

# PART ONE

THEIR mother's portrait hung in the dining-room : a woman seated on a chair, wearing a hat with feathers in it, and with a long, tired, frightened face. She had always been weak in health, suffering from fits of giddiness and palpitations, and four children had been too much for her. She died not long after Anna's birth.

They used to go to the cemetery sometimes on Sundays, Anna, Giustino and Signora Maria. Concettina did not go, she never set foot outside the house on a Sunday ; it was a day she detested and she stayed shut up in her room mending her stockings, wearing her ugliest clothes. And Ippolito had to keep his father company. At the cemetery Signora Maria would pray, but the two children did not, because their father always said it was silly to pray, and perhaps God might exist but it was no use praying to Him, He was God and knew of His own accord how matters stood.

Before the time of their mother's death Signora Maria did not live with them but with their grandmother, their father's mother, and they used to travel together. On Signora Maria's suitcases were hotel labels, and in a cupboard there was a dress of hers with buttons in the shape of little fir-trees, bought in the Tyrol. Their grandmother had had a mania for travelling and never wanted to stop, and so she had run through all her money, for she liked going to smart hotels. Latterly she had turned very nasty, so Signora Maria said, because she could not bear having no money and could not make out how in the world this had happened, and every now and then she forgot and wanted to buy herself a hat, and Signora Maria had to drag her away from the shop-window, thumping the ground with her umbrella and

chewing her veil with rage. Now she lay buried at Nice, the place where she had died, the place in which she had enjoyed herself so much as a young woman, when she was fresh and pretty and had all her money.

Signora Maria was always pleased when she was able to talk about the money the old lady had had, and when she could tell stories and boast about the journeys they had taken. Signora Maria was very small, and when she was sitting down her feet did not touch the floor. For this reason, when she was sitting down she used to wrap herself round with a rug, because she did not like it to be seen that her feet did not reach the floor. The rug was a carriage rug, the one that she and the old lady used to spread over their knees twenty years before, when they drove about the town in a carriage. Signora Maria used to put a little touch of rouge on her cheeks, and she did not like to be seen early in the morning before she had put on her rouge, and so she would slip into the bathroom very quietly, holding her head down low ; and she started and was very angry if someone stopped her in the passage to ask her something. She always stayed quite a long time in the bathroom, and everyone would come and knock at the door and she would begin to shout that she was tired of living in that house, where no one had any respect for her, and she intended to pack her bags at once and go to her sister's in Genoa. Two or three times she had pulled out her suitcases from underneath the wardrobe and had begun putting away her shoes in little cloth bags. The only thing to be done was to pretend nothing had happened, and then after a little she would start taking the shoes out again. In any case everyone knew that the sister in Genoa did not want her in her house.

Signora Maria would come out of the bathroom fully dressed and with her hat on, and would then run out into the street with a shovel to collect dung to manure her rose-

trees, moving very swiftly and taking good care that nobody was going past. Then she would go off with her string bag to do the shopping ; and her quick little feet in their little shoes with bows on them were capable of carrying her all over the town in half an hour. Every morning she ransacked the entire town to find where things were cheapest, and she came home dead tired, and was always in a bad humour after doing the shopping, and would get angry with Concettina who was still in her dressing-gown, and say that never would she have believed, when she was sitting in the carriage beside the old lady, her knees nice and warm under the rug and people greeting them as they went by, that one day she would have to go toiling round the town with a string bag. Concettina would be very slowly brushing her hair in front of the looking-glass, and then she would put her face close to the glass and look at her freckles one by one, and look at her teeth and her gums and put out her tongue and look at that too. She combed her hair and knotted it in a tight roll at the back of her neck, with a ruffled fringe on her forehead, and this fringe made her look exactly like a *cocotte*, Signora Maria said. Then she would throw open the door of the wardrobe and consider which dress to put on. In the meantime Signora Maria would be throwing off bedclothes and beating carpets, a handkerchief tied round her head and her sleeves rolled up over her dry, withered arms, but she would run away from the window if she saw the lady of the house opposite appear on her balcony, for she did not like to be seen with a handkerchief round her head, beating carpets, remembering that she had come to the house as a lady companion—and look at the things she had to do now !

The lady of the house opposite had a fringe too, but it was a fringe that had been curled by the hairdresser and then put into a graceful disorder, and Signora Maria said she looked younger than Concettina, when she came out in the

morning in one of her fresh, bright-coloured wraps, although it was known for certain that she was forty-five.

There were days when Concettina could not manage to find any dress to put on. She tried skirts and blouses, belts, flowers at her bosom, and nothing pleased her. Then she would begin to cry and complain what an unlucky creature she was, without a single pretty dress to wear, and with such a bad figure into the bargain. Signora Maria would shut the windows so that no one in the house opposite should hear. "You haven't a bad figure," she would say, "it's just that you're a bit heavy in the hips and a bit flat in the chest. Like your grandmother ; she was flat-chested too." Concettina bawled and sobbed, throwing herself half-undressed on the unmade bed, and then all her troubles would come out, the exams she had to pass and the difficulties with her *fiancés*.

Concettina had so many *fiancés*. She was always changing them. One of them was always standing in front of the gate, one who had a broad, square face and wore, in place of a shirt, a scarf, fastened together with a safety-pin. He was called Danilo. Concettina said she had given him up some time ago, but he had not yet resigned himself to this and walked up and down in front of the gate, his hands behind his back and his cap pulled down over his forehead. Signora Maria was afraid he might come in all of a sudden and make a scene with Concettina, and she went to Concettina's father to complain about all the troubles the girl had with her *fiancés*, and drew him over to the window to look at Danilo with his cap and his hands behind his back, and wanted him to go down and send him away. However Concettina's father said that the street belongs to everybody and one has no right to drive away a man from a street; and he pulled out his old revolver and put it on his desk, in case Danilo suddenly climbed over the gate. And he

pushed Signora Maria out of the room, because he wanted to be left in peace to his writing.

He was writing a big book of memoirs. He had been writing it for many years, he had in fact given up his work as a lawyer in order to be able to write it. It was entitled *Nothing but the Truth* and it contained fiery attacks upon the Fascists and the King. The old man used to laugh and rub his hands together at the thought that the King and Mussolini knew nothing about it, while in a small town in Italy there was a man writing fiery remarks about them. He was telling the whole story of his life, the Caporetto retreat in which he had been involved and all the things he had seen, and the gatherings of Socialists and the March on Rome and all the fellows who had changed their shirts in his own little town, people who had appeared honest and decent and the shady, dirty things they had afterwards done —“nothing but the truth”. For months and months he wrote, ringing the bell every minute to ask for coffee, and the room was full of smoke, and even at night he sat up writing, or called Ippolito to write while he dictated. Ippolito would tap hard on the typewriter, and his father would walk up and down the room in his pyjamas as he dictated, and nobody could get to sleep, because the house had thin walls, and Signora Maria would turn over and over in her bed, trembling with fear lest someone in the street should hear the old man’s raised voice and the fiery things he was saying against Mussolini. But then all at once the old man lost heart, and his book no longer seemed so fine to him, and then he said that the Italians were all wrong but that you certainly could not change them by means of a book. He said he would like to go out along the street shooting off his revolver, or else that he did not want to do anything at all, just to lie on his back and sleep and wait for death to come. He no longer left his room ; he spent his days in bed and made Ippolito read *Faust* to him. And then he would call

Giustino and Anna and tell them how sorry he was that he had never done the things a father usually does, he had never taken them to the cinema or even out for a walk. And he called Concettina and wanted to know about her exams and about her *fiancés*. He became very kind when he was sad. He woke up one morning and no longer felt so sad ; he made Ippolito massage his back with a horsehair glove, and he wanted his white flannel trousers. He went and sat in the garden and asked them to bring him his coffee there, but he always found it too weak and gulped it down with disgust. He would sit in the garden all the morning, his pipe between his long, white teeth, his thin, wrinkled face screwed up into a grimace, and it was impossible to make out whether this was because of the sun or because of his disgust at the coffee, or because of the effort of holding the pipe in his teeth alone. He made no excuses for anything to anybody after he had stopped feeling sad, and he used to flog the rose-trees with his cane while he was thinking afresh about his book of memoirs, and then Signora Maria would be distressed about the rose-trees which were so dear to her heart, and every morning she made the sacrifice of going out into the street to collect dung in her shovel, notwithstanding the risk that someone might see and laugh at her.

The old man had not a single friend. Occasionally he went out and walked all over the town, with a contemptuous, hostile air, and he would sit in a café in the centre of the town looking at the people passing, in order to be seen by those whom he had once known very well, to show he was still alive and meant them to be angry with him. He would come home well satisfied when he had seen one of the ones who had once been Socialists like himself and were now Fascists, and who did not know the things that were written about them in his book of memoirs, about the time when they were honest and decent people and about the shady,

dirty things they had afterwards done. At table the old man would rub his hands together and say that if God existed, He would let him live till the end of Fascism, so that he could publish his book and see people's faces. He said that in that way one would know at last whether this God existed or not, but he himself thought, on the whole, that He did not exist, or again, possibly He did exist but was on Mussolini's side. After the meal the old man would say, "Giustino, go and buy me a paper. Make yourself useful, seeing that you're not ornamental." For there was nothing kindly about him when he was not sad.

From time to time big boxes of chocolates used to arrive, sent by Cenzo Rena, who had been a great friend of the old man's at one time. Picture post-cards also used to arrive from him, from all parts of the world, for Cenzo Rena was always travelling, and Signora Maria would recognize the places where she had been with the old lady, and she stuck the post-cards into her dressing-table mirror. But the old man did not like to hear Cenzo Rena's name mentioned, because they had been friends but had then had a terrible quarrel, and when he saw the chocolates arrive he would shrug his shoulders and snort with rage, and Ippolito had to write secretly to Cenzo Rena to thank him and to give news of the old man.

Concettina and Anna had piano lessons twice a week. A timid little ring would be heard, Anna would open the gate, and the music-master would walk across the garden, stopping to look at the rose-trees, for he knew the story of the dung and the shovel, and also he hoped that the old man would pop out from some corner of the garden. At first the old man had paid him a great deal of attention and had imagined that this music-master was a great man ; he had sat him down in his own room and given him his own tobacco to smoke, and had tapped him hard on the knee and told him over and over again that he was an

exceptional person. The music-master was engaged in writing a Latin grammar in verse ; he copied it out into a little exercise-book and every time he came he was anxious that the old man should hear a few new stanzas. And all of a sudden the old man had become terribly tired of him; he did not wish to hear any more new stanzas of the grammar, and when the music-master's timid little ring at the gate was heard the old man could be seen escaping up the stairs to hide where best he could. The music-master could not resign himself to being no longer welcomed in the old man's room, and he would talk in a loud voice in the passage and read out his stanzas, looking this way and that all the time. Then he grew sad, and used to ask Concettina and Anna whether he had perhaps offended their father without knowing it. Neither Anna nor Concettina played well. They were both sick of these lessons and wanted to stop them, but Signora Maria was unwilling because the music-master's was the only face from the outside world that was ever seen inside the house. And a house is really too gloomy, she said, without a few visitors now and then. She herself was always present at the piano-lessons, with her rug over her knees and her crochet-work. And afterwards she used to carry on a conversation with the music-master and listen to his new stanzas, and he would stay on till it was quite late, still in the hope of seeing the old man.

The music-master was in very truth the only stranger who came to the house. There was indeed a nephew of Signora Maria's who put in an occasional appearance— the son of that sister of hers at Genoa ; he was studying to be a veterinary surgeon and at Genoa he always failed in his exams, and so he had come to study in this little town where the exams were much easier, but even so he failed from time to time. In any case he was not a real stranger because everyone had seen him constantly ever since he had been a child, and Signora Maria was always on

tenterhooks when he arrived, for fear the old man should treat him unkindly. The old man did not want anyone about the house, and even Concettina's *fiancés* were not allowed to enter the gate.

In the summer they all had to go to Le Visciole, every year. Each time Concettina wept because she wanted to go to the seaside, or else to stay in the town with her *fiancés*. And Signora Maria, too, was in despair, because of the *contadino's* wife there, for they had quarrelled one day when the pig had eaten some handkerchiefs. And Giustino and Anna, too, who as children had enjoyed themselves at Le Visciole, now wore cross expressions when they had to go there. They hoped their father would let them go one summer to stay with Cenzo Rena in a kind of castle he possessed, for Cenzo Rena wrote every year to invite them. But their father did not wish them to go and said that in any case it was an ugly castle, a wretched thing with poor little towers ; Cenzo Rena only thought it beautiful because he had spent money on it. Money is the devil's excrement, said their father.

They went to Le Visciole by a little local train. It was near, but departure was a complicated business, for the old man gave no one any peace during the days when the packing had to be done ; he flew into rages with Ippolito and with Signora Maria and the trunks had to be packed and unpacked a hundred times over. And Concettina's *fiancés*, who had come to bid her good-bye, hung about the gate, and she cried because she was filled with a tremendous rage at having to stay for so many months at Le Visciole, where she grew fat from boredom and there wasn't even a tennis-court.

They left early in the morning, and the old man was in a very bad temper throughout the journey, because the little train was crowded and people were eating and drinking, and

he was afraid they would soil his trousers with wine. Never once did he fail to start a quarrel in the train. Then he would get angry with Signora Maria, who always had numbers of little bundles and baskets and her shoes in cloth bags stuck about all over the place, and in her string bag a wine-flask of coffee and milk ; the old man was particularly disgusted at this flask, to him it seemed revolting to see coffee and milk in a wine-flask; and he said to Signora Maria that he quite failed to understand how the old lady could have wanted to take her about with her on so many journeys. But when they arrived at Le Visciole he was content. He sat himself down under the pergola and took in deep, strong breaths, breath after breath, and said how good the air tasted, It had such a strong, fresh taste that he felt he was taking a drink each time he breathed. And he called the *contadino* and greeted him warmly, and called Ippolito to see whether he didn't-think the *contadino* looked like a Van Gogh picture ; he made the *contadino* sit with his face supported on his hand and put his hat on his head, and asked if he didn't look like a real Van Gogh. After the *contadino* had gone, Ippolito said he might indeed be a Van Gogh, but he was also a thief because he stole grain and wine. The old man flew into a great rage. He had played with this *contadino* as a boy, and he could not allow Ippolito to start pouring contempt in this way upon the things of his childhood, and it was much worse to pour contempt upon the childhood of one's father than to keep back a few pounds of grain when you needed it. Ippolito made no answer, he held his dog between his legs and stroked its ears. As soon as he arrived at Le Visciole he used to put on an old fustian jacket and high boots, and he went about dressed like that the whole summer, and he was shockingly dirty, and besides, he must be bursting with heat, said Signora Maria. But Ippolito never looked hot, he did not sweat and his face was always dry and smooth, and he used to go about the countryside with the dog in the hot noonday

sun. The dog ate the armchairs and had fleas, and Signora Maria wanted to give it away, but Ippolito was mad about this dog, and once when the dog was ill he had kept it in his room at night, getting up to make bread and milk for it. He would have liked to take it with him to the town, instead of which he had to leave it at Le Visciole with the *contadino* who did not look after it and who gave it bad food, and Ippolito was always much distressed in the autumn when he had to say good-bye to the dog, but his father agreed with Signora Maria about the dog and would not hear of having it in the town. So Ippolito would have to wait patiently for him to die, his father said, and really, perhaps Ippolito did hope very much that he would die soon, perhaps this was his pet dream, to be able to go for a walk in the town with his dog.

Ippolito listened in silence when his father spoke unkindly to him, he never answered back and his face remained quiet and pale, and at night he stayed up to type out the book of memoirs, or to read Goethe aloud when his father could not sleep. For he had the soul of a slave, Concettina used to say, and camomile in his veins instead of blood, and was like an old man of ninety, with no girls whom he liked and no desire for anything, all he could do was to wander about the countryside alone all day with the dog.

Le Visciole was a tall, large house, with guns and horns hung up on the walls, with high beds and mattresses that rustled because they were stuffed with maize-leaves. The garden stretched down to the high road, a big, uncultivated garden full of trees ; it was no use trying to plant rosebushes or other flowers because in winter the *contadino* would certainly not look after them and they would die. Behind the house was the courtyard, with the farm-cart and the *contadino's* cottage, and the *contadino's* wife who came to her door from time to time and flung out a bucket of water, and then Signora Maria would shout out that this dirty water made the courtyard stink, and the *contadino's*

wife shouted back that it was clean water, quite good enough to wash Signora Maria's face in, and so the two of them would go on quarrelling for a bit. All round, as far as the eye could see, stretched fields of corn and maize, and in the middle of them stood scarecrows, waving their empty sleeves ; vineyards and oak-trees started at the foot of the hill, and every now and then a shot would be heard from that direction, and a cloud of birds would rise and Ippolito's dog would be heard barking, but Concettina said it barked from fright, not from a desire to catch anything. The river was some distance away, beyond the road, a bright, far-off streak amongst bushes and rocks : and the village was a little beyond it, about ten houses or so.

In the village were the people whom the old man called "the humbugs"—the local Fascist Secretary, the Superintendent of Police, the Secretary of the Commune ; and the old man went every day to the village so that the Humbugs might see him, that they might see he was still alive and that he cut them dead. The Humbugs would be playing bowls in their shirtsleeves, ignorant that they too were in the book of memoirs ; and their wives would be sitting round the monument in the little square, knitting and suckling their babies, with handkerchiefs over their breasts. The monument was big and made of stone, a big, stone young man with a badge and a fez : the old man would stop in front of it and stick his eyeglass in his eye, and look and smile sarcastically, he would stay there for a little, looking and smiling sarcastically : and Signora Maria was afraid that some day or other the Humbugs would arrest him, and she would try to pull him away, as she had once done with the old lady in front of the hat-shop windows. Signora Maria would have liked to talk to the wives of the Humbugs, to have learnt new stitches and taught them some as well: and also to have told them that it would have been a good thing if they had washed their breasts with water that had been

boiled before suckling their babies. But she never dared go near them because of the old man.

In the summer, freckles and places where the skin had peeled were to be seen on the old man's bald, shiny head, because he went out in the sun bareheaded ; and Concettina's legs went golden brown, seeing that there was nothing else to do at Le Visciole except sunbathe, and Concettina sat all day long in a deck-chair in front of the house, with dark glasses and a book that she did not read ; she would look at her legs and take care that they got nicely sunburnt, and then she had the idea that if she kept them sweating in the sun they might grow a little thinner ; for Concettina, besides being heavy in the hips, was heavy in the legs as well, and she used to say she would give ten years of her life to be slimmer from the hips down. Signora Maria would arrange her clothes about her as she sat under the pergola, her extraordinary clothes cut out of old curtains or bedspreads, with a hat made out of a newspaper on her head and her feet crossed on a footstool. Far away, on the brow of the hill, Ippolito could be seen going backwards and forwards with his gun and his dog : and the old man would curse the stupid dog and Ippolito's mania for wandering about the countryside, when all the time he needed him to give him his injection and do some typewriting, and he would send off Giustino to chase him.

## 2

It was at Le Visciole that the old man felt ill for the first time. He was taking his coffee, and all of a sudden the hand that held the cup started trembling, and the coffee was spilt on his trousers, and his body was bowed down, and he was trembling and breathing heavily. Ippolito went on a bicycle to fetch the doctor. But the old man did not want the doctor and said that he felt a little better ; he said the doctor was a humbug and he wanted to leave for the town at once. The doctor came, a humbug of the most insignificant kind, hardly taller than Signora Maria, with fair hair that looked like chickens' feathers, and big baggy trousers like a Zouave and check stockings. And all at once he and the old man made friends. For the old man discovered that he was not a humbug at all, and that he hated the local Fascist Secretary and the Superintendent of Police and the stone young man in the village square. The old man said he was very pleased he had been ill, because in that way he had discovered this little doctor, a person whom he had believed to be a humbug whereas he was really a fine fellow ; and every day they used to have a chat and tell each other all sorts of things, and the old man was almost inclined to read him some bits out of the book of memoirs, but Ippolito said better not. Ippolito could not now go roaming over the countryside, but had to sit all day long in his father's room and give him injections and drops and read aloud to him : but the old man no longer wanted Goethe, he now wanted detective stories. Luckily there was the little doctor coming all the time, and the old man was perfectly contented : only he had told him to stop wearing those check stockings, because they did not suit him and were rather ridiculous.

They left, as usual, at the end of September : however Giustino and Signora Maria left earlier, because Giustino had to sit again for his examination in Greek. In the town the old man began to be ill again, growing thin and coughing, and a doctor came to see him, a doctor who was entirely different from the little doctor with hair like chickens' feathers, a doctor who did not sit and chat with him, who did not listen to him and who treated him badly. He had forbidden him to smoke : and the old man gave Ippolito his tobacco-pouch and told him to lock it up in a drawer and keep the key ; but after a short time he wanted the tobacco, he wanted just a little of it, and Ippolito paid no attention to him and stood there with his hands in his pockets, and so then the old man said how ridiculous Ippolito was, who took everything literally and was lacking in commonsense, lacking a touch of commonsense and imagination, and the world was ruined by people like that, by people who took everything literally, and he couldn't get over having produced such a ridiculous, stupid son, who stood there with a stony face and kept tight hold of the key : and it was a great grief to him to have a stupid son, a grief which did him more harm than a little tobacco. Until finally Ippolito gave a sigh and threw down the key on the desk : and the old man opened the drawer and took the tobacco, and started to smoke and to cough.

Then one day, while they were all at table, they saw the old man come into the room, in pyjamas and slippers, with a bundle of papers in his arms. It was the book of memoirs : and he asked whether the stove had been lit, and it *had* been lit because it was already cold : then all at once he started stuffing the sheets of paper into it, and they all looked at him open-mouthed, only Ippolito did not appear surprised. Big flames came up from the open stove, and the book of memoirs was blazing, and no one understood anything : but Ippolito did not appear surprised, he had got

up and was looking at the flames, smoothing back his hair very slowly, and with the poker he pushed into the stove a few sheets that were not yet burned : and then the old man rubbed his hands together and said, "I feel happier now. It will have to be written all over again. It wasn't going right." But all that day he was very jumpy, and would not hear of going back to bed nor of dressing himself either, and he walked up and down the room and bullied Ippolito with the usual story about his tobacco : he was very angry with Ippolito and finished by sending him out of the room, and insisted upon Concettina reading aloud to him : while she was reading he held her hand and stroked it and told her that she had beautiful hands and a beautiful profile, a really beautiful profile : but then he began saying that she read badly and in a singsong kind of voice, and made her stop.

He went to bed and was now unable to get up again. He grew slowly, steadily worse, and was dying, and everyone knew it, and certainly he himself knew it too but he pretended there was nothing wrong—he who used always to talk of death before he fell really ill; he spoke less and less as the days went by, gradually he came only to ask for what he needed ; Giustino and Anna were forbidden to enter his room and saw him from the door as he lay flat in the bed with his thin, hairy arms lying on top of the coverlet, his nose getting whiter and whiter and sharper and sharper; sometimes he would make a sign to the boy and girl to come in, but then he would say nothing that was intelligible, only confused words, and would rumple up his pyjamas on his chest with his arms, and tremble and sweat. There was a smell of ether in the room, and a red rag tied round the lamp, and the old man's long, pointed shoes stuck out from under the wardrobe, and you knew he would never walk again, because soon he would be dead. Anna and Concettina had not started their piano-lessons again since the summer, but the music-master still came in order to ask

for news, only he did not dare to ring the bell and would stand in front of the gate and wait for Signora Maria to come out into the garden and tell him if the old man had been able to get a little rest. And Danilo, too, would almost always be at the gate, leaning against the wall with a book, and Signora Maria said it was really shameless of him not to leave Concettina in peace now that her father was so very ill; and when Concettina went out for a moment to do some shopping, he would put his book under his arm and walk behind her, and Concettina would throw fierce glances at him every now and then, and would come home very red in the face, with her fringe all untidy.

The old man died in the morning. Anna and Giustino were at school and Signora Maria came to fetch them, a tiny little black handkerchief tied round her neck ; she kissed them gravely on the forehead and led them away. To kiss them she had had to rise on tiptoe, because they were both much taller than herself; it had been in the corridor at the school and the headmaster was there watching ; usually he was rude but he was very kind that morning. They went up to their father's room : Concettina was kneeling there sobbing, Ippolito on the other hand was standing still and silent, his face thin and white as usual. Their father was lying fully dressed on the bed, with his tie on, and shoes on his feet, and his face now was very beautiful, no longer trembling and sweaty, but composed and gentle.

Then Signora Maria took Anna to the house opposite, for the lady there had sent over to suggest that she might be left with them for the whole day. Anna was frightened because there was a dog there. Not a dog like Ippolito's, curly-haired and stupid, but an Alsatian tied up with a chain ; and hung on a tree in the garden was a notice : *Cave canem*. And she was also frightened because there was a ping-pong table. Through the hedge she had seen a boy playing ping-pong with an old gentleman. And so she was

frightened that the boy might ask her to play and she didn't know how to. She thought of saying that she knew how to play but didn't want to because at their house at Le Visciole there was a ping-pong table and they did nothing but play at it all the summer. But if later all of a sudden she and the boy made great friends, it might perhaps be necessary to invite him to come one summer to Le Visciole and then he would realize that there wasn't a ping-pong table there at all.

She had never been in the house opposite. Through the hedge she had looked at the boy and the old gentleman and the dog. The lady with the fringe who appeared on the balcony in her dressing-gown, and who looked so young, was the old gentleman's wife. Then there was a red-haired girl, who was the daughter of the old gentleman and of another wife whom he had had before. On the other hand the boy, and also another bigger boy who must be about Ippolito's age, were the sons of this present wife, the one with the fringe. Signora Maria said they were very rich people, for the old gentleman was the owner of the soap factory, the long red-brick building on the river, with chimneys that were always smoking. They were very, very rich people. They never boiled up their coffee-grounds a second time, but gave them to certain monks who came to ask for them. The red-haired girl, daughter of the old gentleman's other wife, came out in the evenings with a broom and swept the whole garden, muttering all the time and working herself up into a rage. Signora Maria, too, had very often looked through the hedge, for she was inquisitive and much interested in rich people.

Signora Maria left Anna with the maid who came to open the door, recommending that they should make her put a scarf round her neck if she went out in the garden, and then she went home again. The maid led Anna to a room on the floor above and told her to wait there, and in a moment

Signor Giuma would come and keep her company. Anna did not know who Signor Giuma was. From the windows she saw her own home—quite different when seen thus from this side, low, small and old, with the dried-up wistaria on the balcony and, on one corner of the roof, Giustino's ball, torn and rain-soaked. The shutters were closed in her father's room : and she remembered suddenly how he used to throw open the shutters with a clatter and lean out to look at the morning, soaping his chin with the shaving-brush and stretching out his thin neck, and would say to her, "Go and buy me some tobacco. Make yourself useful, seeing that you're not ornamental." And she seemed to see him going out into the garden, with his eyeglass, in his white flannel trousers, with his long legs that were slightly crooked because he had done so much riding as a young man. And she wondered where her father was now. She believed in hell, in purgatory and in paradise, and thought that her father must now be in purgatory, repenting of the unkind things he had so often said to them, particularly when he bullied Ippolito about the tobacco and about the dog ; and how surprised he must have been to find that purgatory existed, when he had so often said that almost certainly there is nothing for the dead, and it is better so because at least you can sleep at last—he himself being such a bad sleeper.

The maid came to tell her that Signor Giuma had now arrived. It was the boy, the one who played ping-pong. He came running in, whistling, his hair over his eyes ; he threw down his books, which were tied together by a leather strap, on the desk. He seemed surprised to see her ; he gave a little cold, shy bow, stooping his shoulders slightly. He started looking round the room for something, whistling as he looked. From a drawer he took an exercise-book and a pot of glue, and stuck some things into the book : they were big faces of film actors, cut out of a magazine. It appeared

to be very important to stick them in, and very tiresome too, for the boy panted and snorted, throwing back his hair from over his eyes. Beside the desk was a big revolving globe and from time to time he looked on it for some country or other and then wrote hastily in the exercise-book underneath the film-actors' faces. The red-haired girl came in. Her hair was short and clipped in a fashion which was popular that year and which was called *á la fièvre typhoïde*. But only her hair was fashionable ; her dress, on the contrary, was wide and ungraceful, with a round neck to it, and was of an ugly sort of lemon yellow. The girl held her usual broom in her hand and she swept the carpet violently and then said, "Giuma, it's not very amusing for this little girl. Leave the film-actors and show her *The Child's Treasure-House*, or take her into the garden and play ping-pong with her."

They looked at *The Child's Treasure-House*. There were several volumes of it and all sorts of things were to be seen in it—flowers and birds and machines and cities. In front of each picture, Giuma stopped for a moment and they both looked : then he said, "Finished ? " and she said, "Yes". "Finished" and "yes" were the only words they spoke. Giuma's thin, brown hand turned the pages. Anna was ashamed of having thought they would become great friends. Then all of a sudden a great clamour was heard all through the house, and she jumped and Giuma laughed : he had white, sharp teeth like a wolf's. He said, "It's the gong. We must go to lunch."

The old gentleman sat at the head of the table. He was deaf, and had a little black box on his chest, with an electric wire which he kept hooked on to his ear. He had a white beard which he placed on top of his table-napkin when he started to eat; he had a gastric ulcer and could eat only cooked vegetables and pieces of soaked bread with oil. Beside him sat the red-haired girl, who was called Amalia,

and it was she who helped him to food and seasoned it with oil and poured mineral-water into his glass. At the other end of the table sat his wife, wearing a very hairy blue woollen jumper and a little pearl necklace ; then there was a person that you couldn't be quite sure who he was, he wasn't a guest because he was wearing slippers ; he had Giума beside him and Giума poured water into his wine out of spite and then laughed with his fist over his mouth ; the man took no notice of him and talked stocks and shares with the old gentleman, but he had to yell because the little box was slightly broken. Then they all started talking about Amalia's new way of doing her hair, *á la fièvre typhoïde*, and the Signora said she wanted to do hers like that too, because she was a bit tired of her fringe. Amalia shouted the conversation into the old gentleman's ear. The little box was called "Papa's apparatus" ; and even the old gentleman alluded to himself as "Papa He said, Papa wants to take a long nap after lunch to-day. Papa is very old ". Then the Signora began to get angry and to look out of the window because of Emanuele failing to arrive. Emanuele was the one who was about the same age as Ippolito, and he arrived almost at the end of lunch. He was lame, and he arrived all red and sweating from the fatigue of limping. He looked like Giума, except that he hadn't teeth like a wolf; he had broad, square teeth that stuck out over his lips. After lunch they wrapped the old gentleman up in a rug on the sofa and put a scarf over his eyes because otherwise he could not sleep, and then left him there.

Anna and Giума played ping-pong. She had told him that she did not know how to play, so certain was she now that they would not become friends, so that it did not matter to her what he might think. He said he would teach her how to play, it was easy. While they were playing the man in the slippers came and watched. He was called Franz. He was small, with light eyes and a face which was sunburnt and all

furrowed. He and Giума began punching each other and chasing each other round the garden. Anna sat and looked at them, playing idly with the ping-pong ball. The dog was not there because it had been sent to some friends of theirs in order to be mated. When it grew dark, Signora Maria called to Anna from the window and she went home.

Her father's funeral took place soon afterwards. Anna had imagined a real funeral with priests and white lilies and a cross. But she had forgotten that her father disliked priests. So there were no priests and no lilies. There were some of Concettina's *fiancés*, in fact the most important of them : Danilo and two or three others. Then there was the music-master who still wanted to know in what way he had offended the old man, and he asked Concettina's *fiancés* and Signora Maria's nephew if they knew. While the old man was ill he had written him letters in which he said he was consumed with regret at having offended him without knowing why, and he asked for his forgiveness whatever the reason might be. But the old man had not read any of the letters, because he was too ill.

They buried the old man beside his wife in the cemetery and Concettina started sobbing violently. Then the people who had come said farewell, with the usual mysterious, ceremonious air, to the relations of the dead, and the latter went back home, and at home they sat down to dinner and there was macaroni and vegetables as on any other, ordinary day.

Signora Maria made her nephew come to the house to take a bath, because he had no conveniences in the room where he lodged and the public baths were so crowded; and Concettina was annoyed and said to Ippolito that that nephew of Signora Maria's would always be getting in their way now. Ippolito no longer had to do typewriting and read aloud, and now he was studying for his solicitor's exams,

walking up and down the terrace with a book in his hand ; each of them knew that he could do what he liked now; Giustino brought home four white mice in a cage that he had bought out of his savings and said he would tame them; and Signora Maria complained that they stank horribly. Anna believed that in a house where someone had died no one ought to laugh for a very long time : instead of which, a few days after the funeral, Concettina was laughing like a madwoman with her and Giustino, because she had made herself a false bosom with wool out of a mattress.

There was a great freedom in the house. But it was a freedom that was a little alarming. There was no longer anyone to give orders. Every now and then Ippolito made a kind of attempt to give orders, but nobody paid any attention to him, and he would shrug his shoulders and go back and walk up and down the terrace again. He and Signora Maria quarrelled over money. Signora Maria said Ippolito was mean, and also that he was suspicious and did not trust her. There were now the mourning clothes to be thought of. But Ippolito did not want to give her the money because he said there was very little of it: he said she must arrange for the mourning to be made at home, as so many people did. Signora Maria went to the chemist and bought some packets of black powder and put the clothes to soak in a big pot: there was a kind of broth in it that looked like lentil soup. But when the clothes were dried and ironed Concettina was not satisfied because they had not come out a fine, deep black ; it was a black that had a brownish tinge in it. Concettina was sulky with Ippolito for several days over this matter of the clothes, because she said she could easily have bought a little cheap material: and she did not come and sit at table but took her meals up to her own room.

Anna did not expect to go and play again at the house opposite. However Giuma went on inviting her. They formed the habit of playing together and not a day passed but he

invited her. Anna did not enjoy herself very much with him. She far preferred to play in the street with her own school-friends. But when Giума invited her she had not the courage to refuse. She did not know why, but she had not the courage. She rather hoped he would lend her *The Child's Treasure-House* some time : but she did not dare to ask him. And she felt rather proud that he should invite her. They scarcely ever played ping-pong ; Giума liked the game of re-enacting films that he had seen. He would tie her to a tree with a rope and dance round her with a burning piece of paper and her arms were sore because he tied her-so tightly, if they stopped playing this game, then he would begin to talk. That first day he had hardly talked at all but now he talked, he talked so much that he even became a bore. He told her stories of things that had happened to him, but to her it seemed that almost the whole thing was an invention. He told her of prizes he had won in rugby matches and boat races—gold and silver cups ; but it was never possible to see these prizes, he had given them away or his mother had put them in a place where they could not be got at. Sometimes Emanuele and Amalia, Giума's brother and sister, would come out on the balcony and start listening, and would laugh loudly. "Buffoon Emanuele would say to him. Then Giума would fly into a rage and run away upstairs to his room. He would come back after a short time with his eyes red and his hair untidy. For a little he would sit silent on the grass, but then he would find the rope and start the rope-and-tree game again. Anna would go home in the evening with her head full of Giума's stories, and of the stories of the friends who took part with him in his rugby matches and boat races : Cingalesi, Pucci Donadio, Priscilla and Toni. They had strange names and you could never make out whether they were boys or girls. Nor was it possible to make out why he never got them to come and play in the garden with him, and preferred to play alone with a little girl who had never taken part in a boat race in her

life. Perhaps it was that with those other friends his inventions and boastings were not so successful. He would walk up and down on the lawn trailing the rope behind him, boasting and inventing. Anna sat on the grass and her neck ached from so much nodding and her lips ached too, from pretending to smile. From time to time she asked him a question or two. They were prudent questions and she pondered them silently for a little while. She asked, "Is rugby a good game?"—or again, "Was Cingalesi there that day?" Of Toni she preferred not to speak because she had never understood whether Toni was a girl or a boy.

Then Giuma began to talk about when he would be going away. He was going to spend the winter at Mentone where they had a villa. Giuma did not go to school, he was given lessons by professors, and later perhaps he would go to college in Switzerland and there he would play rugby all day long. And Anna had a feeling of great repose at the thought of his going away. She would return to playing in the street with her own girl friends: there were boys too, and they hit her sometimes. But they did not tie her to trees. Once when Giuma had tied her to the tree it was almost dark already, and he told her he was going to the kitchen to fetch a knife so that he could cut her throat and eat her. So she was left alone in the almost dark garden, and tied up too, and suddenly she was frightened and started shouting, "Giuma, Giuma!"—and it was getting darker and darker and her arms were hurting her. Then Emanuele came out and cut the knot with his penknife, and took her into the bathroom and put Vaseline on her arms where the skin was grazed and purple. "That brute of a brother of mine," he said.

In the house carpets were being rolled up and trunks and suitcases had appeared. Emanuele was the only one who was not going away, because he had to attend lectures at the university. In truth Amalia did not want to go either, and her stepmother said that if she really did not like the idea of

a change she might just as well be left at home; but the old gentleman said that Amalia was run down and was in need of some sea air. Amalia could be heard weeping because she did not want to go away. So then the old gentleman said to the man called Franz that he must try to persuade her and Franz went and spoke to her and came back after a little to say that he had persuaded her and that she would go.

And so, one morning, they could all be seen getting into the car, Giума with the dog under his arm and Amalia and the man called Franz who was to drive, and Mammina, as they called her, and the old gentleman. Mammina was wearing a very ample tweed cape and dark glasses : and Amalia had also put on a tweed cape which seemed to be more or less copied from the other, but Concettina who was watching from her window said that she looked as if she was everyone else's servant. The old gentleman made them bring him a quantity of newspapers and fixed them in layers underneath his waterproof, because he said there was nothing like newspapers for protecting one's stomach from the cold. Emanuele was left alone on the pavement waving his handkerchief: and he saw Anna at the window and told her she could come whenever she liked and read Giума's books and, if she had to learn geography, she could look at the globe too. He did not look in the least sad at being left alone, and went back into the house limping and skipping and rubbing his hands briskly together.

### 3

Anna tried two or three times to play in the street with some of the other girls from her school, but they no longer found these games very amusing and got into the habit of walking along the road beside the river, chatting and strolling arm in arm. There were many things to talk about, and games were less enjoyable now. Giustino, too, used to walk along by the river with his friends ; Giustino had become a big boy now, he wore Ippolito's cast-off clothes and plastered his hair down. At carnival-time he went to the fairground and afterwards told Anna how he had played, a game of *briscola* with the man who played cards with his feet. He was always wanting money and he sold his white mice to a friend ; by now he was bored with his white mice and never remembered to give them anything to eat. Sometimes he was very nice to Anna but then she would discover that he was needing something—to borrow ten lire or the grey pullover that belonged to Anna but which he liked wearing. He had worn it so much that he had completely spoilt its shape. He was bad at his lessons and Ippolito used to coach him in Greek in the evenings, and every now and then he would lose patience with him and hit him with his fist, and Giustino would jump down from the balcony and run away. Ippolito would shrug his shoulders and say that after all he really didn't care. One evening Giustino stayed out all night long, and in the morning Signora Maria was on the point of telephoning to the police-station. But Giustino came back. He did not say a word to anyone and went into the kitchen to find something to eat. His trousers were covered with mud and his hands all scratched. He went the whole day without speaking and then he said to Signora Maria that he had come home, yes, he had come home but he didn't want Ippolito to give him

any more coaching, otherwise he would run away again, and for good. And Ippolito said that in that case Giustino could make his own arrangements about learning Greek, and he himself didn't care in the least, no, not in the very least.

And then all of a sudden it came about that Emanuele and Ippolito made friends. It was strange because Ippolito had never been friends with anybody, he had never been heard to speak of any friend that he had. Emanuele and he started talking to each other over the gate, and they lent each other books, and one day Anna when she came back from school found Emanuele sitting at dinner with the others, eating vegetable soup. He gave her a wink and said, "We're old friends, you and I,"—and after dinner he made her pull up the sleeves of her jersey to see whether she still had the marks of the rope on her arms.

Anna thought Emanuele would become one of Concettina's usual *fiancés*, one of those who wrote her letters and gave her flowers and took her to the cinema and fell in love with her. But not at all. Emanuele was not much interested in Concettina. He was quite nice to her, he brought her fashion-plates he had found in Mammina's or Amalia's room. He was quite nice but he was always telling her all the things that were wrong with her : her way of dressing and her way of walking and her way of putting on rouge. When Ippolito was not there he stayed chatting with her in the sitting-room and they turned over the fashion-plates together, and he explained to her how she ought to dress. Concettina said she had not the money to dress well. But he was of the opinion that money had nothing to do with it, you had only to look at Amalia to see that money had nothing to do with it; she bought her clothes from a big dressmaker in Turin and yet she was always got up like a servant-girl. Every time he talked about Amalia he sighed and scratched his head. Now she had had her hair cut *à la fièvre typhoïde* and she looked like a monster. She had

fallen in love with that Franz. He, Emanuele, had been aware of this for some time, but no one else in the house had realized it. Franz was a person whom Mammina had unearthed at Monte Carlo and had trailed behind her all the way home. He had told her he was the son of a German baron and had escaped from Germany because of the Nazis, because his father had been a great general under the Kaiser and he still believed in the monarchy. Mammina was ingenuous and always believed everything, and Papa was deaf and easy-going and accepted anything that Mammina put in front of him, just as he accepted the sops of bread that they put in front of him at meals. But he, Emanuele, had from the very first moment distrusted this Franz, and from the very first moment had felt there was something suspicious about his story. And that Amalia should have fallen in love with this fellow was a disaster. To Emanuele he seemed a person who would not think twice about marrying for money. "It's better not to have any money", said Emanuele to Concettina, and he gave her a little tap on the cheek. But if Ippolito arrived, Emanuele immediately insisted on Concettina leaving the room, and she would go off in a huff with the bundle of fashion-plates.

Emanuele and Ippolito had great discussions, but no one quite knew what they were about, because if anyone else was present they started talking in German. Concettina said they were obviously telling dirty stories, for otherwise they would not have found it necessary to use a language that nobody else knew, or else to be all alone in the sitting-room. Sometimes Emanuele stayed on late into the evening, and the sound of a discussion and of someone walking up and down the sitting-room could be heard, and then all of a sudden bursts of laughter could be heard from Emanuele: he had a way of laughing that sounded like the cooing of a pigeon. And then Emanuele would go away and Ippolito would stay up reading for his exams, for he never had any

need of sleep and had accustomed himself to staying up all night, ever since the time of the book of memoirs. But now he no longer looked the same young man as had given his father injections and read Goethe to him, the young man with the subdued, weary look who had been bullied by his father over the tobacco and the dog. Now, ever since he had become friends with Emanuele, he had a shining, restless look in his eyes which seemed always to be looking for something, and his step, when he went to meet Emanuele at the gate, had become vigorous and elastic. Sometimes he stayed all alone for hours in the sitting-room, stroking his face and smiling and muttering to himself. Anna asked him whether he wasn't going to Le Visciole to fetch the dog; she had imagined that after their father's death he would rush off at once and bring it back. But he assumed a strange expression when he heard the dog spoken of. He twisted his mouth in a strange, bitter way, perhaps because he suddenly remembered the bitter, unkind things his father always said to him, at the time when he did not know he was dying and was always talking about his own death, and about the day when Ippolito would go for walks in the town with the dog. In the meantime the dog remained at Le Visciole eating the rotten food the *contadino* gave it, but in any case it had been eating this rotten food for so many years that by now it must have grown accustomed to it.

One evening as they were just finishing supper Emanuele arrived with Danilo. It was the first time Danilo had set foot in the house, and Concettina went very red, with red patches even on her neck. Concettina was peeling an orange and pretended to be deeply absorbed in peeling it, and she did not look at Danilo, and Danilo threw her one quick, knowing glance and went on talking to Ippolito who was saying that he had been expecting him for some time. Signora Maria was very frightened, because Danilo had always frightened her, with his mania for standing quite still

in front of their gate. Danilo and Concettina had met at a dance, and after that they had sometimes gone for a walk together, but Concettina said he had made a vulgar remark to her, a very vulgar remark; Signora Maria asked what it was but Concettina would not repeat it. He came of quite a high-class family but they had become impoverished and his mother was reduced to working as cashier in a cake-shop. And there was a sister who was by no means a steady character. Concettina had given him to understand that she did not wish to see him any more. But he remained unconvinced and was always standing in front of the gate, and when Concettina went out he always walked behind her, without speaking but with a threatening look on his face, Concettina said. And now Emanuele had brought him into the house and Ippolito had said that he had been expecting him for quite a long time, and there he was, sitting quietly at the table, peeling an orange that Ippolito had given him. But when he had eaten the orange Ippolito told him to go up with him into the sitting-room ; Emanuele, on the other hand, stayed to try and convince Signora Maria that Danilo was a charming young man, the best in the world, and that it was quite impossible that he should have made a vulgar remark to Concettina, probably there had been a misunderstanding. And it was not true that his sister was not a steady character ; he, Emanuele, had seen the sister and she had seemed to him a very steady character indeed ; in any case he had a whole pack of sisters, from sixteen years old to three months. But Concettina said there had been no misunderstanding at all, it had really been a very vulgar remark ; she did not want Danilo in the house and she was very angry, she rushed out of the room, banging the door. Emanuele and Ippolito stayed talking to Danilo in the sitting-room until late, and Signora Maria had left her work there and wanted to go and fetch it, but Giustino told her she must leave it and that it was impossible to disturb them. And after that evening Danilo

took to arriving at any moment with Emanuele, and Ippolito would shut himself up with them in the sitting-room. And Ippolito told Concettina that he would receive anyone in the house that he wanted to, and Concettina started sobbing loudly, and then Emanuele in order to comfort her took her to the cinema to see *Anna Karenina* with Greta Garbo, and when they came back Concettina was comforted ; she always liked so much to see Greta Garbo, and imagined that she was just a little like her, because Greta Garbo too had no bosom. "This Danilo has got a real crush on Concettina", said Anna to Giustino. She had learned from her school-friends to say "a crush", and now she was pleased when she had an opportunity of using the word. But then Giustino said that Danilo didn't care twopence about Concettina, and that when he stood in front of the gate he did it to annoy her. Danilo had quite other ideas in his head. Anna asked what ideas Danilo had. Giustino wrinkled up his nose and his lips and brought his face close to hers with a more and more ugly grimace upon it. "Politics" he whispered into her ear, and ran away.

"Politics" thought Anna. She walked about the garden, amongst Signora Maria's rose-trees, and repeated the word to herself. She was a plump girl, pale and indolent, dressed in a pleated skirt and a faded' blue pullover, and not very tall for her fourteen years. "Politics", she repeated slowly, and now all at once she seemed to understand: this was why Danilo had taken to coming so often to the house—because he was talking politics with Ippolito and Emanuele. She seemed to understand about the sitting-room, and the sentences in German, and Ippolito stroking his face, and his restless eyes that were always looking for something. They were talking politics in the sitting-room, they were once again doing a dangerous, secret thing, as the book of memoirs had been. They wanted to overthrow the Fascists, to begin a revolution. Her father had always said that the

Fascists must be overthrown, that he himself would be the first to mount the barricades, on the day of revolution. He used to say that it would be the finest day of his life. And then his whole life had gone past without that day happening. Anna now pictured herself upon the barricades, with Ippolito and Danilo, firing off a rifle and singing. She went very quietly up to the sitting-room and slowly pushed the door open. They were all three sitting on the carpet, with a big bundle of newspapers in front of them, and they got a great fright when they saw her coming in. Emanuele threw Danilo's coat over the newspapers and shouted at her to go away and as she was going she heard Danilo say to Ippolito that he was a fool not to have locked the door.

She wanted to tell Giustino that she had seen the newspapers. Giustino started waving his arms about as though he had been scalded, and then he pinched his lips together with four fingers so that they stuck out and looked like the lips of a negro, and at the same time he made whispering and squealing noises. He pinched *her* lips together, too, with his four fingers—so hard that he hurt her. In the end they came to blows. Signora Maria clapped her hands in the next room, because it was their bedtime. Giustino blew contemptuously in the direction of this hand-clapping. "Newspapers that come from France", he chanted under his breath, putting his books back in his satchel. He turned towards her, and again pinched her lips together. "Mum's the word !" he said.

And soon Concettina, too, began to understand. Danilo came to the house at all hours, till late at night there was a light burning in the sitting-room and Ippolito thumped on the typewriter, as in the days of the book of memoirs. Concettina and Danilo would sometimes meet on the stairs and greet each other distantly, she always rather red and frowning, he with his usual impertinent, sly smile. Concettina used to go and sit in the dining-room with

stockings to mend, and there was the sound of footsteps and chairs being moved in the sitting-room above, and of Ippolito thumping on the typewriter: and, from time to time, that laugh of Emanuele's that sounded like the cooing of a pigeon. Signora Maria complained that one could no longer be in the sitting-room, it was the warmest and most comfortable room in the house, and the piano was there too and Concettina might feel inclined to play a little. Signora Maria considered that Ippolito had become altogether too arrogant, he who had seemed so subdued when his father was alive and who had now suddenly taken to lording it over everybody. He could surely have seen his friends somewhere else; they even had the unpleasant habit of rummaging about in the kitchen, late at night they would start rummaging in the kitchen, and eating bread and cheese; for obviously that young man Danilo did not get enough to eat at home, and so he came to their house to satisfy his hunger. Concettina went on mending her stockings without replying; and every time the bell rang at the gate she would give a start and run over to the window to see who it was. Signora Maria told her she had been very nervous now for some time, and what she needed was to go and take a good cure at Chianciano, for nervousness depends entirely on the liver; but Ippolito was too mean to think of sending her to Chianciano, the only thing he was not mean about was cheese, which he gave to his friends even at night. Signora Maria had not understood anything, and still believed that Danilo came to the house in order to pester Concettina and eat cheese; and when Emanuele and Ippolito started talking German, she was offended and said it was not at all polite to talk a language she did not know in her presence. In any case she had rather forgotten about the Fascists, since the time when the old man had been there, talking about them all the time: and if she recollected them for a moment, it seemed to her that the old man had gone much too far in his anger against the Fascists, because

in the end they had taken Africa, where later on they meant to grow coffee. She still brought her nephew to the house to have baths, and then made him stay and keep warm beside the stove in the dining-room, because he had had pleurisy as a little boy; and she used to bring him Ippolito's books to read, so that he could learn something. And Ippolito was much annoyed when he saw Signora Maria standing on a chair, looking in his shelf for some book for her nephew.

## 4

“Papa and Mammina are coming back”, said Emanuele. There was in fact a great beating of carpets in the house opposite, and they had put all the chairs out in the garden, and the windows were wide open all over the house and you could hear the hum of the vacuum cleaner. Papa and Mammina came back, but Giuma did not. Giuma was at school in Switzerland.

Nor did Amalia come back, for she had gone to Florence to a nurses’ training-college. Emanuele said it was difficult to understand just what had happened, Franz had suddenly left Mentone, and there had been no sign of him and no one knew anything about him; and then Amalia had produced this idea of the nurses’ college, she wanted to be a Red Cross nurse, she wanted to nurse the wounded if war came; she was disgusted with Mentone, she was disgusted with the idea of coming home, she just wanted sick people to look after, nothing else. Of course she could have had sick people to look after at home, said Emanuele, for Papa suffered a great deal with his gastric ulcer, and Mammina had a kind of nervous exhaustion: she lay all day on the bed in her room, with her eyes closed, and the shutters closed, and refused to see anyone.

Emanuele had also been at school in Switzerland for two years, like Giuma, at the same school where Giuma now was. He had not liked it very much, and was always begging Mammina to take him away: he had never managed to be left alone for a minute, and when he had started reading in his room they used to come and call him to go out on one of those silly lakes. Giuma, on the other hand, would be very happy in Switzerland, said Emanuele, because Giuma was a brute and brutes are happy anywhere.

Emanuele was rather annoyed at his parents' return, because Papa always sat up waiting for him at night, he waited for him at the top of the stairs and asked him where he had been till such a late hour. Emanuele would answer that he was preparing for his exams with some friends of his, but he had to shout, because Papa was getting more and more deaf and his apparatus never worked very well; and then Mammina would wake up too, and would ask from her room in a feeble voice what had happened; and Papa would become very angry because they had woken up Mammina in that way; so every night there was trouble. Emanuele said he had no more patience with Papa and Mammina, they had really worn him out and he was finished with them. Danilo had now taken to saying "Mammina" when he mentioned his own mother, in order to tease Emanuele; he would say "Mammina" and make a kind of mewing noise. Danilo's little *mammina*, the cashier at the cake-shop, was a great big woman who sat perpetually knitting at the cash-desk, with round, bulging eyes and a big bush of white hair. Danilo used to say that his *mammina* had brought him up by slapping his face, with the idea that slaps are good for strengthening the facial muscles. But after he had reached the age of fourteen she had left him alone, in fact she had declared that she had had enough of bringing him up, and that now he must see to bringing himself up. His father, on the other hand, had never tried to bring him up at all; he was a type of person who counted for little in his own home, he had changed his job very many times and now was travelling all over Italy selling post-cards. When Danilo came home late at night, his mother was always up and about still, washing and ironing, but she never said a word to him and all she did was to take out of the drawer two or three *Tre Stelle* cigarettes which she had saved for him. As for our parents, Danilo used to say, as soon as they have finished bringing *us* up we have to begin bringing

*them* up, because it is quite impossible to leave them. as they are.

Then, all of a sudden, Danilo vanished. A whole week passed without Danilo's face being seen, and Signora Maria was very pleased, and she asked Emanuele whether at last he had broken off relations with that odious Danilo. But Emanuele at once disillusioned her : Danilo had gone to Turin on business and would be back soon.

One morning, while Anna was dressing to go to school, there was a loud ring at the gate. She went to answer it: Signora Maria was out doing the shopping and Concettina was still asleep. She found herself face to face with one of Danilo's sisters, the sixteen-year-old one, the one whom Concettina believed to be not a steady character. She asked for Ippolito, but Ippolito had gone out. Then she asked for Concettina. Anna went upstairs to call Concettina. Concettina was fast asleep, with her untidy fringe sticking out above the bedclothes. It was not at all easy to wake her up ; for some time she went on groaning and turning over on her other side. At last she woke up. When she heard that Danilo's sister was there she was seized with anxiety, she thrust her trembling feet into her slippers and went downstairs tying the girdle of her dressing-gown.

Danilo's sister was sitting waiting in the sitting-room. She had a quantity of little comma-shaped curls on her forehead and temples, and she was wearing a beret stuck on all crooked, with a long silk tassel that hung right down to her shoulder. She had come to say that Danilo had been arrested in the station at Turin. And Danilo, before he left for Turin, had told her that if by any chance anything bad happened to him, Ippolito must be the first to be informed. She spoke very slowly and quite calmly, and as she spoke she smoothed down her comma-curls and shook her tassel up and down. Concettina turned so pale that she seemed on

the point of fainting, and she clasped her dressing-gown round her with trembling hands.

When Danilo's sister had gone away, with the tassel dancing up and down on her back, Concettina told Anna that she must give up going to school and must run and fetch Emanuele and Ippolito, both of them.

Anna went out into the street and called Emanuele to the window, and he came and looked out. He did not know where Ippolito was, he had only just got up. The best thing would be to go and look for him at the library, where he always went in the mornings. Anna told him to go at once to Concettina who wanted to speak to him. Then she ran off through the town, her heart beating fast with terror and with joy, because Danilo had been arrested, and because she had to find Ippolito and for the first time she found herself mixed up in an important, secret, dangerous affair, she had been really needed and Concettina had not allowed her to go to school. She found Ippolito on the stairs at the library. In a whisper she told him about Danilo, and for a moment he stood quite still with his hand on the banisters, fluttering his eyelids very quickly and pressing his lips together. He started off homewards, so rapidly that Anna had difficulty in keeping up with him.

Emanuele said they must hold a council of war. He limped up and down the sitting-room and told Concettina and Anna that there was no further need now to make a mystery about it, since they already knew so much, and briefly the matter was like this : Danilo had been arrested, and in a short time the police would come and arrest them too, and there was stuff that had to be burnt and they must act quickly. Ippolito had opened the stove and was throwing newspapers into it, as his father had done with the book of memoirs. But the newspapers were so many that they seemed to go on for ever. And when it seemed that the

newspapers were finished, Ippolito pushed the piano aside and pulled out from behind it a whole heap of little pink and green books. Outside it had begun to snow and the stove smoked when it snowed. Concettina and Anna were helping to put the papers into the stove, and making sure that they got burnt. Emanuele limped up and down the room, wiping his red, sweating face and explaining what Concettina and Anna were to say when the police arrived : they were to say that Danilo came to the house because he was so much in love with Concettina, poor chap, and that was all they knew, they must try to seem as silly as possible, they must seem to be silly girls who were interested in nothing but dancing and fripperies. As he said "dancing and fripperies " he twirled his fingers in the air, as if he were imitating the fluttering of butterflies. Ippolito paid no attention to him, but, in his shirtsleeves and with his eyes full of tears from the smoke stood dumbly looking at the flames leaping up from the stove ; and upon his face you could not detect any thought or any surprise, but only the calm, weary expression he had worn on the day the book of memoirs had been burned.

When Signora Maria came back from her shopping, there was nothing left to be burned and she noticed nothing. Concettina told her she had not allowed Anna to go to school because she thought she had a slight cold : and Anna made an effort to sniffle and cough, and anyhow she had no difficulty in this, with all the smoke she had swallowed. Giustino came back from school and Anna ran to tell him about Danilo, but Giustino already knew he had been arrested, because people were by now talking of it in the town : in any case it was never possible to tell Giustino anything new, because he was always informed about everything, nobody knew how.

They waited for the police. They waited all that day and again the next day, sitting in the sitting-room. Ippolito told

Emanuele it would have been better for him to stay in his own house instead of being always with them, for when the police came it was not a very good thing that they should be found together. But Emanuele answered that, in the nervous state he was in, he did not feel like staying in his own house, and he begged Ippolito to let him remain with him : when the police came he could always tell them that he too was desperately in love with Concettina, or even, as far as that went, with Anna, because the police like love stories. Anna stayed at the window watching the snow, it seemed to go on snowing for ever and the street was silent in the snow and empty, and no policeman appeared. In the ante-room lay Danilo's gloves ; the last time he had been to see them he had left them there. As she passed through the room Anna glanced at them and had a strange feeling, and Danilo seemed very far off, it seemed like a dream that it had once been possible to look at him and touch him. He seemed very far off like the dead, and as with the dead it seemed that never again would it be possible to hear from him about the new things he was seeing and thinking.

Anna asked whether it would not be a good thing to burn the gloves as well. But Emanuele burst into loud laughter; after all Danilo's gloves were not marked with his name. Giustino liked these gloves very much ; they were fine gloves made of sham pigskin and he wanted to take them for himself. But Emanuele forbade him to touch them. They must be given back to Danilo's mother, the bush of hair at the cash-desk. Emanuele went and waited for her one evening outside the cake-shop. He gave her the gloves and also some money to send to Danilo, because in prison one needs money, otherwise they give you nothing but tasteless soup, a little bread and nothing else. Danilo was in the New Prison at Turin, he was well and quite calm. His mother also was quite calm and Emanuele was astonished ; the day they

arrested *him* Mammina would certainly have a fit, with screams reaching to heaven.

They waited for the police. But no policeman was to be seen and they were somewhat dumbfounded. Emanuele said that obviously the police were letting himself and Ippolito go free in order to spy upon them. They would have to be very careful. They decided that Ippolito should go to Le Visciole for a month and that Emanuele should go and see Amalia, to see whether she had learned to be a nurse and whether she had forgotten Franz.

## 5

Ippolito came back from Le Visciole with the dog. He made a kennel for it in the garden, out of old boxes. He spent a day sawing and nailing the wood, and when the kennel was ready he painted it green. But the dog quite refused to go into it. Perhaps it was the smell of the paint that it did not like. It sniffed round about it for a little and went away. It still ate the armchairs and was always dirty, even though Ippolito gave it a bath every Friday.

The dog at the house opposite, on the other hand, was no longer there ; they had given it away, because it barked at night and kept Mammina awake. No one now played ping-pong at the house opposite, and the table stood forgotten with the net torn, and the only person to be seen in the garden was the old gentleman in a deck-chair basking in the sun, his stomach well stuffed out with newspapers, so that when he got up he made a great rustling noise. One day Franz reappeared. He was dressed in white because the hot weather had now started, with a dark blue jersey of the kind then in fashion, and he was carrying a large suitcase and some tennis racquets. Surprised exclamations were heard from the old gentleman, and Franz's voice shouting into his ear that he had come from a tennis tournament.

So Emanuele, on his return, found himself face to face with Franz, in fact he was the first person he saw coming towards him, and afterwards he told Concettina that he had felt like getting back into the train and going away again, because he really could not bear the face of this man Franz and he had an idea he was a spy, paid by the Fascists to spy upon him and Ippolito, and in any case it was hard to understand where he got his money from, because he did nothing and was always so well dressed. Emanuele had

been to Florence to see Amalia and had then gone to Rome and Naples with her, because he had found her very thin and wasted and had suggested that she should give up the nursing college and go on a journey with him. He scratched his head violently when he recalled this journey, it had not been at all a cheerful affair, he had dragged Amalia through the Vatican Museum, had shown her the Raphael frescoes and she had wept, then they had gone to have something to eat and she had ordered a boiled egg and had wept into it. She was weeping for this man Franz. Emanuele made great efforts to explain to her that she meant nothing at all to Franz. But Amalia said that, on the other hand, she did mean something to him, she had understood that she did mean something to him, but there was a thing she could not say, a horrible thing, and she covered her face with her hands and started to sob. Emanuele said he was not in the least curious to know what this thing was, this thing that Amalia had discovered one evening at Mentone, and Franz had left next day : Emanuele shrugged his shoulders and snorted and went red. And then it had come out that Amalia did not in the least want to be a nurse, she wanted to give that up, and she herself did not know what to do. She wanted to study the history of art. And yet she had been all over the Vatican Museum without looking at anything, Emanuele said, there were the Raphael frescoes and she had wept. He had left her in a boarding-house in Rome, she did not want to come home, and in any case, now that Franz was there again, it was better that she should not come. Emanuele was very depressed, what with Danilo in prison, his sister not knowing what she wanted and his father with a gastric ulcer, and so many exams to pass and no politics, no politics at all, no hope of ever being able to do anything serious again, with that man Franz paid to spy upon him. But Ippolito shook his head and said that probably Franz was not a spy, he was just a poor fool and nothing more, no use for anything except winning tennis tournaments.

Emanuele went to his own home merely for eating and sleeping, and passed the days with Ippolito on the terrace, with the books that he ought to have been studying, but he had no inclination for work and Ippolito got on his nerves because he, on the other hand, worked hard, stopping only in order to prepare the dog's food. He said Ippolito was like an old lady when he took the dog out for a walk and gave it its food, he said that all of a sudden his soul had turned into that of an old lady.

From time to time Danilo's sister came to give them news. She no longer had a tassel but a hat with a crown, with bunches of cloth flowers on it, standing straight up on her head. She no longer had a tassel and perhaps she missed having something to swing, for she swung her head and her shoulders, this way and that. Danilo was well and was quite calm, they had not found anything against him. He had been arrested only because of the people he had visited in Turin during those few days, a small group of three or four who were now all in prison, and would be tried by the Special Tribunal. Danilo, on the other hand, would almost certainly not be brought to trial; they would give him his release earlier. The only trouble was that he would find himself behindhand with his studies, after an interruption of so many months. Danilo was studying book-keeping and accountancy, but he always said he did not like these things and that he would like to do something else, goodness knows what he wanted to do. In prison he had taken to studying German, and he wrote to his mother that he hoped they would not release him before he had learned to write and speak German well ; he wrote dull letters and his mother was angry. When Danilo's sister came Ippolito stayed working on the terrace, as though he were not in the least interested in hearing news of Danilo, and left Danilo's sister to be received by Emanuele and Concettina. And then, when Emanuele and Concettina came back to the terrace

and gave him the news, he scarcely seemed to listen. And then Emanuele would exclaim that he had gone as cold as a fish, a thing that makes you cold even to look at it. Ippolito would just give a little crooked smile and go on walking up and down with his book in his hand. Emanuele said that Ippolito got seriously on his nerves, but Concettina did not get on his nerves, Concettina was so charming, and he took her hand and kissed it on the palm. And he told her she had grown thinner and also more beautiful, with those eyes with dark circles round them because she too had been sitting up at night working for her exams. Concettina had discarded all her *fiancés*, and was thinking only of her studies, and perhaps she was thinking of something else too, Emanuele said, perhaps she had taken to thinking of Danilo who was in prison, and had fallen in love with him a little. Then Concettina was angry and snatched away her hand from Emanuele's hands and ran away from the terrace. Emanuele laughed and said there was no doubt about it, Concettina was sorry now for her rude behaviour towards Danilo and for the long hours she had left him in the cold outside the gate. "We have to go to prison to make women love us," Emanuele said, "otherwise we get nothing."

It was very hot and Mammina went with Franz to bathe in a lake near the town, for she had now recovered from her nervous exhaustion, she was very well and had a great number of flowered dresses and a very large straw hat. She and Franz would get up early in the morning, take the car and go swimming in the lake, and not come home until three in the afternoon. Emanuele was always much worried until they came back, because Franz drove the car like a madman, he always said that unless he drove fast he had no enjoyment in driving. In the meantime the whole town was whispering about Mammina and Franz, but Emanuele did not know this, or did not show that he knew. On the other hand Signora Maria knew of it, and when Emanuele

was not there she would start talking about those two who were always together and had no shame, and would look out of the window at the old gentleman sitting in the garden and be sorry for him for being made to wear horns like that, poor old gentleman. But the old gentleman sat in his deck-chair nursing his stomach which was all stuffed up with newspapers even in full summer, because he was always afraid of a possible draught, and he would wave good-bye to Mammina and Franz as they went off together ; it did not look as if his horns worried him very much, perhaps because he had gradually become accustomed to them and was resigned to wearing them, poor old gentleman. But his ulcer *did* worry him and people in the town said perhaps he was dying, and he did die, and Emanuele rushed off to call Mammina who was swimming in the lake with Franz.

The old gentleman's funeral was a big funeral with a very long procession, a snake that curled itself all through the town. There were a great many large wreaths, and the driver of the hearse wore a white wig and a tall hat, and the horses had Mack hoods. In the first row could be seen Mammina with a black veil, leaning on Emanuele's arm, and Amalia and Giума who had been summoned by telegram, and Franz with a grey overcoat and grey gloves and a sad, severe expression. Behind came all the people from the soap factory, and among them was to be seen Danilo's mother with a big tortoiseshell comb planted in her bush of hair, for she had been dismissed from the cake-shop, perhaps because of the affair of Danilo, and Emanuele had had her taken on at the soap factory. At the cemetery a long speech was made about the old gentleman, about the soap factory which previously had been nothing at all and he, gradually, had succeeded in making it big and important, and Anna and Concettina were very much bored and the heat was terrible. Anna looked at Giума who was there right in front of her. He had long trousers now and the face

almost of a grown-up man, big and hard, but he brushed the hair away from his eyes with the same gesture as before. Anna only saw him that day at the funeral and they did not say anything to each other, and a little time after the funeral Giума went back to school.

Immediately after the opening of the will Amalia departed too, as though the ground were scorching her feet. She was going back to the nurses' college to finish her course, so Emanuele said, but goodness knows whether he was telling the truth and goodness knows where she was really going. She and Mammina had scarcely spoken to one another and Amalia had stayed almost all the time in her own room, as indeed Mammina had too, and Franz roamed the house with an unhappy expression, and tried to talk to Emanuele who barely answered him. The reading of the will was a very long and tedious ceremony, everyone sitting round the table with the uncle who was a colonel and the lawyer ; the uncle who was a colonel was the old gentleman's brother and the old gentleman in his will had appointed him to be the guardian of Giума who was a minor. In the meantime Franz who had nothing to do with the reading of the will waited in the next room, and from time to time he put his head in at the door to make some foolish remark, to announce the arrival of the upholsterer or the dyer or to say that lunch was ready, and the uncle who was a colonel would give him a look of annoyance. According to the will Mammina had the usufruct of the inherited property, and the shares in the soap factory were to be divided equally between Amalia, Emanuele and Giума. Mammina went very red and asked what a usufruct was, but the uncle who was a colonel told her to be quiet and that he would explain it to her afterwards.

A few days after Amalia had gone Franz said that he must go away too on stockbroking business. So Emanuele and Mammina were left alone, at lunch and at dinner the two of them were alone at that long table, and when they had

finished Mammina would lie down on the sofa and take off her shoes, and say how unkind Amalia had been to her, she had done her no harm at all, she could not understand what Amalia had against her. Then she asked what usufruct was and whether it was much or little, and whether she would still be able to have a dress or two made for herself now and then, and Emanuele kissed her and told her she could have all the dresses made that she wanted. And Mammina said that Emanuele had always been so good to her, and this consoled her for Amalia's bad behaviour and for Giama's air of indifference, Giama had become so cold and arrogant with her. Emanuele suggested that they should go out for a little, and they took the car and went out of the town, but as they were passing along the lake Mammina said she did not wish to see the lake, and never again would she swim in it, because the lake reminded her of the day Papa died, while she was enjoying herself swimming. Emanuele accelerated and Mammina kept her eyes shut, until he told her that the lake was no longer to be seen. Mammina said she really could not have imagined that Papa was going to die just that morning, she had gone to the lake because it had not seemed to her that Papa was so very ill, he was quiet and as rosy as a baby. And then she said they must have a fine bronze statue made of Papa by some good sculptor, to put in the courtyard of the soap factory.

When he was able to leave Mammina Emanuele went back to his studies on the terrace with Ippolito, and Ippolito told him he was now the head of a business and despised his poor penniless friends, and the soap factory belonged to him, the soap factory was his very own, and from the terrace he pointed towards it with his outstretched arm, but Emanuele covered his eyes with his hands and would not look. He would go and work in the factory, he said, after he had got his degree, because he had promised his father he would do so, but he had no desire to work there, God knows

what he would have given to work somewhere else. He was not in the least interested in soap and would like to bash in the face of anyone who dared to show him even the tiniest little bit of it.

The exams went well for everyone except Giustino, who as usual was told he must take them again in October. And after the exams Ippolito began asking what they were waiting for, why didn't they go to Le Visciole, and no one had any desire for Le Visciole and they suggested he should go there by himself, but he could not make up his mind to go all by himself. Signora Maria was hoping for an invitation from her sister at Genoa, and Anna and Giustino were hoping that the usual invitation would come from Cenzo Renato that castle of his with the small towers, and perhaps it would be possible to accept, now that the old man was no longer there to forbid it : but Cenzo Rena was in Holland and wrote from there. No invitation arrived for anyone and they left for Le Visciole, otherwise Ippolito would have given them no peace ; but Concettina was obstinately determined to stay in the town, because she had to prepare her thesis and to consult books in the library. She was preparing a thesis on Racine, but so far she had written only three pages of it and Ippolito had read them and considered them to be idiotic. Emanuele had to accompany Mammina to Men-tone but promised that as soon as he had established Mammina there he would come himself to Le Visciole, and Signora Maria said wasn't it too stupid, to have a villa at Mentone and come to Le Visciole, where there wasn't even running water and to get a bucket of water you had to pump for an hour in the courtyard.

## 6

Emanuele arrived at Le Visciole at the beginning of July. So now Ippolito was no longer alone in his wanderings round the countryside, but Emanuele limped quickly along beside him up and down the paths, red from the sun and heated with discussion. Giustino spent his time in the village square, in company with the sons and daughters of the Humbugs, and in the evenings went and danced on the open-air platform, with its paper lanterns swaying amongst the foliage. They did a great many things now which their father had not allowed them to do, and Anna swam in the river at a place where there was a quiet pool, and Signora Maria sat in the sun on the bank, where the wives of the Humbugs went with their babies, their work and their picnic lunches, and at last Signora Maria was able to speak to them.

One evening, while they were having supper under the pergola, a motor-car stopped at their gate. They heard the door of the car bang and the creaking of the gate as it opened, and did not understand who it could be at that hour, and they saw at the bottom of the drive a man in a long white waterproof and a hat all out of shape. Emanuele rose and started limping nervously round the table. But it was not a policeman. It was Cenzo Rena and he began embracing them all.

And so at last they saw him, this Cenzo Rena who sent chocolates and post-cards from every part of the world. They had always imagined him as being very old, as old as their father, and yet he did not look so very old, he had just a few grey streaks in his hair and moustache. Signora Maria had always said he was very rich, and now again she was saying so and boasting of it while she prepared him a little

supper, and at the same time she was cursing the idea that they all had of coming to Le Visciole, from Mentone, from Holland, they all came and planted themselves in this miserable hole where she already had so much to do.

Cenzo Rena did not appear very rich, just to look at him. He had on this very long waterproof which looked like a nightshirt, and underneath it he had on a thick sweater, all discoloured and dirty, which hung in folds over his stomach. He had enormous suitcases tied up with cords ; he ran off and pulled them out of the car and started furiously untying the knots, and then pulling out socks and drawers, all higgledy-piggledy. Anna and Giustino stood watching, expecting a present of some kind, but, instead of that, Cenzo Rena dug out from under the socks merely a few photographs of Holland which he had taken ; he seemed very proud of these photographs, but in reality they were not very clear, all you saw was a sort of blur, and Cenzo Rena explained that he had taken them in the rain. Then all at once he tapped himself on the forehead and apologized for having forgotten to bring any presents, he had intended to bring all sorts of things for everybody and had forgotten. From underneath the socks he pulled out also a tin of tunny-fish in oil, and they all sampled it and stayed till late under the pergola, because Cenzo Rena was eating and drinking and smoking and did not seem ever to want to go to bed.

When they went into the house, Cenzo Rena suddenly stopped at the foot of the stairs with his eyes full of tears, and said that he seemed to see the old man coming down those same stairs with his eyeglass and his white flannel trousers, and that he seemed to hear his snappish tone of voice when he said, "Make yourself useful, seeing that you're not ornamental ". Cenzo Rena started stroking Ippolito's head, untidying his hair a little, and said that Ippolito was the very image of his father as a young man : but Ippolito remained stiff and motionless, with downcast

eyes and frowning brows, as he always did when someone behaved with tenderness towards him.

Cenzo Rena stayed for several days at Le Visciole. In the morning he wanted to have a bath, he was dirty but he always had a bath, and he said he remembered that there was no bathroom at Le Visciole and so he had brought expressly a rubber bath. So Signora Maria had to go and pump water in the courtyard, and run up and down the stairs with buckets, and it was no use because he came out more shaggy and untidy than before, after splashing water all over the room. Cenzo Rena was tall and big, and his face was all hair and eyebrows and moustaches, and he wore glasses too, glasses with tortoiseshell rims. He did not choose to dress like other men, with a tie and a jacket, but always wore blouses and sweaters and strange things, and he wore strange things on his feet too, slippers or galoshes or sandals, never real shoes. He had brought with him a great many bottles of brandy and a great many tins of tunnyfish in oil, and at the end of lunch, as soon as he had finished his fruit, he opened one of these tins of tunny and started swallowing it in spoonfuls, and Signora Maria was offended and went over the lunch in her mind, to see if it had been good and plentiful enough. In the morning as soon as he woke up he at once started smoking, drinking and eating the tunnyfish in oil, and writing quantities of letters in a tearing hurry, and he upset a bottle of ink on a carpet in his room, and Signora Maria took the greatest trouble rubbing the stain with milk and breadcrumbs but it did not come out, a beautiful carpet ruined for ever. And Cenzo Rena stood watching her as she rubbed, he said it was Lady Macbeth's spot, which all the perfumes of Arabia could not remove. But Ippolito, too, was annoyed about the carpet, he said nothing but you could see he was annoyed. And at table Cenzo Rena from time to time slapped Ippolito hard on the shoulder, hard enough to make him jump, and set to

work to try and comfort him about the carpet and promised to send him a very beautiful new carpet, a carpet from Smyrna. But then he shook his head and said that certainly Ippolito resembled his father physically, but was very different from him in spirit, for his father, at Ippolito's age, was ready to set all the carpets in his house on fire and the chairs too.

Cenzo Rena often went for country walks with Ippolito and Emanuele, and went out shooting with them, but he said that Ippolito had no idea at all of how to take up the right position nor of how to take aim, and indeed he hardly ever hit anything, and in any case it was impossible to go out shooting with that dog. When he came home Cenzo Rena was tired and out of temper, he threw himself into a chair under the pergola and shook his head, for a long time he shook his head and he said to Ippolito and Emanuele that the two of them were full of nothing but smoke and fog, they thought themselves goodness knows what and yet they didn't even know how to shoot little birds. Two little provincial intellectuals, that was what they were, and that is the dreariest and oddest thing that can exist on earth. They had never seen anything ; he, Cenzo Rena, had been in America, in Constantinople and in London, and he knew what Italy was when looked at from Mexico or from London, Italy was just a flea, and Mussolini a flea's droppings. But Emanuele and Ippolito did not even know Italy, they had never seen anything except their own little town, and they imagined the whole of Italy to be like their own little town, an Italy of teachers and accountants with a few workmen thrown in, but even the workmen and the accountants became rather like teachers in their imagination. And they had forgotten that in Italy there were peasants and priests as well, in fact if you came to think of it there was really nothing else, because teachers and workmen were, fundamentally, nothing but priests or peasants. And in Italy

there was the South, cried Cenzo Rena, and he jumped up from his chair when he said the South, and banged his hand on the table and threw out his arms. They didn't know what the South was, or what the peasants of the South were, with nothing but a few beans to eat. Emanuele limped up and down the lawn and wiped the sweat from his face, and from time to time he turned his head quickly and drew in his breath as if he wanted to answer, but he did not answer. And Ippolito did not answer either, but sat sideways on his chair with the dog between his knees, and gave a little crooked smile as he stroked the dog's ears. On the other hand this was all vain chatter, went on Cenzo Rena, because in a short time there would be war, a war with poison gases and cholera germs rained down from aeroplanes. And so there would be nobody left on the earth.

Then all at once Cenzo Rena discovered the *contadino*. He was not a *contadino* of the South, but he liked him all the same. He was not a *contadino* who ate beans, he was a *contadino* who ate chickens and rabbits, and big bowls of soup flavoured with bacon, far better than the thin, pallid soups made by Signora Maria. Anyhow he was a *contadino* and Cenzo Rena liked him, and he gave him cigarettes and the *contadino* gave him bread and sausage. They spent hours sitting together in the courtyard, and the *contadino* began talking about Ippolito being always so suspicious and arrogant. The *contadino* had known him since he was born and had taken him for rides in his cart when he was a little boy, and now it pained him to find himself so unkindly treated. He was never satisfied with the harvest, it always seemed to him too little, he knew nothing about country matters and tried to pretend that he did know. Cenzo Rena listened and looked as though he immensely enjoyed hearing Ippolito spoken ill of, and when Ippolito and Emanuele came back from shooting he rushed to tell them that he found it far more enjoyable to converse with the

*contadino* than with them, because the *contadino* had not so much fog in his head as they. And he explained to Ippolito that, seriously, it was not at all clever to put a *contadino* against him in this way. He stole, yes, of course he stole, but why in the world shouldn't he keep a little of the corn after he had spent the whole of his time upon it, while Ippolito stayed in the town thinking of an Italy in which *contadini* did not exist? Besides, he stole because he knew the world was badly arranged and people lived by stealing, by tearing the shirts off each other's backs, and of course some day or other this thing would have to stop, but it was not at all simple and why should Ippolito's *contadino* have to be the one to begin? Emanuele muttered that these were commonplaces. Commonplaces, cried Cenzo Rena, of course they were commonplaces, but why not repeat commonplaces if they were true, and this was just what had happened to them, for fear and shame of commonplaces they had lost themselves in vain and complicated fancies, they had lost themselves in fog and smoke. And gradually they had become like a couple of old children, a couple of very old, wise children. They had created around themselves, as children do, a complete dream-world, but it was a dream without joy and without hope, the arid dream of a pedant. And they did not look at women, they never looked at women, they passed numbers of women on their country walks and did not look at them, lost as they were in their pedantic dream-world. Cenzo Rena called Giustino, slapped him on the shoulder and rumped up his hair, and started praising Giustino for being healthy and sensible. And he begged Giustino to take him to dance on the platform with the daughters of the Humbugs, for he found them very charming.

And so Ippolito had found someone else who took pleasure in tormenting him, and it seemed to be his fate that people should torment him. Cenzo Rena told him he

was very handsome, but even this was said in order to provoke him. He said, "A pity, such a handsome young man, look how handsome he is, he might make plenty of women fall in love with him and instead of that he takes no interest in women. He takes an interest in carpets, in corn, in his own foggy, smoky ideas, but as for women, he doesn't wish to look at them and when they go past he turns the other way." Giustino and Anna looked at Ippolito, for the first time they came to know that he was handsome. He was lying back in an armchair under the pergola with his shabby fustian jacket thrown carelessly over his shoulders, his worn shooting-boots on his feet, his long, delicate hands stroking the dog's ears, his hair streaked with gold and curly at the back of his head, his mouth twisted in the bitter smile that he wore when people tormented him. It was thus that Anna and Giustino were to remember him always, as they had seen him that summer at Le Visciole, when he had been discovered to be handsome because Cenzo Rena had said so.

Cenzo Rena made a long stay at Le Visciole because he enjoyed it. He liked the daughters of the Humbugs and took them out for rides in his car. He liked swimming in the river with Anna and Giustino, and then lying in the sun on the bank while they fanned him with a branch. He liked the dog, and used to whistle to it and take it down to the river with him, partly in order to provoke Ippolito who was then unable to go out shooting, and in any case, Cenzo Rena said, the dog suffered when it was taken out shooting, because it had never been a sporting dog and the noise of firing frightened it, and also it was hot and it was good for it to plunge into the river. After bathing he would drag off Anna and Giustino to drink grenadine in the village square, and then they would wander round the shops, and Cenzo Rena would buy everything that could be bought in a small village like that, corkscrews and cheese and straw hats, and many yards of

unbleached calico to make himself drawers. And the village seemed transformed since he had been there to wander round it. It no longer seemed a tedious village of flies and dust, but it seemed all at once to have turned into an amusing, strange place where there was something strange and amusing to be bought in every shop. Every now and then Giustino would say feebly that perhaps he ought to go back home and get on with his work. But Cenzo Rena told him not to do any work, that it was useless, that the schools in Italy were badly organized and that they made boys study a lot of things that served no purpose in life. He himself had never had any desire to study, and yet now he was quite satisfied with the way in which he had spent his life. All they had taught him at school he had forgotten, the ablative absolute, if he thought about the ablative absolute he found nothing but a black hole and he was frightened of it. And nobody had ever asked him about the ablative absolute when he went to Constantinople or London to arrange sales of shipping. He had found a job which allowed him to make long journeys, and then he would return to his own home, in a small village in the South, and there he could spend his time with the *contadini* and listen to them, for there was no one who was so well worth listening to as *contadini*. Giustino and Anna would have to come and visit him in his house for a little, it was a house and not a castle, and there were no towers, goodness only knows how those towers had arisen out of the old man's head. In the village they called it the castle because they had called it so for years and years. It was the home of his family, an extremely old house, and all he had done was to rearrange it a little. There were no towers, there was just a kind of terrace on the roof, which from a distance might possibly look like a tower, but it was just a terrace and he had put a telescope up there to look at the stars. For a long time he would be travelling, and then he would go back home and he was always pleased to see his own house again, high up on the hill, with the pine wood

behind it and below it a tumbled mass of rocks. It was a house without any carpets, he could not be bothered with carpets, and he liked to hear his footsteps echoing through the big rooms. Certainly he had made money from his job as well, but that was not important. It was not important because he could lose the whole of that money at one stroke without blinking an eyelid. He had no special needs. He needed only a little brandy and a few cigarettes, and he begged Anna and Giustino never to let him want for them, even if he suddenly became very poor and ended up in rags on a bench in a public garden. Perhaps they would then be rich and important and would come to his bench in a motor-car with a few bottles of brandy.

One evening when Cenzo Rena had gone with Giustino to dance on the platform they came home very late and they were both drunk, they both felt ill and Signora Maria had to get up and make coffee and lemonade for them. Next day Cenzo Rena stayed in bed, he was gloomy and green in the face and complaining. The doctor with the chicken-feather hair came to see him, and there was nothing wrong with him, it was just that the wine had made him ill. But the doctor with the chicken-feather hair told Ippolito that there was a scandal in the village, because Cenzo Rena when he was drunk during the dance had started annoying a girl, the daughter of the Superintendent of Police, and the Superintendent had been on the point of striking him and they had been separated only with difficulty, and the women had been frightened. Giustino would not say anything about what had happened, and he too was gloomy and green in the face and did not leave his room. Then Signora Maria, with her parasol and her shoes with bows on them, went and called upon the Superintendent's wife and explained that they must be patient with Cenzo Rena, because he was not quite right in the head, and in any case he would be gone in a short time. And she also found a way

of mentioning that he was very rich, for to wealth all things are forgiven.

They had had enough of Cenzo Rena by now, and he too, all of a sudden, had had enough of them, all of a sudden he started to hate the village with its Humbugs and Humbugs' daughters, and he said that it was only in Italy that certain things are still to be met with, idiotic superintendents of police who strike you with their fists and idiotic girls. The middle-class girls in Italy, he said, go mad if they see a man, and at once they get it into their heads to try and get themselves wooed and married, they don't know how to have healthy relations with men. How disgusting they are, the middle-class girls in Italy, he said, and at the same time he started packing his bags to go away, and he thrust shirts and socks into them higgledy-piggledy, together with the straw hats he had bought. The new drawers that he had had made for him by the *contadino's* wife, out of the unbleached calico he had bought in the village, were rough and scratched his behind, and Signora Maria suggested washing them in order to soften them, but he was unwilling to wait for them to be washed and dried. He did not wish to stay even one hour longer in this dreary village, he wanted to breathe free air, without any superintendents and girls.

He left and all was quiet again at Le Visciole and in the village, and nothing remained of him but a pair of worn-out slippers on the rubbish-heap behind the courtyard, and the dog went and fetched them and chewed them, and snarled if anyone took them away. Cenzo Rena sent post-cards from London, to them and to the *contadino*, but to the little chicken-feather-haired doctor, on the other hand, he wrote a long letter, to tell him that when he had gone into the chemist's shop in the village he had discovered that it was entirely lacking in serum against snake-bite, and it was a piece of gross stupidity in a neighbourhood where there were so many snakes, and so he had better give up being a

doctor, because he did not even know what there ought to be inside a chemist's shop. The doctor came to Le Visciole and read the letter, half amused and half mortified, and he explained that he had ordered the serum and it was not his fault if they had not yet sent it. Emanuele burst into a great fit of laughter, one of the long, deep fits of laughter that were characteristic of him. These long fits of laughter, like the cooing of a pigeon, were now coming to be heard again, but all the time Cenzo Rena had been there Emanuele had roamed round the house mortified and frowning, and he said he almost wanted to go back to Mammina at Mentone, because it was not very nice of him to leave her alone the whole summer. However, immediately after Cenzo Rena's departure he became cheerful again, and in fact he said that, at bottom, Cenzo Rena was a fine fellow, and he mimicked him when he shook himself because his drawers were scratching him, and when he rose to his feet to shout out about the *contadini*.

But one day Emanuele had a letter from Amalia, in which she informed him that she had married Franz. After that his long, deep fits of laughter ceased again, even though he said that, when all was said and done, he did not care in the least.

## 7

When they went back to the town they found Concettina in tears, because her thesis had been rejected. It was twenty-five pages long, and Danilo's sister had typed it for her and bound it up in a big album tied with red tapes. But the professor had said that it would not do. Concettina had slept in all the rooms, one after another, because, what with her violent exertions and her discouragement, she had never been able to induce herself to make her bed, and in the kitchen there was a great confusion of eggshells and opened tins, and Signora Maria took three days to clean the house and she said the house looked as if it had been lived in not by one single girl but by a regiment of *bersaglieri*. But Concettina was in such a state of despair that even Ippolito did not have the heart to be angry with her, even though black-beetles had appeared in the kitchen through its being left so dirty. Concettina said she had no desire to go to the library again to look for more books on Racine, in any case she had come to hate Racine and wanted to try somebody else, but she did not know who. Emanuele tried to comfort her : surely she would not need to submit a thesis at all, since within a year she would be married. But Signora Maria said that within a year was too soon, because Concettina must first learn how to keep a house clean. Emanuele said, "If you don't find anyone to marry you, Concettina, I'll marry you myself. It doesn't matter to me whether the house is very clean or not, and I don't very much mind blackbeetles. I should be making rather a sacrifice in marrying you because I don't much like women without bosoms. But if you really don't find anyone else I'll take you on. Or perhaps you might marry Cenzo Rena, who is very rich and would take you to see Constantinople and explain to you all about *contadini*." And in order to cheer up Concettina Emanuele

started to tell stories about Cenzo Rena and to imitate him when his drawers were scratching him. But Concettina said she did not want any joking because she had too many troubles. So Emanuele asked, hadn't he his own troubles too? Hadn't his sister got married to that fellow Franz? And Mammina was on the point of coming back from her holiday and still knew nothing about it and he would have to break the news of it to her gradually. And there had been the treaty of agreement between Germany and Russia and now it was impossible to understand anything, it was impossible to understand what might happen, everything was confusion. Cenzo Rena had said that perhaps Germany and Russia were coming to an agreement together, and Emanuele had not believed it, and now it had really happened. Emanuele suggested to Concettina that she should put on a nice dress and a nice hat and come out for a walk with him ; they would have ices at a café in the Corso and then they would go to the cinema without troubling about anything. But Concettina was now going every evening to study shorthand with Danilo's sister. And as soon as she had gone out Emanuele said how ingenuous Concettina was to think that her plans would remain a secret. It was clear that she was studying shorthand with Danilo's sister so that Danilo on his return should think well of her, for being such a brave and simple girl and studying shorthand with his own sister. And he limped about the room, delighted with the idea of Danilo and Concettina married and with a heap of babies. But the recollection of the Russo-German treaty came back to him, who would ever have thought it, and now goodness knows what might not happen. Meanwhile Signora Maria was complaining that Concettina never paid any attention to her, she had begged her so often not to go and see Danilo's sister because she was certainly not a steady character, and as for Danilo, they had put him in prison. Of course the political affair was just a story, they must have put him in prison for swindling or

smuggling. For smuggling watches, perhaps. And she herself would never consent to a marriage between Concettina and Danilo, Emanuele's ideas were quite nonsensical. Nor did she like Concettina's studying shorthand, what on earth was the use of shorthand to her, her father hadn't sent her to the university for her to finish up in some little office as a shorthand-typist.

Mamma came back on the very day that Germany invaded the Polish Corridor. England and France declared war on Germany and everybody believed that Italy would now enter the war too, no one in the town spoke of anything else. Mamma was seized with panic and made Emanuele telegraph to Giama to come back home at once. She was so terrified that Emanuele did not dare say anything to her about Amalia and Franz. Mamma went down into the cellar to see if they could take refuge there in case of air raids. She sent for one of the Civil Engineer Corps whom she knew, to see if the cellar was safe. The Civil Engineer went round tapping all the walls with a small hammer and said the cellar was perfectly safe, the whole house might fall in but the cellar would not. Mamma had armchairs, blankets and a bottle of brandy taken down to the cellar. Meanwhile she was also trying to find out what could be done about gas-masks, where they could be bought, and she wanted Emanuele to go to Turin to get information. Everyone was talking about these masks but no one had ever seen them, and in any case it was not certain that they could be used against every type of gas. Mamma was always sniffing the air and thinking she smelt a strange smell, an asphyxiating smell. And still Giama did not arrive, perhaps they had already closed the frontiers, perhaps Giama had been overwhelmed in a horde of refugees.

Giama, however, took it easy and did not arrive for a fortnight, and he said that at his school the rugby matches were going on and he had wanted to stay because he felt

sure his side would win, and indeed it had won. He was very handsome, healthy and fresh and sunburnt, and Mammina was happy to see him because she had imagined him dead or overwhelmed, and then at last Emanuele told her that Amalia and Franz were married. Mammina said she knew already, she said this in a very faint, rather harsh voice, and then immediately went on talking about the cellar and about asphyxiating gases, and about all the stores that must be laid in, about sugar and oil, because in a short time everything would disappear. Signora Maria, also, was scouring the town in search of oil and sugar, but Ippolito would not give her the money and all she managed to buy was a few pounds of sugar ; in reality the shops were full of stuff, but everyone was buying and prices were going up. Signora Maria, too, was thinking about air raids and she hoped to be able to go and take shelter in the cellar of the house opposite, because the cellar of their own house did not seem to her at all safe. She had suddenly started being very nice to Emanuele, and she begged him to persuade his mother to allow them to come to that fine cellar of hers if air raids were suddenly to begin.

Emanuele left his radio only in order to run over and tell Ippolito the news. But the war was still a long way off, in Poland, Italy had made no move and Emanuele did not know what to think ; he said that if Italy did not enter the war there would never be an end of Fascism. But Ippolito said to him that it no longer mattered to know whether there would be an end of Fascism or not. Because in Poland people were dying, every day people were dying on one side or the other, while he and Emanuele were sitting talking on the terrace and Signora Maria was searching the town for sugar. Emanuele blushed and limped up and down. Cenzo Rena was right, said Ippolito, Fascism was nothing but flea's droppings. Emanuele went back home and explained to Mammina that the question of Italy was not important,

because in Poland bombs were falling while she was sitting drinking tea, in Poland houses were falling down and when there were houses falling down it was of no importance whether they were falling in one place in the world or in another.

One day Emanuele had a letter from Franz, brought by hand by a girl friend of Amalia's who had seen them. They were living in a *pension* in Rome. In the letter Franz told Emanuele that he was not a German, and he was not a baron, he had been lying all the time. He had grown up at Freiburg, where his father at one time sold waterproofs. But his father and mother were Polish, and now they lived in Warsaw. And his mother was of Jewish origin and the Germans would kill her. He himself was listening to the radio all day long and weeping. If Italy came into the war there was no knowing what would become of him, seeing that he had a Polish passport in his pocket. If Italy came into the war on the side of Germany, it was all up with him. Some people were saying that perhaps Italy might still ally herself with England and France. He begged Emanuele to let him know whether there was a possibility of this happening. But it would be too good, it could not happen. He asked forgiveness for having lied all the time, he had not lied out of malice, but only like a child telling a fairy story. He begged Emanuele to take care of Amalia if anything should happen to him. He begged him to send some money because they had almost nothing left. Emanuele shrugged his shoulders, he was vaguely moved but he could not also help laughing a little, owing to the waterproofs making their appearance like that all of a sudden. Goodness knows why anyone should be ashamed of being Polish and of having sold waterproofs, and should then confess to it all of a sudden amidst sobs. He sent a cheque made out to Amalia ; only afterwards did he realize that he had not made it out to Franz, and reflected that he must therefore still be

mistrustful of him. He made Mammina read the letter, Mammina cast a glance at it and at once thrust it away from her, she said she had known all about these things for some time, and she spoke in that same very faint voice.

At the end of September they began to think that Italy would not now do anything, that she would allow the others to destroy themselves while she herself sat looking on, so as to throw herself in at the last moment on the winning side. Only Mammina continued to be frightened, she would not allow Giума to go back to Switzerland, because she would never be able to sleep if she knew he was far away, with the danger of war hanging over them. Giума was now going to the local high school and was in Giustino's class, and Giustino described how he gave himself all sorts of airs with his rugby and his Switzerland, and everyone in the class had begun to hate him. Emanuele started work at the soap factory. He had a room all to himself, with a big armchair and a long desk and a quantity of magazines, and on the walls he had hung reproductions of pictures he liked, Piero della Francesca and Botticelli. And when he could he went downstairs and talked with the workmen. He had all sorts of reforms in mind, a big nursery and crèche for the workers' children and a canteen where you could eat for a mere song ; the workmen now had to bring their food with them from home. He sat at his desk writing out long menus of unusual and excellent meals for each day of the week, and thinking of these meals made him so hungry that he had to ring the bell and send out an office-boy to fetch him sandwiches from the bar on the other side of the street. But when he spoke of these plans to the managing director, the managing director shook his head and told him he was too young. Ippolito also was working now, he had been taken on at a lawyer's office, and he and Emanuele could no longer spend their days together, but in the evening after dinner Emanuele would run straight over to Ippolito and relieve his

feelings about the managing director, he hated him and he said what he would like to do to him, shake him hard from head to foot, take his two cheeks between his fingers and pinch them hard, take down his hat from the peg and trample it on the floor. And so he would do as soon as he had managed to get a little authority in the factory, he was nothing now, he was just the boss's son who had come to learn the job. He would not sack the managing director, he would not do anything to him, he would just throw his hat on the floor and trample on it a bit.

## 8

One day, at two in the afternoon, when they were all together in the dining-room eating a creamy cake that Emanuele had brought from his own home, suddenly Danilo appeared in the doorway. Concettina had opened the gate to him, and was now beside Danilo in the doorway, pale, rather breathless, with frightened, sparkling eyes. Emanuele ran to embrace Danilo, and gave him two smacking kisses on the cheeks. Danilo looked surprised, and raised his eyebrows a little. Emanuele was immediately ashamed of the two kisses, he went red and threw open the door of the sideboard to look for a knife and a plate ; Danilo must at once have some of the cake, Giustino must go and buy a bottle of champagne and have it put down to his account, Signora Maria must wash the glasses. But Signora Maria told him that she was not his servant and was not taking any orders, and she wanted to rest now because she had a headache. You could see she was in a state of fury and of terror too because of Danilo, she looked and looked at him with an expression of horror, and finally left the room muttering to herself. It was Concettina who went to wash the glasses. But Danilo did not turn to look at Concettina as she went out with the tray. Danilo was much changed, indeed he was hardly recognizable. He was dressed in new clothes, with a bowler hat and an overcoat of a heavy kind of cloth, and in his hand he actually held an umbrella because it was raining that day. He had a precise, prudent look about him, almost like a policeman. He sat on the edge of his chair with his umbrella, his hat on his knee, and a crumb of cake fell on his sleeve and he flicked it away with his finger-nail and looked very carefully to see whether it had left a mark. Emanuele told him how smart he had become, exclaiming at great length about his overcoat and

his hat, with deep, echoing bursts of laughter. Danilo explained that he had stopped a few days in Turin to furbish up his wardrobe, his mother was now making good money, and he gravely thanked Emanuele for having taken her on at the soap factory. Emanuele began to relate how he had quarrelled and intrigued in order to convince the managing director, he began to talk about the managing director and about all the things he intended to do some time or other. But Danilo did not laugh. They noticed that his face was yellow and as though slightly swollen, and he no longer seemed capable of laughing, he did not laugh at all. The only time he laughed a little was when he got up to shut the door, he said it pleased him so much to be able to open and shut doors again, oh how lovely it was. Emanuele wanted to know a thousand things all at the same time, whether there were bugs in prison, whether they let you read novels, whether he had learned German. Giustino came back with the champagne and Concettina came back with the glasses. Concettina was looking very pretty, with her fringe thrown back so as to leave her forehead uncovered, a look of astonishment in her eyes and her lips pale and trembling. Emanuele asked Danilo if he knew that Concettina was now going to his sister for lessons in shorthand. Danilo answered yes, he knew, and he took his glass from Concettina's hands but his face did not light up as he looked at her, the old sly expression seemed to have vanished from his face. They drank the champagne without any gaiety, Ippolito refused to drink and said that champagne gave him a burning in the stomach, so Emanuele got angry with him, was it possible he should think so much about his stomach, he seemed like a real old lady. It was by no means an everyday happening that a friend should come out of prison. Danilo announced all at once that he was getting married in a short time. At Turin, during the days before they arrested him, he had met a girl, a girl of the working class, and when he came out of prison he had seen her again and they had decided to get

married. In prison he had thought about many and various things, he said, and it had seemed to him that he had always lived like a fool, that he had lost a great deal of time. In prison you grow up, he said, and you get so that you can't stand any kind of affectation or pose. In prison he had made a critical examination of the whole of his past life, he said, and had realized that there had been nothing good about it, it was only the hours he had spent with this girl that had not seemed to him so wasted and useless. She was a very simple, serious girl, and he could marry her with confidence because she would not be frightened on the day when they put him in prison again, she would just go on with her work and she was prepared for this idea, she was a very "prepared" kind of girl. Emanuele asked if she was pretty and Danilo answered that he did not know, he had never asked himself that question, in any case he did not need a great beauty, he needed a quiet girl who was prepared for anything. For the present they expected to live with Danilo's mother, all that was needed was one more bed, and Marisa—the girl was called Marisa—would look for a job here in the town, possibly even Emanuele would manage to get her taken on at the soap factory, as well. Ippolito got up and said he ought to have been back at his office long before this, and Danilo said he was going out too because he had to go to the joiner to order the bed for his wife. So Emanuele and Concettina were left alone in front of the table covered with plates and glasses. Emanuele said he had no desire to go to the factory that day, he was sleepy and he felt sad, that champagne was not very good, it had been a mistake to send Giustino out because champagne unless it is very good does you harm. Concettina all at once laid her head down on the table and began to sob. Emanuele jumped up in a fright and started to comfort her, he asked if it had really been such a serious thing, if she was really rather in love. Concettina shook her head violently, she was not in love, she herself did not know why she was crying like that.

Emanuele said that he felt very sad too and did not quite know why. He too had been distressed at seeing Danilo so changed, with his bowler hat and his prudent look, it had been much better when he wore a beret and spent hours outside the gate. But there was no reason for crying, Concettina would find plenty more men to fall in love with her, she would forget Danilo, she had got ideas into her head and dreamed about Danilo in prison, suddenly she had seen him as a hero, a very natural thing and not in the least tragic. Poor Concettina, who had even gone so far as to start taking lessons in shorthand. At the mention of shorthand Concettina sobbed more violently, she had come to hate shorthand and didn't want anything more to do with it, she didn't want to go on going to Danilo's sister in the evenings, and now what was she to do about Danilo's sister who would expect her? But surely she could send a note, said Emanuele, laughing, any excuse would do, it wasn't a problem. Emanuele stayed till the evening comforting Concettina, caressing her and holding her hands in his.

Danilo and the prepared girl were married a few days later. Everyone had pictured this prepared girl as being rather ugly, but she was not ugly at all, in fact she would have been rather pretty if she had not had such a worn-looking face and hair all scorched with peroxide. Her hair was terrible, said Emanuele to Ippolito and Giustino as they walked back from the wedding, he himself would never have taken a wife with such scorched-looking hair, with curls that were rough and dead and of a yellow colour that was almost green. He could never stroke hair like that. Her face was pretty but very much the worse for wear, her complexion already faded, her skin rough and dead. Giustino, however, had liked Marisa, he said Emanuele understood nothing at all about girls, goodness knows what scarecrow of a wife he would marry, some snobbish old bird planted on him by his mother. They were coming back from the wedding party at

Danilo's, Concettina had been asked too but she had not come. Danilo's mother had started talking to Emanuele in a corner, she was asking whether it was possible to get Marisa taken on at the soap factory too, she was asking whether it had been sensible for them to get married, with Danilo who hadn't yet got his accountant's diploma, and the girl wasn't up to much anyhow, at twenty her complexion was already so much the worse for wear. Emanuele complained that now he would have to quarrel and intrigue all over again, to get Marisa taken on at the factory. However it was not necessary, for Marisa at once found work at the foundry. She got up early in the morning and before going to work she cleaned Danilo's shoes and brushed his suit, and she brushed his bowler hat long and carefully, and it became more and more stiff and lustrous. And then she cleaned the room and Danilo's room was now no longer recognizable, with the floor polished and the curtains ironed, and a little set of bottles and glasses on the chest-of-drawers. But Danilo's mother, when she saw Emanuele coming out of the factory, complained always about the girl, who perhaps was not actually bad but who never seemed content with anything, she went back and washed the salad again after they had washed it ever so many times, and she sniffed the butter and the meat, she sniffed everything. And she was sure that Danilo had not married for love but as a matter of reason, and things which are done as a matter of reason never turn out well.

Danilo resumed his habit of coming to see Ippolito all the time, and Signora Maria had to resign herself to seeing him arrive at the end of dinner, even though it dismayed her each time to reflect that he had been in prison and that he had married a working girl, one who worked all day long at the foundry in a black apron. Danilo always came alone, because his wife was tired in the evenings and went to bed immediately after supper. Signora Maria ran away as soon

as she saw him coming, but Concettina did not run away, in fact she would start making jokes with Emanuele and uttering shrill shrieks of laughter, but as soon as she stopped laughing her face would suddenly become all wrinkled and tired. She would disappear and reappear immediately with her hat on and pulling on her gloves, and would open the window and talk to someone waiting underneath, then she would run downstairs and her shrill shrieks of laughter would still be heard, and the sound of a car driving away. She had unearthed her old *fiancés*, and had resumed her visits to the library and had taken up with Racine again, and the young man with the car waited for her at the door of the library, smoking one cigarette after another.

Emanuele related the news he had heard on the radio, but there was never much news. The Germans and the others were carrying on the cold war, on the Maginot Line and on the Siegfried Line, no one was winning or losing, just a few shots in the air from time to time. Emanuele said they had now invented the cold war to make him die of boredom, no one would ever win or lose, the cold war would go on for ever. But Ippolito only asked himself what was happening in Poland, what it could be like there in the winter with the houses fallen down and with the Germans, with the Germans taking people away to die in the concentration camps, and he said his will to live left him at the thought of those camps, where the Germans put their cigarettes out against the prisoners' foreheads. Then Emanuele, too, began to wonder what had become of Franz's parents. But Danilo said that for people who were dying in the camps there was nothing to be done ; on the other hand something could be done for his friends who were still in prison, they had taken them to Rome in a prison van and now they had to stand their trial by the Special Tribunal, and did Emanuele and Ippolito know what a journey in a prison van was like, a

journey that went on for ever, all chained together? Did they know what prison was like? They didn't put their cigarettes out against your forehead, but it was not comfortable, and people became consumptive if they ate nothing but the soup they gave them, unless they had money to buy themselves something else. And they needed money also to pay the lawyer at the trial, and money to help their families. To raise money, that was the important thing, not to sit by the radio and be bored because the war was a cold war. Emanuele went red and said that perhaps he could give them just a little money, not much because he could not touch his capital, his uncle who was a colonel would know if he did, he always started to stammer a little when he spoke of his capital. But he could save a little on his cash expenses. Danilo shrugged his shoulders, more was needed than Emanuele's small savings, which he put aside a little each day as a good child does. A good big sum was needed and it must be raised at all costs.

Anna was always hoping they would start on their politics again, with their newspapers and pamphlets, but Giustino told her they would not start again, all they thought of was finding the money for Danilo's friends in prison, in any case that was politics too, finding the money was called Red assistance and it was very dangerous. But nobody now shut themselves up in the sitting-room and the sitting-room was always deserted, with the shutters closed and a cold fit to kill you, because Ippolito said they must economize with wood, and there was no need to light the stove in that room as well. Signora Maria complained that Concettina could no longer play the piano, but Concettina said she did not care in the least about the piano and in fact she had decided to sell it, the piano belonged to her and she could do what she liked with it, it had been her grandmother's and her grandmother before she died had said she was leaving it to her. Every day at table she talked about selling the piano,

and she asked Emanuele what had to be done to put an insertion into the paper, how much it cost and where you had to go. She said she had decided to sell it because she wanted to make herself a trousseau, she couldn't possibly go naked to get married. So Ippolito said that when she had somebody to marry she could then think whether or not to sell the piano, at present she had no one but those *fiancés* of hers, she had had them for years and years and not one of them was any good to marry. And Concettina said there was one who was extremely good to marry, the one who always came to take her out in his car, and she was marrying him at once, at the end of the month. And he was a young man who was extremely good to marry, he was far better than Ippolito and Emanuele and the usual run of their friends, he was a young man who was fond of her and he had been waiting for her for a great many years. And in any case she had no need to give explanations to anyone and was acting according to her own ideas. She went out banging the door and they were all left looking at each other in bewilderment, and then suddenly they heard the sound of Concettina's violent sobs coming from her room, and Emanuele wanted to go to her, but Ippolito restrained him. Giustino said he knew the young man with the car perfectly well, he was a Fascist and he went round in a black shirt in processions. Emanuele knew him too and said what his name was, he was called Emilio Sbrancagna, Concettina would be Signora Sbrancagna, a fine name too. Emanuele wanted Ippolito to go at once to Concettina and persuade her to give up this fellow ; couldn't they hear how she was crying, she was marrying him because she was desperate and discouraged and goodness knows what ideas she had got into her head, perhaps she had got it into her head that if she didn't get married now she would never get married at all. But Signora Maria said that she had looked at this young man from the window and he was tall, and distinguished-looking, and she had also sought a little

information about his family, because she always thought of everything. It was an extremely good family and in good circumstances, they lived in a villa a little way out of the town, the father owned a chemical works and the son worked there too. At this moment Danilo appeared, and asked what they were doing sitting round the table with that troubled look on their faces. So Emanuele explained to him that Concettina wanted to marry Signor Sbrancagna, a Fascist. Danilo asked what was so tragic about that, the Fascist would help them when they got into trouble. Then he at once started talking about something else, as though Concettina had been any ordinary person and he had never waited for her for whole afternoons at the gate.

Next day Signora Maria started cleaning the house, because Concettina had told her that Emilio Sbrancagna was bringing his parents to see her. The sitting-room windows were thrown open and Signora Maria climbed up on a ladder to clean the panes. Anna in the meantime had to dust the piano and the furniture, and she tried to move the piano to see if there were still any pink and green pamphlets hidden behind it. There was nothing, only a few flakes of dust on the floor. Concettina did not help with the cleaning, Concettina stayed lying on the bed in her room, stifling a sob in her handkerchief from time to time. Signora Maria thought she was weeping because of the trousseau, and said Ippolito ought not to allow her to sell anything, he ought to go and draw the money out of the bank, she was convinced there was a heap of money in the bank and that Ippolito was unwilling to touch it. Every now and then she came down from the ladder and went to comfort Concettina, she told her that as a matter of fact not much was needed for a trousseau, just a few practical, washable things, no artificial silk because it was vulgar, just linen or batiste. By eight o'clock in the evening the sitting-room was ready, with the stove lit and the teacups ready on the piano, and

Signora Maria had put on her black dress with the lace *jabot* and had suddenly started ordering everyone about, Giustino was to warn Danilo that he was not to appear, Concettina was to wash her eyes with boracic lotion and smooth back her fringe, Emanuele was to appear for a moment, say how d'you do and go away at once.

Emanuele, however, refused utterly to go into the sitting-room, he crept away into the kitchen with Anna and together they watched the Sbrancagnas getting out of their car, the father a tiny little man and slightly deformed, with long hay-coloured moustaches, the mother tall and white-haired, the young man with his hair cut *en brosse*, a black feather-brush above a brow high and narrow as a tower. Emanuele kept on saying, "Poor Concettina, what a terrible business, what a terrible business," and cursed Ippolito for not doing anything to stop the marriage ; he just let things slide, he always let everything slide, in reality nothing and nobody mattered to him, in reality he was a cynic. Concettina, who had helped to burn the newspapers, was fated to finish her career amongst the Sbrancagnas, she was fated to end up in a family of Fascists, with a portrait of Mussolini at the head of the bed, she, the daughter of her father, a man who had died in sorrow at not seeing the revolution. Concettina, out of melancholy, out of spite, goodness knows why, was fated to end like that. And apart from everything else there was also the danger that one of these days she would tell her husband about the time when they had burnt the newspapers, and he could already see Emilio Sbrancagna rushing to report it to the police, and then what a fine to-do there would be. Emanuele limped about the kitchen and kicked out at the legs of the table, and said poor Italy that had to depend on types like Ippolito for the revolution ; Anna nibbled biscuits, until Concettina came running in and took the silver dish away from her. Emanuele followed her into the passage and made her

swear on the memory of her father never to say anything about the day when they burnt the newspapers. Concettina swore, but a great fury against Emanuele suddenly came over her, she gnashed her teeth and pulled his ear violently, then she broke away from him and went back into the sitting-room with the silver dish. Emanuele returned to the kitchen to kick at the table-legs, rubbing his ear which was hurting him.

In the sitting-room Signora Sbrancagna was sitting with Signora Maria on the sofa, Signora Maria sat with two fingers pointed on her knee and talked about her travels, about the time when Concettina's grandmother's fur coat had been stolen at the Grand Hotel in Cannes, a fur coat made of "skuntz". She talked and talked and all of a sudden was seized with nervousness, she looked at the biscuits and they seemed very few, she looked at the door in anguish lest she should see Danilo coming in. Ippolito was silent, stroking his face, Concettina was crumpling a handkerchief in her sweating hands, and to Signora Maria it seemed that Concettina was looking ugly that evening; with her fringe smoothed back and the blue dress she had put on she no longer looked like a *cocotte*, but on the other hand she looked like a schoolmistress. Signor Sbrancagna ate the biscuits and got his moustaches all full of crumbs, and tried to make conversation with Ippolito, but it was not easy to force a word out of Ippolito when he started gazing into the void and stroking his face. But young Emilio Sbrancagna appeared to be quite indifferent to conversation and to everything, and lay back in his armchair with his fingers intertwined and his feather-brush standing up straight on his forehead, and he looked at Concettina with a very gay and knowing smile, and he sat in the armchair as though he had always been there, rocking his long, loose-limbed body backwards and forwards in it, then suddenly he jumped up and played a few chords on the piano, and Signora Maria, on

the sofa, gave a start and looked at the piano, thinking that now it could never be sold, now that they had all seen it. Signora Sbrancagna wanted to know about Cannes, she had never been there, her husband had refused to take her there because he had heard that the women went on the beach stark naked. She herself had once been robbed of a brooch in an hotel at Vicenza, a brooch of great value, but her husband told her not to talk nonsense, no one had ever robbed her of anything, she had lost the brooch because it was not properly fastened, in any case it was an ugly brooch and worth only a few pence. Signora Sbrancagna whispered to Signora Maria that her husband always behaved like that, he took great pleasure in mortifying her in front of other people. All of a sudden, when no one was expecting it, Signor Sbrancagna started saying that there was no reason for keeping silence about the thing that lay so near all their hearts, his son and Concettina wanted to get married, well then let them get married, he would have preferred a girl with a certain amount of dowry, but if there was no dowry never mind. Signora Maria said that Concettina, after all, had something, a share of Le Visciole was hers ; Signor Sbrancagna said he knew this but that that little piece of land, which had to be shared between four, could not be called a dowry. However he intended to pass over the question of a dowry. There remained the question of politics, which was a more thorny one, he wanted to be sincere and he knew that Concettina's father had been a revolutionary, and he himself had always had a great fear of revolutionaries, and he rose to his feet and fixed Ippolito with two staring eyes. However he knew that he had also been a fine person, he knew that even amongst revolutionaries there were fine people, it seemed strange but there were fine people to be found everywhere. He said this in a very low voice but his wife was at once frightened, she looked all round and asked if the maid slept in the room next door, with maids you could never be quite sure, and a

person could find himself in trouble over a misunderstood word. Then he grew angry with his wife, he had not said anything, wrong, what he had said could perfectly well be shouted aloud in the piazza, that there were fine people even amongst revolutionaries. Then Signora Maria said that Concettina's father had been far more than a fine person, he had been a very superior man, he had spent his whole life in love for his children, and also, as well, in writing a book of memoirs, but in the end he had burned the book, goodness knows why. Young Emilio Sbrancagna all of a sudden burst out laughing, he rocked backwards and forwards in his armchair and laughed, pulling up his knees and shaking his feet. Everyone looked at him in astonishment and his mother asked him severely why he was laughing like that. He said he couldn't help laughing at the idea of his father shouting aloud in the piazza in defence of revolutionaries. And after this burst of laughter they all felt light-hearted, and Concettina, too, seemed to be soothed and serene, and Signor Sbrancagna as he went out shook Ippolito's hand warmly and said he hoped to be able to have more conversation with him, for the moment he looked into his eyes he had felt a great liking for him, and he hoped he was not a revolutionary but, when all was said and done, never mind even if he was, and his wife was thumping him in the back all the time, and she explained to Signora Maria that in her house it was always like this, her husband and her son said things they ought not to say. Finally the Sbrancagnas went away, and the others found Emanuele still in the kitchen, sleeping with his head on the table, so they woke him up and sent him off to bed.

Next day Signora Maria took the grandmother's jewels to the pawnshop, to be redeemed later with the money from the next harvest. Then she searched the whole town for some pure linen, she had a horror of mixed materials, she stopped for an hour in each shop and ran up ladders to

ransack the shelves. Finally she came home with yards and yards of linen and started cutting out and stitching up undervests and nightdresses, until late she was stitching and embroidering and could talk of nothing but buttonholing and hem-stitching. Concettina wanted to make herself a close-fitting black *redingote*, exactly like Mammina's, and she took up her position at the window to watch Mammina when she went out wearing the *redingote*, but she never managed to see properly and questioned Emanuele at great length about the buttons and the pockets, Emanuele promised to go at night on tiptoe and look at the *redingote* in the wardrobe and get the whole matter fixed in his head. Emanuele however did not stop tormenting Concettina about politics, as a bride she would be sleeping with Mussolini's portrait over the head of the bed. Concettina blushed and said that even the Fascists had done some good things, the bridges and the roads for instance, and it was very strange to hear her talk like that about bridges and roads, she who had never bothered about a road or a bridge in her life, had never asked herself whether there were enough of them in Italy. Emanuele covered his face with his hands and groaned, my God, how little had been needed to make Concettina go all to pieces, all that was now left of Concettina was a handful of crumbs to throw to the birds. He never wanted to see Emilio Sbrancagna, and he begged them to put a black handkerchief tied to a stick in the window if Emilio Sbrancagna was in the house, and, if he wasn't there, a white handkerchief, and then he would come. Danilo on the other hand said that he wanted to meet this Emilio Sbrancagna, because one ought to discuss things with Fascists, to understand what they have in their heads. But Ippolito said that Emilio Sbrancagna had very little Fascism in his head at all, he put on a black shirt as he would have put on any other, and all the rhetorical side of Fascism had passed over him without defiling him, he was as fresh and healthy as a young calf in a meadow. And

Danilo said that the Fascist party had in it plenty of these young calves, it was by no means entirely composed of wolves and eagles, there were the calves as well and tomorrow they would be going off to be killed in the war, exactly like calves going to the slaughter-house. And it was an important thing to talk to these young calves in the meadows, it was an important thing to talk to anything that was still alive in Italy.

Only once did Giustino remember to hang up the black handkerchief on the stick, so that Emanuele should know that Emilio Sbrancagna was there, but this handkerchief was Signora Maria's scarf, and she went and took it in for fear that it might be spoilt. After that there were no more handkerchiefs, and Emilio and Emanuele began to meet on the stairs and to greet each other, but Emilio at first scowled because he imagined that everyone who came to the house was in love with Concettina, until Signora Maria explained to him that to Emanuele Concettina was like a sister. And gradually Emanuele stopped grinding his teeth as he said the word "Sbrancagna". And then one day there was the meeting between Emilio and Danilo, and Danilo started questioning him with the policeman-like air that he had acquired in prison, and Emilio fidgeted anxiously in his armchair, with a great longing to escape to Concettina who was sitting in the sun on the terrace. Danilo asked him a number of questions, whether he had read this and that and whether he was frightened about the war, Emilio shook his black feather-brush of hair and turned from side to side in his armchair, he had no desire at all to go to the war, in any case who in Italy now thought about the war? He told Danilo and Ippolito that he felt himself too stupid to talk to them, they talked to him as though he were very intelligent but really he was stupid, he had never read either Spinoza or Kant, he had tried but had quickly stopped because he did not understand. He wanted to marry Concettina and that

was all, he did not look forward into the years to come, every day that came was beautiful. He knew that Danilo had been in prison, he felt a great respect for those who went to prison but he himself would never have the courage to go there, he put on a black shirt and marched in processions. In any case it seemed to him that the Fascists had done a few good things, for example they had taken Africa and Albania, perhaps it did not mean a great deal to have taken them but nevertheless taken them they had. The only thing he did not like was the Rome-Berlin Axis, he could not bear the Germans, his father had fought in the war against the Germans and he himself was small then but he had not forgotten it. He did not like the Rome-Berlin Axis but in point of fact Mussolini was not now waging war side by side with the Germans, perhaps *he* couldn't bear them either and the Rome-Berlin Axis had been all a joke. On the whole it seemed to him that things in Italy were really not going so badly, perhaps they might be even better but he himself was satisfied, Danilo and Ippolito were too intelligent to be satisfied and they imagined other kinds of governments, but he himself was stupid, he was easy to please and was quite satisfied. At last they let him alone and he made his escape, and he really did seem like a young calf or a colt that had been let loose to graze at ease, and Danilo stayed in the sitting-room arguing on the subject of calves, there were so many of them in Italy and they were all like that.

On the night before the wedding Concettina sat up weeping, but it was a weeping that had no sorrow in it now; she sat on the bed with her hands clasped behind her head and bright, quiet tears ran down her face, and Signora Maria dozed at the foot of the bed, and from time to time gave a start and got up with her hair all undone, with one cheek red and the other pale, and went down to heat up the camomile. These tears left no mark upon Concettina's face, in the morning it was a pure, fresh face, with no swelling or

redness, a beautiful face washed clean by tears, luminous and mild. Refreshments had been prepared in the sitting-room, and Signora Maria had wondered if they ought to invite Mammina, but Emanuele said it was no use, Mammina certainly would not come. On the contrary, Mammina was offended at not being invited, and said to Emanuele that she knew perfectly well that Concettina had copied her *redingote* and that *that* was why she had not wanted to invite her, it did not matter in the least to her that she had copied it but all the same she must not think it suited her, she was too big in the legs and hips to wear a close-fitting *redingote*, and she would have done better to copy her loose sack coat, for a woman with Concettina's figure it would have been much more suitable. Emanuele ran across to say that they ought to invite Mammina, but by now it was too late, Mammina was offended and did not come, she sent some flowers instead. Emanuele and Giума came ; Emanuele said that Giума looked well at a wedding, he was very smart and made a good appearance. Danilo and his wife also came ; Signora Maria did not want them at any price, she was in despair, what on earth would the Sbrancagnas think when they found themselves in company with Danilo and his wife ? But Ippolito said it was he who was master of the house, and he had purposely fixed the wedding to be on a Sunday, so that Danilo's wife would be able to come too. Signora Maria said he remembered to be master of the house only when it was convenient to him, usually he was indifferent to everything, and it had been necessary for her to humiliate herself by taking the jewels to the pawnshop in order to provide a trousseau for Concettina. Emanuele was laughing all the time at the thought of the face Signor Sbrancagna would make when he found himself in the company of Danilo, because everyone in the town knew he had been in prison. But Signor Sbrancagna and his wife lived a detached sort of life in their villa outside the town, and he knew nothing about Danilo,

and asked Ippolito who the young man was who looked so very intelligent and distinguished. During the whole time of the ceremony in church and again later while they were taking refreshments at the house Signor Sbrancagna stayed beside Ippolito, because he had taken a great liking to Ippolito, and he started telling him all about himself, how he had come to marry his wife and how he had set up his chemical works, and he asked in a low voice whether Italy would come into the war on the side of the Germans, as for the Germans, he could not bear them, he had fought against them and once a man has fought against a country he never forgets it, how can he then make friends, the human heart is after all the human heart and remains deaf to political expediencies. And then the Russians were now allied with the Germans, what a mix-up it was. As for the cold war, it was impossible to believe in it, goodness knows how many dead there had been already, there was little movement because the winter was coming on, but in the spring there would be a disastrous explosion. And Ippolito said he thought so too.

Anna stood in one corner of the room in a dress of yellow velvet which Signora Maria had cut out of a curtain for her, she was thinking that she was sick of being dressed in curtains, no one could fail to notice that what she was wearing was a curtain, it still even had its tassels at the bottom, because Signora Maria had said that they made a fine trimming and that it would be a shame to take them away. She looked at Giustino who was behaving in a rather silly fashion with Danilo's wife, he was sitting on the arm of her chair and telling her that in the winter he would take her out ski-ing, he would teach her to come down like a snow-plough, it was easy. Danilo's wife had a flame-red blouse which went badly with the colour of her hair, but at least it was a blouse and not a curtain, Anna wondered why she should be the only one who had to be dressed in a curtain.

She would have liked Giustino to have taken her out skiing too, but he certainly wouldn't, he would go alone with Danilo's wife so as to behave in a silly fashion with her, as though Danilo's wife really wanted to pay any attention to him. Danilo's wife was listening to him absent-mindedly with her tired, worn expression, and from time to time she broke into a laugh which sounded like a cough. Giuma was there beside them, his lips curved in a contemptuous smile, evidently Giustino's boastings about the snow-plough seemed to him very foolish, no doubt he was very good at skiing and the snow-plough must seem to him just a piece of nonsense.

Giuma saw Anna looking at him and came over to her. "We two used to play together when we were small," he said. He said it as though he were speaking of a very distant and far-off time ; since then he had been in Switzerland, had won goodness knows how many rugby matches, his cheeks had become hard and bristly, his shoulders square and strong. He had become very tall and elegant, he had a silk shirt with his initials on it, he had a watch in a kind of black shell hanging at his belt. He stood in front of her and fiddled with the chain of this watch, his hair still fell over his eyes and he threw it back, curving his lips as he did so. "We used to read *The Child's Treasure-House*," she said. "*The Child's Treasure-House!* yes, yes . . ." Giuma started laughing a great deal at the recollection of *The Child's Treasure-House*, he threw back his head and laughed, and she saw again his small teeth like a wolf's. She would have been amused to read *The Child's Treasure-House* again, several times she had asked Emanuele what had become of all those volumes bound in blue, Emanuele knew nothing about them, perhaps Mammina had had them taken up to the attic. "You used to tie me to trees with a rope," she said. "Really? I'm sorry. I hope I didn't hurt you too much." He had become, very charming, when his contemptuous smile vanished he

seemed even a little shy, it seemed to her that he remained beside her out of shyness, because he did not know anyone else in the room. But she felt a great boredom, a great fatigue at being with him, the same boredom and the same fatigue that she had felt in the days when they had played together. To her those days did not seem so far off, it seemed to her that so few things had happened, they had burned the newspapers and they had expected the police and then no one had come at all. Giума asked her in a low voice who was the monster in the red blouse, she told him it was Danilo's wife but he did not know who Danilo was, certainly he did not know anything about the time when they burned the newspapers, Emanuele had told them all that his brother was an impossible person. Giума said he did not know any of Emanuele's friends, in any case he and Emanuele did not see each other often, just for a moment in the morning at the bathroom door, at table rather seldom because they ate at different times, and he himself often had to accompany Mammina out to lunch and to play bridge. He pressed the spring of the black shell and looked at the time, Mammina was expecting him even on *that* day, he said that Emanuele had been clever enough not to learn bridge, so did not have to accompany Mammina to various boring drawing-rooms. He asked Anna if she would be free next day to go to the cinema with him after school, he would wait for her in the avenue, they had played so much together as children and now there was no reason why they should not see each other. And so he would have an excuse for not making a fourth at bridge. Anna said yes, she was free, and thought with a feeling of fatigue and fear of the afternoon they would spend together, perhaps from now onwards Giума would want to be often with her, she was proud of it and at the same time fatigued and frightened and she felt for him a kind of distress and did not know why.

When the guests had gone Concettina's suitcases, full of the trousseau all made of pure linen, had hurriedly to be closed, and Concettina and Emilio went off by car for their honeymoon.

## 9

When Anna came out of school next day she found Giума waiting for her in the avenue, and they went to the cinema to see *The Mark of zorro*. Giума paid for her. All that day she had been wondering whether the money she had would be enough for the ticket, if they went to a cinema in the centre of the town it certainly would not. She talked about it at school to her desk-neighbour, she was her dearest friend and they told each other everything. Her friend started laughing, she often went to the cinema with boys and knew that they always paid. She told her that Giума would certainly kiss her, boys took girls to the cinema simply in order to kiss them. Giума however did not seem to be thinking of kissing her, he sat beside her in the almost empty, dark theatre and stamped and champed, you just couldn't go to the cinema nowadays, there was never any possibility of seeing a decent film. Only at the end did he stop fuming, there was a duel on the balustrade of a terrace and even he was left breathless. But when they came out he spoke scornfully even of the duel, he started telling her about a long film of duels that he had seen at Geneva, Anna couldn't understand what he was talking about because it was a very tangled story. They walked towards home and on the road beside the river they met Emanuele and Ippolito, Emanuele raised his eyebrows and opened his eyes wide when he saw them together. At the gate Giума told her he would wait for her in the avenue again next day, it would be nice to be together even if they didn't go to the cinema.

They got into the habit of meeting in the avenue every day. Anna would rather have gone to see her girl friend or come straight home to do her homework. As it was she had to stay up after supper to do her lessons. But she was too

proud of Giuma wanting to be with her. Giuma was a boy. Concettina had told her again and again that at her age she had had plenty of boys to go out with. Concettina had scolded her because she came straight home from school to do her homework. Now she was impatient for Concettina to come back from her honeymoon, so that she might be seen with Giuma on the road by the river. Signora Maria, however, was not altogether pleased at her going about with Giuma, she did not know Giuma, she did not know what type of boy he was. Emanuele told her he was an impossible type, presumptuous and fatuous, but in the matter of upbringing there was nothing to be said against him, he was well brought up from head to foot and you could safely give him five hundred girls to take out. But Signora Maria asked why he had not made friends with Giustino who was in the same class, why with Anna ? Then Giustino said that Giuma had tried to make friends with him too, but he had not paid any attention to him and so he had immediately stopped.

Of Giustino and of the other boys at school Giuma always spoke with great contempt. They did not read books, they did not wash properly, they did not go in for any kind of sport : they gave themselves grand sporting airs but when it came to the point they could do nothing seriously. Anna asked him if he was still friends with Cingalesi and Pucci Donadio : she had always remembered these names which at one time he had so constantly repeated to her. Giuma frowned. Pucci Donadio he remembered, he had never been really a friend of his, he was the son of a friend of Mammina's, he was much smaller than himself and they used to take him to play on the beach at Mentone and he had to make sand-castles for him. As for Cingalesi, he didn't know who he was. Then he thought hard and recalled Cingalesi, a boy who used to sell oranges on the beach. No, he had other friends now. He pulled a bundle of letters out of his pocket; he showed her the stamps on the envelopes,

his friends wrote to him from every part of the world, from America, from Denmark, at the school in Switzerland he had got to know people from everywhere. Some of them were still at the school and were waiting for him to come back, they were putting aside bottles of brandy and gin to celebrate his return, he felt he really wanted some gin, perhaps Mamma would let him go back again soon.

He often took her to the cinema, for he always had money to spend. Or they would wander about the town, they would go into bookshops and look at the magazines and the art books, Giama went into ecstasies over reproductions of pictures in which there was nothing but triangles and small circles. Sometimes they bought roast chestnuts and sat and ate them on a seat in the public gardens. Giama would pull out the poems of Montale and start reading them aloud. He had explained to her who Montale was, he had explained who the other poets were who were of any importance. Anna sat silent without listening to him, she was quite unable to fix her attention upon his words. She looked at his wide, light-coloured overcoat, at his scarf, at the locks of hair falling over his forehead, at his small teeth like a wolf's. Gradually she had ceased to be bored in his company, she did not listen to what he said but she looked at him, and she was infinitely proud to sit with Giama on a seat in the public gardens, and it seemed to her that Giama's light-coloured overcoat and his scarf and his watch in its black shell all belonged partly to her, and it seemed to her that none of her school-friends had anything like this, a boy to go about with like this, her school-friends went out with giggling, tiresome boys who did not read Montale and knew nothing about the painters who made small circles. She sat silent with her hands in her lap, the shells of the chestnuts entangled in the wool of her coat. She could not have said one single word about Montale and she had not understood much of his poetry. Yet she had taken a fancy to certain

lines, from having heard them spoken by Giума : “Un’ora e mi riporta Cumerlotti—Lakmé nell’aria delle campanelle—o vero c’era il falòtico—mutarsi della mia vita—quando udii sugli scogli crepitare—la bomba ballerina.” She went home with the *bomba ballerina* and the *falòtico*, for some time the *bomba ballerina* went dancing in front of her. She did not ask Giума who Cumerlotti was, she did not ask him about the *falòtico*, she was afraid he might get angry, and she was afraid the *falòtico* might turn into something dull and valueless if one discovered what it was.

In the morning at school her friend always asked her whether Giума had kissed her and she said no. Her friend was much surprised and not altogether pleased and said that never had such a thing happened to her, boys always kissed her. In the end she imagined that they had kissed each other and that Anna wouldn’t tell her. Gradually they became a little less friendly. Anna did not tell her anything about the *falòtico*, this friend of hers now seemed to her silly, and also it seemed to her that her neck was a little dirty, she like Giума had now begun to look whether people washed themselves properly. So that when Giума really did kiss her she said nothing to her friend. No one knew about it.

Giума kissed her one day when he was feeling sad. He had got only three marks in Greek, Mammina was angry with him, and then he had said he had got only three marks on purpose, because he wanted to go back to Switzerland, he did not like this nasty school and did not want to stay there any longer. All of a sudden Emanuele had begun shouting at him too. And then he had said it didn’t really matter to him so much about the school, but he didn’t like staying at home and he preferred to go to a boarding-school, he didn’t like taking Mammina about when she went to see those awful women who played bridge. Emanuele had shouted that he must not be lacking in respect towards

Mamma, he had gone for him and they had hit each other, Mamma, trying to separate them, had sprained her wrist, and then the whole day had been spent in putting vegetable-mineral water compresses on it. They were not letting him go back to Switzerland, there was no hope of that. And he was fed up with everything. Only with Anna was he happy, she was the only person who was kind to him. They sat in silence, Giama looked down on the ground, frowning, and made marks in the dust with his foot. Suddenly he put his arm round her waist and pressed himself slightly against her. There was a terrible silence between them, they looked at each other in a fright, the fright and the silence lasted a long time. And then Giama kissed her and they sighed and smiled at each other peacefully.

Anna knew from Giustino that at school they detested him, they turned their backs at once if he came up to speak to them. At first he had bored them to tears with his rugby matches and his letters from all parts of the world, he irritated everyone with his letters, he insisted on translating parts of them which seemed to him immensely funny, he explained how funny they were and told long tales about drinks and football matches, laughing on his own account. Now, on the other hand, he could talk of nothing but the poems of Montale, he was as vehement about Montale's poems as if he had written them himself, he dragged in Montale every time the teacher asked him a question. He suggested meeting once a week to read and discuss Montale. And probably he didn't understand anything at all about Montale. Emanuele asked Giustino why they did not punch his head, perhaps it would have done him a great deal of good. But Giustino said they hadn't even any desire to punch him, nor even to make fun of him, he was too tiresome, they preferred just to turn their backs when he came up to them. Nobody except Anna could manage to endure him, and they went about together because Anna

was silly and ingenuous and took all the nonsense he told her seriously. Anna was listening, and she tried to curl her lips in scorn as Giума did. But she felt mortified, she thought of how he went up to speak to them and of how they turned their backs, and she felt deeply mortified, just as though they had turned their backs on *her*. And at times she was seized by a suspicion that in reality Giума knew no more about the *falòtico* or about Cumerlotti than she did, that he had to pretend he knew in order to feel powerful and proud, in order to curl his lips in scorn and walk proudly about the town, without looking too closely at his own intimate self, which was perhaps mortified and suffering and lonely. After a long time perhaps it would be discovered that he knew absolutely nothing about the *falòtico*. Once upon a time he had boasted perpetually about Cingalesi, bringing him into every conversation, and she had thought of Cingalesi as of some terrible, disdainful force. Then the old Cingalesi had gone up in smoke and all that was left in his place was a harmless orange-seller.

His face, when he kissed her, always lost all sign of scorn and of arrogance. His face became gentle, tender, brotherly, as he started removing, one by one, the chestnut-shells from her coat. Then they would laugh about these shells, and it seemed there were so many things they could laugh about together, it seemed they could laugh together even about the *falòtico*, that they could say to each other that they did not quite know what it was. But they did not say this, they never got as far as saying it, it was only for one moment that Giума continued to be so tender and gentle, the next moment he curled his lips and looked round him in disgust, how squalid these public gardens were, how squalid the town was, you ought to see what the public gardens in Geneva and Lausanne were like. Then he pressed the spring of the black shell and buttoned up his overcoat, Mammina was expecting him as usual to make a fourth at bridge.

In the end Anna told him about the time when they burned the newspapers, herself and Concettina and Ippolito and Emanuele. Giума did not show much surprise, he said he had suspected for some time that Emanuele was getting mixed up in politics, he was really an idiot. He didn't like Fascism himself, but it was better to put up with it and it wasn't worth the trouble of running risks, besides Emanuele ought to think of Mammina, if they put him in prison Mammina would go mad. He didn't hold with Fascism himself, above all it was a provincial thing, it made Italy provincial, it prevented people from arranging exhibitions with fine pictures from abroad. Fascism was certainly an ugly, provincial, ignorant thing. But it wasn't worth the trouble of getting oneself put in prison for such an ugly, clumsy thing, getting oneself put in prison was taking it too seriously. But there must be a revolution, Anna said. He started to laugh a great deal, he bent back and laughed, displaying all his wolf-like teeth. A revolution, he said, Anna wanted to start a revolution. No, he said, there was no need for that, because Fascism would gradually fizzle out by itself, like those rubber balloons that deflate themselves with a whistling noise. No, there was no revolution to be started and in any case even if a revolution did have to be started Emanuele and Anna would not be the people to do it. "And not Danilo either ? " asked Anna. Not Danilo either, Giума answered, not Danilo either, because he had married a wife who was too twisted and pinched.

## 10

Concettina came back from her honeymoon, and went to live with her parents-in-law in their villa outside the town. Concettina was going to have a baby and all she could do was vomit and spit. She did not come to the house. Anna and Giustino went to see her a few days after she had arrived, she was lying in a big double bed, wearing a yellow embroidered bed-jacket and spitting into a chamber-pot of flower-patterned china. Her mother-in-law was fussing round her, and also a number of grandmothers and old aunts and servant-maids, one of them bringing her soup and another lemons to suck and another putting a hot-water bottle at her feet. Concettina spoke very slowly, with her teeth clenched to prevent her from vomiting. She had been to Naples and to Capri, and had bathed in the sea before the time when she started vomiting. At Capri she had bought a box all made of shells and some shoes of plaited straw. There were old men there dressed as fishermen who were really marquises or princes, there were women who looked like men and men who looked like women. There was a lady sitting in a café with a parrot on her shoulder and three cats on a lead. Then when she had shown them the shoes and the box they found nothing more to say to each other, Anna and Giustino were standing waiting for the moment to go away, there was nothing more to say to this new Concettina who was going to have a baby, in this house full of grandmothers and servants. Old Signora Sbrancagna told them they must not tire Concettina. So they went away, they had a long way to go to get home, it took at least an hour to walk the distance between them and Concettina. The house in which Concettina lived was right out in the country, and it had round it a small damp garden, surrounded by a wall with pieces of glass stuck on top of it.

“Che ha in cima cocci aguzzi di bottiglia ”, said Anna. But Giustino told her to stop quoting Montale at once, he knew that Giuma read her Montale’s poems and goodness knows what they thought about them, he himself had read Montale too and had not understood much of it, he was a poet who wasn’t very easy to understand. The poem about the pieces of broken bottle was the only one that could be understood a little. He told her to be careful with Giuma, perhaps he wanted to kiss her and she must take care not to let herself be kissed, she must not let herself become like Concettina, who before she got married had allowed herself to be kissed by almost everybody. Concettina had got married all the same because she was rather attractive, *she* wasn’t in the least attractive and she would never get married if she went about too much with boys and let herself be kissed. They were both in a bad temper and they quarrelled all the way home, Giustino said she was treading on his toes, couldn’t she keep a little to one side ? He didn’t at all care about her being seen every day with Giuma, goodness knows how many times she had let him kiss her, and tills Giuma was an impossible kind of person, at school they turned their backs on him if he came up to speak to them. Anna told him that the girl she had seen him with was an Impossible kind of person, that very tall, thin girl who went out for walks with him in the evening. In any case he liked pinched-looking women, he liked Danilo’s wife who was so terribly pinched-looking, he liked women who were all twisted and dried up. Giustino said that the girl whom he took out for walks in the evening meant nothing to him, she was not his girl, she was a girl who was useful to him because she was very good at doing Italian exercises, whenever he had a difficult exercise he went to this girl and got her to do it for him, and then as a reward he took her out for a walk. They got back home and Emanuele hurried to meet them in order to ask if there was a portrait of Mussolini in Concettina’s bedroom, they answered that there wasn’t and Emanuele was displeased,

he said that perhaps Concettina had taken it down in a great hurry when she heard them arrive. Signora Maria began imploring them for goodness' sake to leave Concettina out of their politics, she was not feeling well because she was expecting a baby. Emanuele said that Concettina would have a dozen babies all for love of the Duce, so as to provide soldiers for Italy as the Duce wished. Anna and Giustino felt rather sad, it seemed strange but they felt lost without Concettina in the house, it seemed strange because she had never taken any notice of anyone and always stayed shut up in her room mending her stockings or filing her nails or nibbling her pencil while she thought about Racine. And now it seemed as if Concettina no longer existed in any part of the world ; this woman who was going to have a baby, this woman who spat into a flowered chamber-pot did not seem to be the real Concettina at all. Concettina had now got rid of Racine for ever, but, to make up for it, she suffered from nausea and would have to bring into the world a dozen babies, all of them tiresome to wash and to put to sleep.

Giuma told Anna that he and Danilo had been to a café together. He was all excited but did not want to show it. They had met on the road beside the river, and Danilo had come up and started talking to him. Anna had known for some time that this was bound to happen, because Danilo had told Emanuele several times that he wanted to get to know his brother and find out what he was like. Emanuele begged him not to bother about it, his brother was an impossible kind of person, an impossible person and that was that. But Danilo replied that it was a good thing to find out even what impossible people were like. Giuma told Anna that he and Danilo had talked and talked, and in the end they had gone to a little café on the outskirts of the town, where there was a gramophone with a horn which played old songs. He and Danilo had talked about all sorts of

things, it had got dark and they didn't notice it. They had even talked about Montale, Danilo had wanted to know all about Montale and Giuma had explained to him. On the way home they had also discussed politics a little : Giuma had spoken of his ideas, saying that Fascism would gradually fizzle out of its own accord. Danilo had invited him to come and see him one evening, seeing that they had had such an interesting conversation. Anna was sad, she wanted to tell him about her visit to Concettina and about the things Giustino had said to her on the way home, she wanted to ask if it was true that she was not at all attractive and that she would never get married. But it was impossible for her to say anything, Giuma went on and on talking about Danilo and Danilo and Danilo, he did not even think of kissing her.

Giuma went to see Danilo every evening for a week. During that week he did nothing but talk of Danilo and Danilo and Danilo, even Danilo's wife no longer seemed to him so pinched-looking, her hair had got into that state because she went to cheap hairdressers, if she had had the money to put herself in order and to dress herself she would have been rather attractive. During that time they kissed very seldom, Giuma had too much to say, he was continually pressing the spring of the black shell to see if it was getting near the time to go to Danilo's, he had given Mamma to understand that he was going to a friend's house to study. Danilo and his wife were of the opinion that he read poetry very well. Then things between him and Danilo began to go not so well, Anna was immediately aware of it, he began saying that there was a bad smell in Danilo's room, and then, that set of bottles and glasses displayed on the chest-of-drawers, that set of bottles and glasses was a wonder, it was the most provincial thing you could imagine. Danilo wanted to draw him into politics but he wasn't having any, he wasn't a clumsy fool like Emanuele, he didn't want to run idiotic risks. At first they

had read Montale but then Danilo had asked him whether he knew about Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*, yes, he knew about it, but he had told Danilo clearly that he didn't want to hear any mention of things like that. Later on he would have to be a director of the soap factory, and Emanuele also would have to be a director, and so they could not possibly be on the side of Karl Marx, they were the owners of a factory and they could not be on the side of those who wished to hand over the factories to the workers. It was perfectly clear and if Emanuele did not understand it he was a complete idiot, if he let his head be turned by Danilo and read Karl Marx. Anna said that perhaps it was not right that they two should possess a soap factory and other people nothing, not even enough to clothe and feed themselves. Giума got very angry and said it was perfectly right, it was right because his father had built up the soap factory out of nothing at all, before that it had been just a ridiculous kind of shanty and his father had worked all his life to turn it into something big and important. In any case justice is not of this earth, said Giума, justice is of the kingdom of heaven. And he said that he as a child had believed in the kingdom of heaven, but now he had ceased to believe in it, now it was a thing that only babies believed in. Then Anna asked where justice could be found, if the kingdom of heaven, where it could have been found, did not exist. Giума said it certainly was a pity not to be able to find it anywhere. However he did not believe in the justice of Karl Marx. And he did not want to go to Danilo's again, he did not want ever to smell the smell of that room again, he smelt it upon himself, in his clothes, he had them kept out in the air all night long but the smell did not go away. Anna suddenly remembered what Cenzo Rena had said about the peasants in the South, that they ate nothing but beans, and she said that all the same something ought to be done about the peasants in the South. But Giума told her not to think now about the peasants in the South, he drew her into a quiet corner of the

public gardens and they stayed there kissing for a while. Then Giума wanted to go back to the café where he had been with Danilo, a café on the other side of the river, smoky and dark, Giума said it was like certain cafés in Paris, if you hid yourself away in there with that old gramophone with a horn and those old prints on the walls you could really believe you were in a café on the Seine.

At home Anna found Danilo, He was telling how he had lost patience, the evening before, with Giума, because of all the nonsense he talked about justice and about Marx. Danilo had been partly laughing and partly angry, and finally he had lost patience and sent him away. For several evenings he had been patient, out of kindness he had tried to make him talk about one thing and another and gradually Giума had thawed, he read Montale's poems and they never managed to send him to sleep. But the nonsense he had talked about Marx ! Danilo had been unable to keep calm, all of a sudden he had thrown his hat and coat at him and had told him never to show his face there again if he was going to talk like that. Emanuele was rather mortified, he told Danilo he had warned him that it was useless to waste his time with Giума, everyone knew what sort of a person Giума was, after all he was only seventeen and Mammina had spoiled him terribly, and then he had been at that school in Switzerland, a school for rich, spoiled little boys, in any case Switzerland was a country that ought to be consigned to the flames. What a mania Danilo had for wasting his time with everybody, what a mania he had for knowing what everybody was like inside. And Danilo said that this was politics too, to try and find out what people were like inside, to find out the thoughts and reasonings of a boy of about seventeen, coming of a bourgeois family, spoiled, educated in Switzerland. But Ippolito then said that Danilo was not acting rightly, because he set himself the abstract proposition of finding out what people were like inside, and

in each one he saw a political problem, and he had an inquisitorial, offensive way of asking questions. And perhaps without meaning to he had done Giума harm, perhaps he had wounded him deeply, inviting him to his house in a way that was perhaps human and friendly and then suddenly starting to question him in that inquisitorial, offensive way, that cruel way, Danilo did not know it but at times he could be very cruel. Danilo asked him why he himself did not try and discuss things with Giума, it was an interesting experiment. Ippolito answered that he did not make experiments, he despised everything that was in the nature of mere experiment, all of a sudden he seemed very angry, he had become pale and breathless. He did not make experiments, he left people alone and was indifferent to them, but Danilo who loved to have disciples must learn to control his temper, you don't invite a boy to your house to have confidential talks and discussions and then laugh in his face and throw him out. Danilo compressed his lips and tapped gently with a pencil on the table, from time to time he raised his eyes and fixed Ippolito with a cold, attentive stare, Emanuele limped restlessly up and down. But in the meantime Giustino had come in and was asking why they never tried to study *him* to find out what he was like, he also was seventeen and came of a bourgeois family and why didn't anyone ever think of studying *him* ? Then they all burst out laughing together and Danilo put the pencil in his pocket and said he was going home to bed, there had been so many evenings when he and his wife had sat up till the small hours reading Montale with Giума.

## 11

Anna told Giума nothing of what she had heard. She was careful to say nothing to him that might displease or provoke him. She pretended to believe all he said to her, she pretended to believe it was because of the smell that he had given up going to see Danilo. She pretended to believe that he did not like the company of his school-fellows because they did not wash properly and were silly, she pretended not to know that they turned their backs on him when he approached. She felt cowardly in relation to Giума, she had a great fear that he might suddenly get tired of being with her and of kissing her, if she contradicted him over something and they started quarrelling. So she tried never to contradict him and never to quarrel. They no longer talked about justice, they no longer talked about the revolution. But Anna still thought about the revolution when she was alone in her room, she saw a Giума who had suddenly become different, who mounted the barricades with her and fired shots and sang. These were thoughts that she allowed to grow in secret within her, every day she added a new adventure, the flight of herself and Giума with guns over the roofs, Fascists whom Danilo and Ippolito had not succeeded in capturing and whom she and Giума led in chains in front of the people's tribunal. And she and Giума, after the barricades, would get married, and they would give the soap factory to the poor. While she was with Giума these thoughts would dissolve in smoke, she would be deeply ashamed of them and it would seem to her that she would never think them again, but she always thought them again when she got back home and shut herself up in her room, as soon as she sat down at the little table in her room these thoughts blossomed joyous and arrogant inside her.

The snow had come and they were cold walking about the avenues, they went every day now to the café that seemed like Paris. They were together every day but not on Sundays, on Sundays Giuma went off ski-ing, sometimes he had to take Mammina with him who did not ski but sat, all dressed up in furs, in the hall of the hotel and played bridge. Giustino also went off ski-ing if he could manage to scrape together a little money by selling some old books or passing on his mathematical exercises to his school friends, because Giustino was good at mathematics. He used to pass on his mathematical exercises to Giuma too, he said he made Giuma pay double rates, because he could not stand him and because he knew he was always full of money. When he had scraped together the money he went up into the attic and started hammering, his skis were never in good order, they were old skis with the fastenings all coming to pieces. Then he put on Ippolito's army trousers with a big patch in the seat, and a waterproof of Concettina's which Signora Maria had cut down as a jacket for him. Giuma told Anna later that he had seen Giustino on the ski slopes, it was enough to make you die of laughter, Giustino in a woman's blue jacket giving great shouts and whistles and rolling down like a sack, he was covered with snow from head to foot. On Sundays Anna stayed at home, she sat at the table in her room and did her homework for the whole week, and every now and then she put down her pen and thought about the revolution.

Gradually these Sundays became very gloomy for her. She had her usual thoughts, gunshots and flights over the roofs, but at the back of these thoughts was the face of the real Giuma, laughing with his wolf-like teeth, and it became more and more difficult for her to pluck out this real face from her heart. At the back of these thoughts there was the figure of the real Giuma who did not make his escape over the roofs but went out to the ski slopes or had tea in the hotel with

Mamma all dressed up in furs, so very remote from the revolution and from her. She knew from Giustino that he had taken to ski-ing always with a girl, a girl with white velvet trousers, they held each other round the waist as they ski-ed, and Giustino admitted that she was rather an attractive girl. Anna begged Giustino to take her out ski-ing just once. But Giustino said that she had neither the skis nor the costume, she couldn't possibly go ski-ing in a skirt and ordinary shoes, besides she didn't know how to ski and he certainly had no intention of sticking behind her all the time. Anna said that Giama would teach her. But Giustino shrugged his shoulders and laughed, just imagine the great Giama bothering himself about her on the ski slopes, the great Giama had the girl with the white velvet trousers. In the end Giama himself also spoke to her about this girl, she was called Fiammetta, she was not stupid and she ski-ed well. Anna asked him if he was in love with this girl. Giama said no, he had never been in love, if by any chance he fell in love perhaps he might fall in love with this girl but for the moment he was not in love, he liked her just to go ski-ing with. Anna on the other hand he liked for talking to and also for kissing. For kissing there was no need to be in love, it can easily happen that a boy and a girl when they are great friends can give each other a few kisses now and then. Anna asked him whether he had kissed the girl Fiammetta. He said no, he hadn't kissed her, at least not for the moment. All of a sudden Anna started to cry, they were sitting in the Paris café and outside the windows you could see the river going away into the mist, between telegraph-poles and banks patched with snow. It seemed to Anna that there was nothing in the world so horrible as that river, those telegraph-poles and that café, and that snow, those patches of snow, suddenly she was seized with longing for a scorching summer that would make all traces of snow vanish from the whole earth. Giama frowned at her tears, he ran quickly over to the cash-desk to pay and told her to

come away, she couldn't possibly start sobbing there in the café. They walked along together in the evening light, Giuma kept his hands in his pockets and his face hidden in his coat-collar, she was sobbing and giving little sudden starts, and nibbling her thumbs inside her gloves. All of a sudden, with a weary, resolute air, he drew her behind the bushes on the river bank, they kissed and he begged her not to get such silly ideas into her head, he showed her that she had made a hole in her gloves by her nibbling. They had to make their way through clumps of bushes to get back to the bridge, he pulled off the brambles that had got entangled in her coat as he had done before with the chestnut-shells, there were no chestnuts now, the time of the chestnuts was over. Their shoes were muddy and they cleaned them with a newspaper before they came back into the town.

Giuma told her that Mammina was feeling ill because Franz and Amalia were on the point of arriving. He knew how matters stood, Mammina had been very much in love with Franz before Franz and Amalia got married, and now she did not know what attitude to take on finding herself face to face with him again. So she lay in bed in the dark and would not allow anyone into her room, she would not allow anyone to see her while she was thinking of what attitude she should take. He, Giuma, was not a puritan and it did not matter to him if his mother had had a love affair with Franz, poor Mammina, so much the better if she had had some days of happiness, so much the better for men and women if they could enjoy themselves together. Emanuele, on the other hand, was a puritan and would have found it scandalous to think of Mammina having a love affair with Franz, perhaps it had occurred to him but he had buried the thought in his mind, he was good at burying in his mind all thoughts that he did not like, burying them so deeply that he forgot they had ever existed. After Papa's death

Franz for a moment had been undecided whether to marry Amalia or Mammina, but he had decided on Amalia because Mammina had only the usufruct whereas Amalia had the shares. And so poor Mammina had been left with nothing but her bridge.

Later, Mammina put on a resolute, imperious expression as she waited at the garden gate with her fox fur thrown over her shoulders and her lorgnette ; Emanuele had gone in the car to the station, Giama had stayed with Mammina by the gate. The car came back and they saw Amalia and Franz get out, Mammina kissed Amalia on the brow, to Franz she put out a long, limp hand without turning her head.

Emanuele went across to tell Ippolito how transformed Amalia was since her marriage, she had taken to giving orders and making decisions for everyone, for herself and Franz she wanted the red room, not the green room which Mammina had had prepared for them, which was so far from the bathroom and so sunless. And Franz was to start work at once at the soap factory. And poor Franz was subdued and sad, he whispered to Emanuele that he would have preferred the green room because at least you couldn't see the soap factory from its windows, it distressed him deeply to think of the soap factory and he would have preferred not to go and work there at once, he felt rather shaken in health, he had heard nothing at all about his parents and every night he had horrible dreams, he woke up all panting and sweating and Amalia gave him camphor injections, the course she had taken as a student-nurse had left her with a mania for giving injections, Franz's behind was as full of holes as a nutmeg-grater. It was by no means certain that the camphor was good for him and he would have liked to consult a doctor, but Amalia maintained that camphor was what he needed. He realized that he had to work at the soap factory, he realized that he had to work and could not always remain in idleness, his life had been full of errors, it

had been a long chain of idle hours and acts of cowardice and lies, he told Emanuele that some day perhaps he would tell him the whole story of his life. He had made up his mind to turn over a new leaf but not at present, at present everything frightened him, he could not help thinking all the time about the Germans and the concentration camps and at night he saw his parents in those ditches in which they burned the dead. But it was Amalia who gave orders and a few days after their arrival Franz was working in the soap factory, sitting at a desk with an unhappy expression, and in the evening Franz and Emanuele came home together, and now it was Franz who complained about the managing director, and Emanuele contradicted him, saying the managing director was really a fine fellow. Emanuele was sorry for Franz and at the same time irritated with him, and was always wanting to contradict him, and his voice was always a little harsh when he spoke to him.