

When Jimmy Savo  
married a girl  
from  
Rome, Italy,  
he suddenly became  
part-owner of a  
unique parcel of real estate  
—La Rocca di Poggio,  
a 13th century castle,  
set high up  
in the Umbrian Hills.

This is  
the true story  
of Lord Jimmy's reign  
over Poggio,  
the tiny village

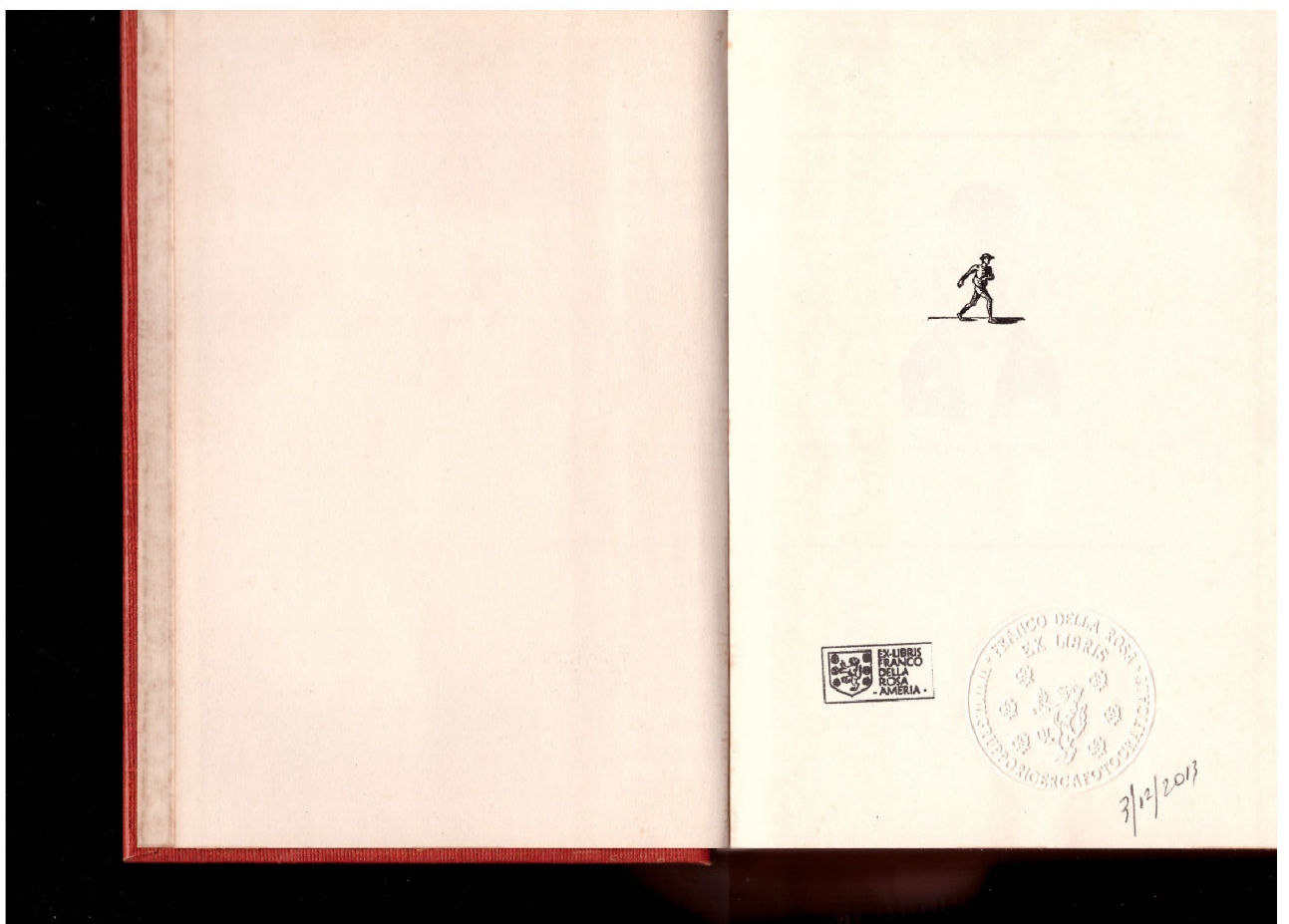
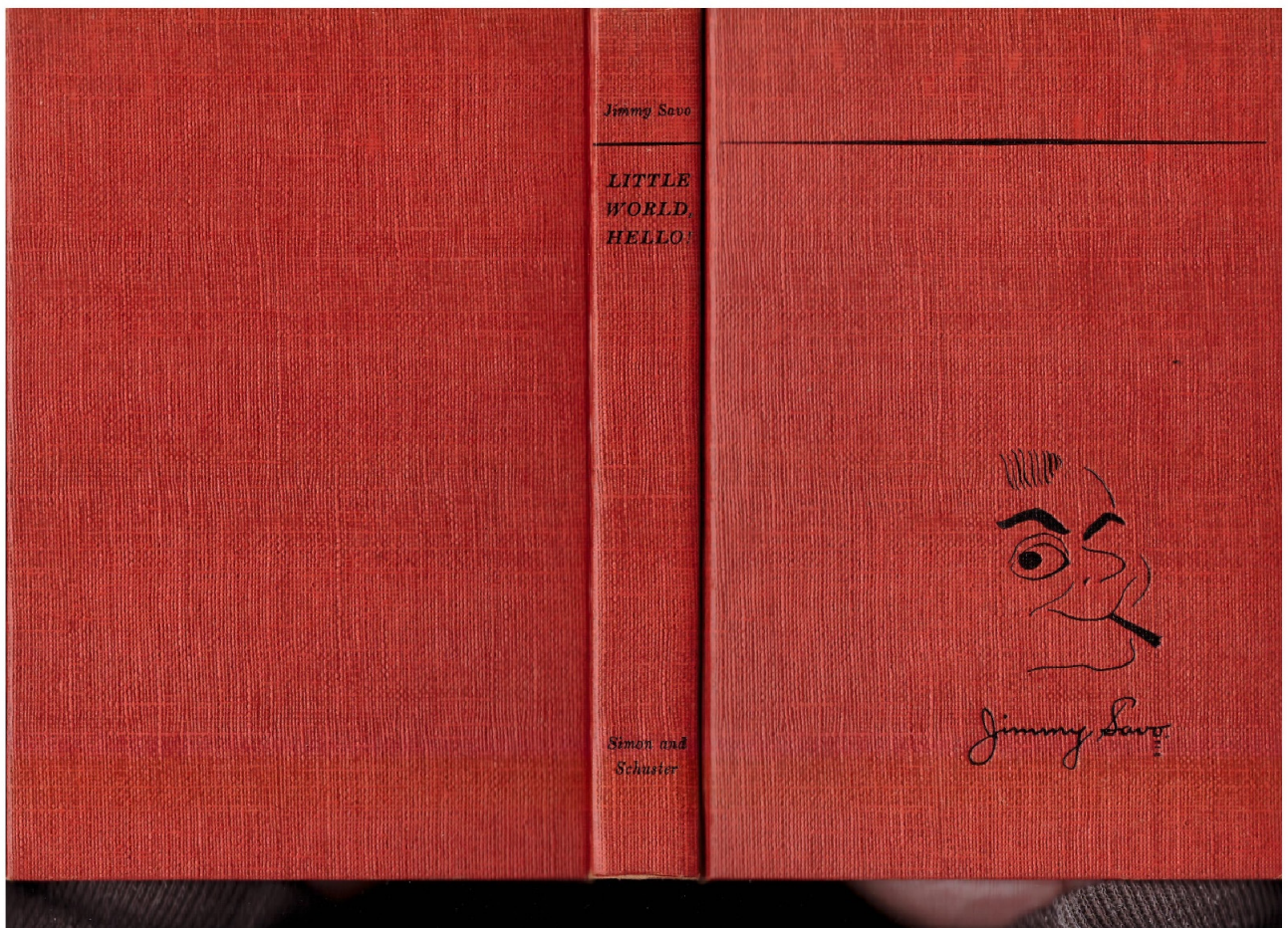
(Continued on back flap)

Jacket Design by A. Birnbaum

Price \$2.75

(Continued from front flap)  
of nineteen peasants  
surrounding the castle.  
Jimmy Savo  
writes  
with the same  
childlike freshness  
and unworldly charm  
that have made him  
a beloved figure in theatres  
and cafés  
up and down the U. S. A.  
Here is a book  
for anyone  
who could use a brief flight  
from reality  
into  
a mountain fairyland.

Little World, Hello!  
by Jimmy Savo  
Simon and Schuster



---

Drawings by A. Birnbaum



JIMMY SAVO

---



---

# LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

BY  
Jimmy Savo

SIMON AND SCHUSTER, NEW YORK, 1947

---

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED  
INCLUDING THE RIGHT OF REPRODUCTION  
IN WHOLE OR IN PART IN ANY FORM  
COPYRIGHT, 1947, BY SIMON AND SCHUSTER, INC.  
PUBLISHED BY SIMON AND SCHUSTER, INC.  
ROCKEFELLER CENTER, 1230 SIXTH AVENUE,  
NEW YORK 20, N. Y.

*A longer version of one chapter of this book ap-  
peared under the title, The Bad Man, in Vogue,  
January 15, 1944.*

*Second Printing*

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
BY H. WOLFF BOOK MFG. CO., INC.

For Nina

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

1. SO, ARE YOU THE ONES?	1
2. UP THE HILL ON A RELUCTANT DONKEY	8
3. NUMBER SEVEN HAS IT	20
4. SUPERBO, BUT NOT VERY COZY	31
5. MEET ALFREDUZZO THE THIRD	37
6. WHISTLING GHOSTS	44
7. THE VILLAIN OF POGGIO	53
8. VENERANDA'S GOOD NAME	60
9. GOODBYE, VENERANDA	71
10. THE FACE IN THE WINDOW	83
11. THE OLD AND THE NEW	93

12. PLEASE, VENERANDA, GET MARRIED!	100
13. A COW IS A FORTUNE	106
14. MARCELLINA, LADRA!	113
15. LOVE IS BETTER THAN MILK AND EGGS	116
16. THE BOTTOM OF THE WELL	123
17. SOMETHING MUST BE DONE	127
18. CHEEMY IS MISSING	130
19. THERE WAS A TERRIFIC HUSH	137
20. LIQUID JEWELS	143
21. DARK DAYS	155
22. FIESTA	163
23. EXIT	179

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

---

<i>Jimmy Savo</i>	<i>frontispiece</i>
<i>Nina</i>	<i>page 3</i>
<i>Gian-Domenico, the Bellringer</i>	13
<i>Lorenzo</i>	17
<i>Three Women of Poggio</i>	27
<i>Elena</i>	39
<i>Andrea and Delfina</i>	49
<i>Alfreduzzo</i>	55
<i>Veneranda</i>	67
<i>Old Joe</i>	75
<i>Temistocle</i>	87
<i>Daydream</i>	109
<i>The Elusive Shepherd</i>	119
<i>Marcellina</i>	149
<i>Dinnertime</i>	157
<i>La Signora</i>	167

## SO, ARE YOU THE ONES?

"CHE BELLO, CHE BELLO!" Nina exclaimed.

"Yes, it is pretty!" I said. It was, too. We were at the window of the inn, looking out over a valley and up a green mountain. On the top of the mountain sat an old castle under a little white cloud.

"*Che bello, che bello!*" Nina went on, the way she does when she's excited about something. Sometimes my wife has a way of forgetting which language she's talking in and she doesn't get back to English for quite a while.

] 1 [

## LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

"It's *bello*, all right," I said. "Reminds me of the backdrop of a show I played in once."

"No, no, no, no. *Raffaello!*"

"No," I said. "Let me think. No, it was an Earl Carroll show—*Vanities*."

"*Raffaello!*"

"Oh! *Vanities!* That's silly! It's the background of a painting by Raphael! He lived here in Umbria in his early days. He painted these hills and castles and mountains and valleys many, many times."

"Then we own a Raphael."

"Well, not a whole one. Just the top."

"Those rocks?"

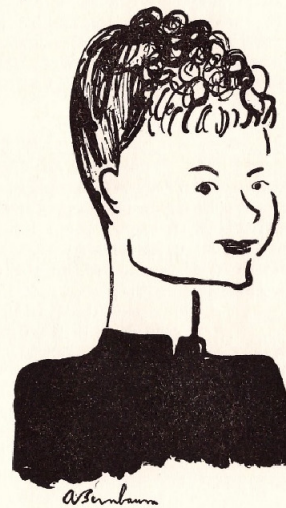
"They're the walls of the town. They're part of the castle."

For a while we just sat and looked. It was impressive. I never saw anything I enjoyed looking at so much. This was the first time I had ever been in Italy, where my parents were born. Nina had been born in Rome, which was about sixty miles from this little village where we were having lunch in the *osteria*. This old castle had impressed her when she saw it as a child and later her father wrote to her in America that he had gotten it for her. Now she thought it would be wonderful to go there and stay a few days.

"Remember," I said to Nina, "my agent will be cabling me about that new show. Who'd ever look for me up on top of a rock?"

"Oh, they'll find you, don't worry. Just enjoy it."

] 2 [



NINA

We went back to our lunch.

Around us in the *osteria* they were playing cards, drinking red wine, and whispering about us because we were foreigners. The woman who ran the place sat down at our table, leaning on her fat arms. She was wide and gay and had a big smile with a small nose in the middle. I could tell by the nose that she was snoopy.

"So!" she said. "You are the ones who come to stay in the castle!"

The whispering stopped.

A *carabiniere* leaned forward. A thin man took his clay pipe out of his toothless mouth, leaving it open, with a white ball of smoke in the gap. A man with fat geranium cheeks held his glass still at his lips. It was so quiet I could hear the hens clucking and scratching in the dirt outside the door. They were the only ones not paying attention.

"Yes, we are," said Nina.

The woman turned to the others.

"They are!" she repeated. The silence broke all around us.

"*Sono loro! Sono loro!*" they all echoed.

The geranium man took a quick gulp of wine and said, "I told you!"

The *carabiniere* sat up straight. The thin man with the pipe blew the white ball out of his mouth and began to smoke fast.

Now they all wanted to know something else, and right away.

] 5 [

"Are you Americans?"

"Yes," we said.

All over the place open palms slapped tables. Everybody turned to everybody else and buzzed. Didn't I tell you? Only foreigners would have the idea!

"*Pazzi! Pazzi!*"

I knew that word. Crazy, it means. The thin guy pointed his pipe up the olive-green mountain to the castle.

"Are—are you going to spend the night there?"

"Well," I said, "we're going to—to try."

"A-chee-chee!" exclaimed a man with his cap on his knees. Someone in the middle of the room swallowed the wrong way and went into a coughing spell. Laughs exploded like corks. Then everybody began to talk at once.

"What's the matter with them?" I asked Nina.

"They're just making fun of you," she said. And she burst out laughing.

I certainly was murdering them. And these people didn't even know I was a comedian. In a show in New York it would have been great, but here I wasn't even trying. I was on my vacation.

I said to Nina, "What's so funny about me?" She still couldn't answer.

It didn't seem to me that I looked very funny. Of course I'm not exactly impressive looking, but I've been told I look dignified, sometimes even sad.

"They're laughing," Nina explained, "because they say there are ghosts in the castle."

] 6 [

I gave her a big frown.

"They say no one has lived there for fifty years. There are holes in the roof, the windows have no panes, and it's very drafty."

"Is that all?"

Someone was calling from outside the door. Did I hear right? Were they calling for Napoleon?

"Napoleone! Napoleone!"

The woman with the fat arms went to the door, looked out, and, turning back to the people inside, announced, "They have come for the Americans." She didn't say it to us. She said it to them, as if they would be more interested in the news than we were. "They have come with donkeys."

"Donkeys!"

I made a motion to pay the bill. Napoleone added it up on the tips of her puffy fingers. We paid and got up. Everyone else in the inn got up and followed us to the door, as if they were going along with us.

The thought of it worried me.

] 7 [

UP THE HILL  
ON A RELUCTANT DONKEY

UNDER THE TREE at the side of the road stood a good-looking, brown-haired boy about eighteen, with a flower stuck in his hat. Two men who looked like twins stood beside him, holding the bridles of a pair of donkeys.

"Buon giorno," said the boy.

"Buon giorno," we said.

"I am Lorenzo, ai suoi comandi," he said, and made a modest gesture that meant the other two were also at our

] 8 [

UP THE HILL ON A RELUCTANT DONKEY

command. Lorenzo was so bashful he had to swallow each time before he could get the words out.

"The people of La Rocca di Poggio are waiting to greet you at the gate of the town, Signori," he said.

All three bowed respectfully and got busy arranging the saddles. These men were different from those in the *osteria*. With them I began to feel more comfortable.

Although the others had trailed Napoleone out of the inn and stood around us and the donkeys, it didn't look as if they were going to follow us after all, which was good.

It occurred to me that I had better make plans for getting on the donkey's back. I knew I must leap into the saddle gracefully. While I was figuring out how to do it, the two attendants took me by the arms and boosted me up onto the donkey, as if I were a little boy about to take his first pony ride.

Nina didn't seem to be having any problems at all. She was on. Lorenzo slapped her donkey gently on the hind-quarters, and off they went.

"Addio! Addio!" the crowd cried merrily.

The twins placed themselves on either side of my donkey and gave her a smack. She just laid her ears back. They got behind and pushed and cried, "Ehi! La Bionda! Ehi!" Suddenly she started to kick, tossing her hind legs around in a circle. I threw my arms around her neck and hugged her tight.

The audience was delighted.

] 9 [

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

The *carabiniere* seized the bridle. La Bionda stopped kicking as soon as one of the men removed the key of the castle from my hip pocket. The key was about a foot long and I had been sitting on it, pressing it into La Bionda's back. Now she started and the policeman stepped aside, saluting me as if to say, "The road is yours!"

The crowd waved and shouted, "Addio! Addio!" all over again. The twins settled down at my side, ready to catch me if I fell off. At last I felt safe.

Out of sight of the townsfolk, we moved forward peacefully until the path began to wind sharply up over slippery rocks.

"Do not be afraid, the donkeys are sure-footed," said Lorenzo gently. Ah, how sensitive and sympathetic these people from Poggio were!

Now we were climbing among sedate olive trees. Sometimes we caught a glimpse of the old walls of the castle at the top of the weaving path. I squinted up at it, wondering what it would be like, and thinking that I had never in my life heard shoes squeak like those on the feet of the twins.

When Nina first told me about the castle, I pictured something big, gray, and majestic that had somehow a resemblance to the Hotel Plaza, and I think I know why. When I was a kid of five, I had a dog called Nelly who had several puppies, and I wanted to sell them. Since I couldn't imagine anybody in the Bronx being able to afford the puppies of such a wonderful dog as Nelly, I

] 10 [

UP THE HILL ON A RELUCTANT DONKEY

came downtown. When I saw the Plaza, with all the rich, well-dressed men and women going in and out past the doorman in his grand uniform, I was sure I had found the right place. I offered the pups for five dollars (males, with blue ribbons) and three dollars (females, with pink ribbons). Nobody bought, but when I left I felt sorry, everything was so elegant. As far as I am concerned, a proper castle should look like the Plaza.

Nina was calling from up ahead.

"That bell! How nice it sounds! It's been ringing ever since we left the town."

"It sounds nearer up here. Where does it come from?" I asked Lorenzo.

"It is the bell of the church of La Rocca di Poggio. It is ringing for the holiday."

"What holiday is it?"

"The Poggiolani do this to greet you, Signore."

For us! Gosh! What a nice idea! The sound was even sweeter now that I knew the bell rang for us.

"How about the fellow who's ringing it? Won't he have a sore arm tomorrow?"

"Gian-Domenico? No, no, Signore," Lorenzo answered. "Gian-Domenico is the bell ringer. He has rung for many years. It is he who rings the bell when it storms, to keep the lightning away."

"How does the ringing of the bell keep lightning away?" Nina asked. Lorenzo thought a moment before he replied.

] 11 [

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

"Gian-Domenico is old and in all his years no house and no farm within sound of the bell has ever been struck. This is what we know."

"Sh-sh," Nina whispered. She was pointing to the road above us.

Three barefooted children raced like fawns through the shadows under the olive trees and disappeared.

"Scouts!" I told Nina. "They're going to spread the news that we're coming."

We passed an iron cross marking the place where a path branched off into the trees. There was a whirl of wings, and a flock of birds rose in the air. Lorenzo said, "St. Francis lived for ten years at the foot of this mountain. Once a year people come up here to pray."

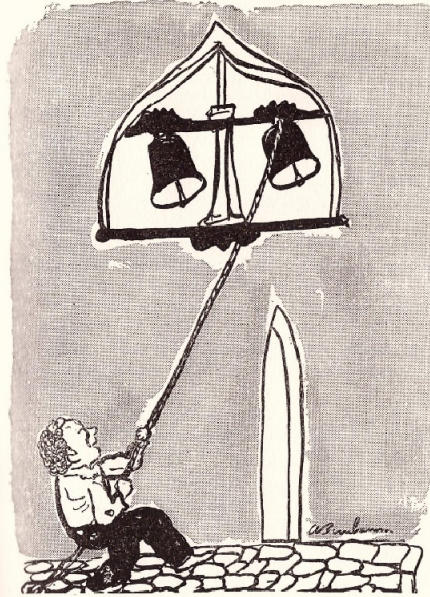
It was very quiet. I missed something. I looked around. The twins had taken off their shoes and were carrying them in their hands. They had decided that the sound bothered me. What wonderful people!

The path narrowed to a couple of feet and swung around a sharp bend at the edge of a cliff. My two knights dropped behind. Exactly at the point where the trail was most dangerous my donkey stopped, hung her head and lost herself in thought.

I tried to whistle her on. My chaperones cried, "Ehi! Ehi!"

La Bionda gazed down the precipice at the valley and looked gloomy. I peeped down myself. What I saw made my heart jump. With a farewell glance at Nina I closed

] 12 [



GIAN-DOMENICO, THE BELLRINGER

UP THE HILL ON A RELUCTANT DONKEY

my eyes, grabbed the saddle, and waited for the end. La Bionda did not move. She just went on brooding.

"Don't be afraid," called Lorenzo. "La Bionda is only resting."

"If you say so," I said, and hung on.

The donkey shook off a fly as if nothing had happened and moved casually around the corner to safety. I stopped holding my breath. My attendants, who hadn't said a word, came up alongside, released my grip on the saddle, maneuvered me back into a dignified position, and silently walked on.

Overhead the sky was a beautiful blue dappled with white clouds. We rose higher into the clear air. I took a big breath and felt the flush of health return.

"Wonderful air we have here in Poggio!" I said to Nina.

"Sh-sh." Down the path skipped a little group of children in their bare feet. Their hands were full of wild flowers.

"A reception committee," I said.

A little girl stepped forward holding her bouquet up at me with a stiff arm.

"Oh, thank you!"

She kept her eyes on the ground.

"Will you tell me your name?"

Too shy to answer, she ran away and joined the others, who were standing at the side of the path. A tiny five-year-old walked backward just in front of Nina's donkey, clutching her little bunch of flowers.

] 15 [

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

"What lovely posies!" Nina said. The child paid no attention; she seemed fascinated by Nina's sun hat.

"She's forgotten to give me the flowers," Nina whispered. "Call her. I'm afraid the donkey will step on her."

I held up a piece of candy. We had brought a supply especially for dealing with children.

"*Ehi, bambina!* This is for you."

The child ran over to me. She took the candy, looked up at me, and smiled.

"*Come ti chiami?*" I asked her.

"Marcellina," she answered readily. Like an old friend, she put her hand on my stirrup and walked along beside me, the hard candy making a ball in her cheek, and smiling up whenever I looked at her. Her eyes were as big and dark as plums.

"I told you—Raffaello," said Nina. "She's a Raffaello cherub!"

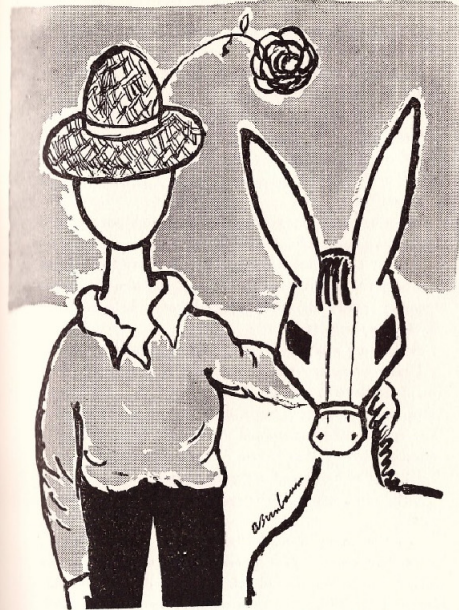
"Only thinner," I said. As I looked down at our little cherub, she was sticking her tongue out at her companions.

The first little girl had fallen behind and was jumping from stone to stone, chanting:

There is a treasure in our tower,  
Ohee lee, ohee la.

It was buried there by Alf the coward,  
Ohee lee, ohee la.

] 16[



LORENZO

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

"What's the treasure she's singing about? Lorenzo, what's this about a treasure?"

"*Il barone* tells the history best, Signore. He will relate it to you," Lorenzo answered.

"A baron lives up here?" I asked, not sure if I was pleased.

"Temistocle is a baron only among us. We call him *il barone*. It's a nickname."

"I see."

We were getting near the top now. I could see a group of people assembled outside the gate.

Just at this moment La Bionda gave way to an emotion so great that it made her jump. I was almost thrown from my saddle. Her head wagged from side to side, and she snorted angrily.

Something was very wrong. I followed her wary gaze.

Under a headful of curls a pair of dark eyes in a thin oval face stared up at me. They belonged to a boy about nine, wearing nothing but a little ragged pair of pants. The rest of him was coated with dust. What made La Bionda mad was that he was hanging onto her tail.

I looked at Lorenzo for suggestions.

"Ah," he sighed, "Alfreduzzo," and he seemed resigned.

"Pretty name," I said, "but—"

"A bad name," said Lorenzo, sighing again. "His father, the baron, should not have called him after Alfreduzzo the Third, the most wicked man who ever lived."

] 18[

UP THE HILL ON A RELUCTANT DONKEY

The baron was sure that after centuries the name had lost its evil. It is evil still."

I looked at the boy. He did not seem bothered. He was still holding La Bionda's tail.

"Evil? That child?" said Nina. "It can't be."

"Do you like this little pot of poison?" I asked.

"Well, I don't know. There's something appealing about him—something that reminds me of you."

"Oh, well, that's different."

Even if Nina was right and he couldn't be a bad boy, I wasn't sure I wanted him attached to my donkey's tail. And certainly the donkey didn't.

I decided to speak to Alfreduzzo, tactfully.

"Watch out," I said, shaking a playful finger at him.

"Better let go the donkey's tail. She might kick you."

He didn't look up, but his eyelids quivered.

"La Bionda?" he said, almost in a whisper. "She knows me."

It was no time to argue. In front of us was the entrance to the citadel.

Thus did I, the new lord of the castle of La Rocca di Poggio, ride into my domain. The sonorous bell tolled festively, the town folk awaited us, and a little boy named Alfreduzzo held the tail of my donkey like a page carrying a lady's train.

] 19[

## NUMBER SEVEN HAS IT

IN THE SHADOW of the old arched gate of the town, the people of La Rocca di Poggio were gathered in a semi-circle. La Bionda stopped in the middle of the group, hung her head, and dozed. Nobody said anything. Only the clang of the bell was heard.

Nina and I smiled at them. They smiled back shyly.

Their faces were like those I had seen in the paintings in the museums of Rome. Only the clothes were different. No beautiful colors here, no velvets and brocades, no

] 20 [

## NUMBER SEVEN HAS IT

antique elegance. None of the wealth of this town in the Middle Ages had come down through the centuries to these people. But beauty had.

As I ran my gaze along the line, it stopped short at the sight of the bright head of a girl. Her hair was the color of sweet cider with the sun shining through it, and her eyes were like two big violets. She was probably seventeen, but no doubt her dress was older than she was. Worn through and mended, it was as white as those little clouds hovering over the castle. In her eyes there was the wonder you see in the faces of children at the circus. Her feet were bare. She wiggled her big toe as I looked down at them.

Three white geese waddled out toward us. They stretched their necks and flapped their wings. One of them, a black ring around his right eye, came up close and hissed. I could see that the other two were just passing the time of day, but this one looked mean. I could swear that he was hissing at me personally.

I stood up in my stirrups and took off my hat.

"Hello! Hello, everybody," I said.

A tall man with a thin, handsome face, twinkling eyes, and upright mustache stepped forward. With one hand he took an old pipe with a long curved stem from his mouth. With the other he lifted a crushed, soft black hat from his head. Sweeping both arms out wide, he made us a deep bow.

Though his clothes were of the same homely sort as the others, the man had style. Around his waist, about three

] 21 [

## LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

inches below the top of his trousers, he wore an antique belt with a big buckle. His patched coat was thrown carelessly over one shoulder. He carried himself with the easy grace of a bullfighter. If I hadn't known that I was the Lord of Poggio, I would have thought he was.

He shifted his weight onto one foot, bending the knee of the other, like a man posing for a tintype.

"I am Temistocle, *ai suoi comandi*," he said.

I should have known. This was the baron. Temistocle! The name fitted him perfectly. I stood up in my stirrups carefully, in order not to waken La Bionda, and made a sweeping gesture with my head, trying to get some thirteenth-century style into it. Everybody bowed in return.

Just then I saw a small, heavy door opening in one of the turrets that formed the town entrance, and, like a dwarf in an opera, a little, bent old man came out. He wore a cap cocked to one side over fluffed white hair. He came near me, and stopped, leaning with both hands on his cane, looking at me with a squint in his eyes.

"He is Giovannino, the eldest of our town," said Temistocle.

"Hello, Joe," I said.

I expected him to say, "I am here to serve you. What are your wishes?" Instead, pointing to a log under the arch, he said, "This is the best spot to sit. I've sat here on this log all my life. As you notice, there is not a splinter."

"Giovannino is by tradition the town watcher. All his

] 22 [

## NUMBER SEVEN HAS IT

ancestors have been Poggio's sentinels," explained Temistocle. Then he pointed to the meek little woman at his side. "Genoveffa, my wife." I looked around at the faces while the baron called their names.

"Leontina, Andrea, Delfina, Elena, Calliope, Settima, Emma . . ."

The blonde girl was Veneranda. Altogether there were nineteen inhabitants of Poggio.

Nina whispered, "*Andiamo*," and went through the gate, the donkey's hoofs resounding on the stony pavement. I nudged La Bionda's thin ribs with my heels. She woke up and ambled in. The silent Poggiani followed. The three geese fell in behind, led by Black Eye.

Now we were in Poggio.

Thick, high walls, tall arcades and winding paths, tiny houses built into fortress walls, steps rising gradually like ramps, twisted in and out, up and down by way of underpasses, overpasses. Hardly any two houses had front doors on the same level. The architect who designed the place seven hundred years ago had followed the contours of the top of the rock. At the highest point of the mountain rose the castle, overshadowing the town. It seemed to hold out its arms and squeeze the whole village into one snug, jagged little bunch. It was a rugged, tight-fisted place. The whole town could have been set down in Columbus Circle.

Our caravan moved up through the tangle of passageways, past the medieval church and under an arch, the

] 23 [

sound of the bell thundering from above, crossed a square, and stopped before the heavy door of the castle.

I decided we were home at last.

I pulled the big key out of my coat pocket, and handed it to the man who stood beside me.

"I am Eugenio," he said promptly, "son of Calliope, *ai suoi comandi*." He seemed very pleased.

"Swell!" I said.

Settimia, his wife, ran to a little house across the square and came back with an antiquated oil lamp and a goose feather, with which she oiled the lock. Eugenio turned the key to the right and to the left. It made rasping noises, but the door did not open. Drops of perspiration appeared on his forehead.

"My father knows about the lock," spoke up Elena, a young girl about twelve.

"Where is he?"

"He is ringing the bell. *Un momentino*."

A few seconds later the ringing stopped and Elena came back with her father. It was Gian-Domenico, who kept the lightning away with his bell. He was hollow-eyed and moved with heavy steps, as if he were walking on snowshoes.

Silently his long, delicate fingers manipulated the key in the lock with the ease of a magician doing card tricks.

The baron whispered to me, "Gian-Domenico does not speak. Do not mind him. For twenty years he has kept his silence."

] 24 [

I wanted to ask why, but the moment was too important for that. The bell ringer turned the key. His lips moved. So many turns to the right. So many turns to the left. "*Uno, due*"—he raised his face to the sky—" *tre, quattro . . .*" Not a sound came as his lips met and parted. At the seventh turn the door opened.

All together, like a choir, the Poggiolani said, "*Bene, bene!*"

Gian-Domenico pushed the heavy door back and looked at me, smiling. I was so grateful I raised my hat to him. I nudged La Bionda. She did not respond. Nina started forward and made a nice entrance. The twins at my side pushed La Bionda; she stuck to the spot.

Then little Marcellina, still holding the bouquet of wild flowers, put it under La Bionda's nose as if it were hay, and walked backward through the big door. The donkey and I followed.

We moved through a shadowy arch. The donkeys' hoofs suddenly stopped clattering on the stones. They were walking on thick, green moss. We were in the castle courtyard.

I held my breath. Nina was ecstatic.

"*Meraviglioso! Meraviglioso!*"

Behind me I heard the baron's voice.

"*Superbo!*"

That was the word for it—"superb." We were in a *cortile*, a patio with silver-gray walls and tall arcades sustaining balconies from which stairways ran down like

] 25 [

rivulets. Green vines hung from the rails like rich, thick rugs, and the stone stairways were banked with wild thorn bushes. At one side of the courtyard was a medieval well. We were in the middle of poetry; a kind of soft gray-green poetry.

Here and there lay fragments of marble—broken pieces of statues, ornaments of medieval ages, streaked with the green of time.

I noticed that two men were doubled over beside our donkeys as if cramped with stomach-aches.

"What's the matter?" I whispered to Nina.

"They expect you to use their backs to dismount," Nina whispered back.

Did you really have to step on people's backs to be a lord? It was ridiculous. I looked at Nina to see what she would do. She had already climbed off somehow. I slid quickly down the other side of the donkey and came around to straighten up my man. He looked confused.

The eyes of Poggio were on me. It was the big moment. I was sure they expected a speech.

"Anything the matter?" Nina asked under her breath.

"No."

"Well?"

Well, being an actor, I looked around for a stage. Pushing my way through thorny bushes, I climbed the steps to the balcony. Nervously I leaned over the balustrade and looked down at my audience. What under the

] 26 [



THREE WOMEN OF POGGIO

sun should I say? Just then I heard a chirp, chirp. In front of me, in the vines, was a nest with five young birds, all with their mouths wide open. It was lunchtime; they were looking to me for worms. I didn't happen to have one on me, but I stopped worrying about my speech. I said, "Hungry? When do we eat?"

And then something marvelous happened. They applauded! The children danced! Little Marcellina threw her bouquet of wild flowers at me!

"*Si, si, si, si!*" they cried.

"He is a man of few words!"

"*Si, si, si, si!*"

"He is thoughtful!"

Obviously I had hit on a very popular subject. The baron stood off and admired me.

"You like to eat? *Bene!*"

The women lost their shyness and scattered joyfully in every direction, running to their homes. Then back they came, loaded down. Like heavy headdresses they carried on their heads cornucopias of figs, jugs of spring water, a board with long loaves of bread on it, a basket with three legs of lamb sticking out. Some had big jugs of wine, some iron cooking kettles. One little woman was almost hidden under a big bundle of wood. They carried their burdens with ease, their backs straight and motionless, their bodies swaying at the hips.

The men brought oil lamps, chairs, and other pieces of furniture, a bit the worse for wear. Men and women in

] 29 [

single file climbed the stone steps to the first balcony and disappeared into the castle.

"Where did they get it all?" I asked the baron.

"Ah, Signore," he answered, "you bring it. You put your foot into our little town and at once it is a land of plenty. Where did it come from? From Orvieto and Assisi and Perugia, where is all the wealth of Umbria! We knew of your coming. We prepared. La Signora sent us word." By "La Signora" he meant Nina's mother.

"And they brought all that food for us!" said Nina.

"How kind you are, Temistocle!"

"Must have cost a lot of money," I said. "Thanks, Baron!"

"When you come, Lord of the Rock, nothing is too good. When you come, come the miracles. We spend like kings." He gave me a sidelong glance as he added, "Around here, your credit is excellent."

] 30 [

## SUPERBO, BUT NOT VERY COZY

THE BARON SWUNG HIS HAT in a circle around the *cortile*, and, like a perfect host, asked, "Shall I show you the castle, Signori?"

"You know the place?" I asked. "Down there they said it had been shut up for fifty years."

"When I was a boy, my father used to like to tell us of its history. I know every tower, every corner, every crevice."

] 31 [

The baron led us into a big hall off the *cortile*, at the left of the castle door.

"This is the armory," he said. "It was the anteroom in the old days. Here soldiers in armor waited for their orders."

"Some walls!" I said, noticing the deep slits that formed the windows.

The baron smiled. "In those feudal days, in order to be safe from attack, the lords gathered their people in citadels like this one, up on the highest hills. The serfs would work the fields below in times of peace, but when danger threatened they ran up to the town, locked the gates, and fought off the invaders through these slits with arrows." Temistocle pulled an imaginary arrow and let it go out of the slit with a whistle. He followed it with his eyes, then he straightened up. "It was many years later that people gradually left the fortress towns to live peacefully in the valleys," he said.

"Why didn't you leave, Baron?" I asked.

"I? Oh, I am a homebody. I am attached to our little town."

We had gone to the back of the armory and the baron stood with a hand resting affectionately on a large wine press. It was a primitive gadget, with a long pole for a donkey to pull around in a circle.

"This press turns the friendly little grapes into the best wine of the world." He gave it a familiar pat and led us across the *cortile*, into a huge, churchlike hall.

] 82 [

"The lords used to keep a hundred horses here." The baron pointed to the end of the hall. "That is the bottom of the tower."

"Ah, that's where they buried the treasure the children were singing about! I'm glad you told me. How do we get in?"

"Ah, *amico*, *non è possibile*. It was walled up long ago and has never been opened since. It is accursed."

"Cursed?" I looked to see if he was kidding.

"Si. I will tell you the story someday."

"And nobody can get in?"

"No. The tower was formerly open at the top. The wicked lords of La Rocca di Poggio had the practice of throwing unwelcome guests down. There are bones inside, many bones. In the days of Alfreduzzo the Third, the wickedest lord of Poggio, this was the highest tower." Temistocle looked important. "In the Middle Ages the height of a tower was proof of the rank of the lord," he explained.

"Poggio was very proud of its tower. When the Pope, for punishment, made Alfreduzzo the Third cut it down, it pained him very much."

"Did he stop throwing people down?" I asked.

"No, Signore, he did not. Many years passed before Alfreduzzo the Third ended the practice of hurling down displeasing guests."

We went out into the *cortile* again.

"Would you like to visit the *piano nobile*? There,

] 83 [

Signore, you will select your quarters for the night."

On the second floor we passed through a series of dark halls with huge fireplaces and doors framed with white marble. Latin inscriptions were carved on them. Every room was sparsely furnished with ancient hope chests.

"That coat of arms," said the baron, pointing up with his curved pipe to the top of a door, "belongs to the Marchese Alfreduzzo the First, who built this town in 1220."

"Can you imagine?"

"There," the baron said, waving his black hat toward another door, "is the coat of arms of Pope Innocent the Tenth, who once owned this castle. That fresco over the fireplace is the coat of arms of the Countess di Cervara."

I was amazed. "A marquis? A pope? A countess? And me. Who would have thought it!"

The baron led us to the window. "Over that mountain are the ruins of her castle. Four hundred years ago she came here to marry a lord of Poggio. It was a great wedding. The same bells that rang for you today rang for her. She was a wonderful woman." He spoke of her with reverence, as if he had known her all his life. After a moment's reflection he added, "The girls of Poggio have reason to be grateful to the Countess. That is, the good girls," he added, looking at Veneranda, who was busy clearing away some brambles.

"That one could be a big success somewhere if she had a chance," I said, also looking at Veneranda. Temistocle looked doubtful.

] 84 [

The rooms were certainly historic, but not exactly cozy. We selected the right wing for our apartment. It had fine, deep windows, looking out over the green-blue valley, but without panes. This would be perfect for a soft summer's night, but what if it rained, I thought. Well, perhaps Gian-Domenico, who can keep the lightning away with his church bells, could make a special effort to keep the rain away, too.

"Any mosquitoes?"

"Never, never mosquitoes," said the baron precisely. "Never a single mosquito."

We went to the kitchen. It was big and wide and filled with Poggiolani. A big caldron hung over a blazing fire in a huge fireplace.

Settimia was busy making a batch of noodles. She was dumping eggs into a ring of flour on a board. The other women were arguing about how many eggs should go in. Everyone had her say. It was a serious discussion. They agreed on ten. As I came in, they asked me what I thought about it. I answered quickly, as if I knew, "Twelve."

There was no more talk. If I said it, it must be so. Settimia dropped in two more eggs and happily beat the dough.

Dusty little Alfreduzzo was busy swinging at flies with some long hairs from La Bionda's tail.

"Having fun?" I asked, handing him a lozenge. He ate it in no time.

"This is my son," spoke up Genoveffa, the little woman the baron had introduced as his wife. She wore a crocheted

] 85 [

shawl and on her feet were heavy, hobnailed shoes, which gave her walk a plodding motion. Her dark hair, sprinkled with gray, was rolled up on top of her head like a pretzel.

"You're Alfreduzzo's mother? A fine boy!" I thought if I put in a good word for him he might not persecute me. I gave him another lozenge.

As I strolled around the kitchen, I felt a light touch on my hand. It was Marcellina. She was babbling something.

"Jimmy!" Nina called. "She wants a lozenge, too." I gave it to her.

Waving the lozenge in her hand, she began to improvise a little series of dance steps, chanting, "Cheemy! Cheemy! Cheemy!"

"Cheemy? What's that mean?" I asked Nina.

"She's trying to say your name."

That pleased me very much. I was getting along all right. The people loved my speech from the balcony. The women asked me how many eggs to put in the noodles. The baron called me "*amico mio*." And little Marcellina called me by my first name.

Temistocle snapped a couple of cross words at the geese that had come into the kitchen. I just ignored the geese. I walked over to the caldron, suspended from a chain in the fireplace. The cooking smelled good. I leaned over to look down into the pot and felt a sharp peck. I turned in a hurry; there was Black Eye. In his beak was a piece of my trousers.

] 36 [

## MEET ALFREDUZZO THE THIRD

WE SAT DOWN to our first meal in the castle. Florentine oil lamps cast a flickering light over the huge dining table, giving a spookiness to the dark-red walls of the dining room. Wood crackled in the fireplace.

Young Lorenzo shyly brought in the homemade noodles, a leg of lamb, roasted on a spit, a salad. We ate in silence until Lorenzo reappeared at my elbow and whispered, "The people of Poggio are waiting."

"What for?"

"For you to pour the wine."

] 37 [

The Poggjolani had finished their dinner. They stood as we entered the kitchen and Temistocle put a flagon of wine in my hand.

Each of the Poggjolani had brought his own glass. They were of different shapes. I began to fill them and passed them around. They all refused the largest, leaving it for me. I handed it to the baron and he accepted graciously and raised it in a toast.

"I drink to Cristoforo Colombo, and also to Amerigo Vespucci, who had the great privilege of giving America its name, to John Caboto, and to all the great explorers born in this sweet land of Italy, for having discovered the country from which a new lord comes to the Rock of Poggio!"

He tossed off his wine in one neat gulp. The faces turned now to me. I got up.

"To the past and the future of Poggio," I said, standing where the baron had stood, hoping I looked as impressive.

"That is two toasts," Temistocle pointed out.

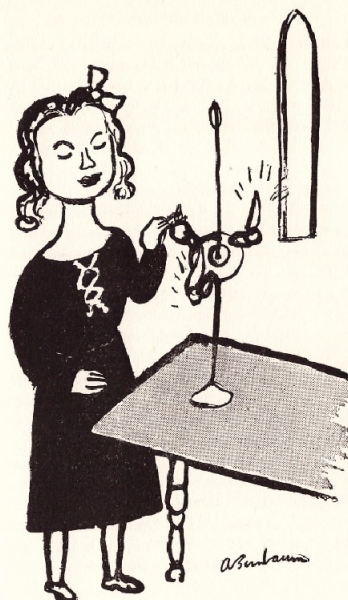
So after we had emptied one glass, I poured another. Veneranda began to sing. Old and young voices chimed in. The burning wood crackled in the fireplace. The wavering lights from the fire and the oil lamps threw the faces into relief.

The baron held up his empty glass.

"Lord of the Rock!" he began.

Their way of addressing me as Lord of the Rock gave

] 38 [



ELENA

MEET ALFREDUZZO THE THIRD

me a strange feeling, as if I were a pirate or something. "Let me fill your glass first, Baron!"

"Ah, you are good, *amico*." He held it up high without spilling a drop. "To you once more, and may the evil spirit of Alfreduzzo the Third disappear forever from Poggio."

"Oh, I don't hold anything against him," I said.

"I think I am speaking the truth if I say that Alfreduzzo was possessed of the devil."

"But you speak as if you liked him," I protested.

"Ah, *amico*, *si*, he was *magnifico*." He put his hand on my arm. "But he was the devil, too. Do you think he would have sat at the table in the red hall where you had your dinner in the quiet way you did, or come here to drink with us in the kitchen?"

"Oh, times change," I said.

"But Alfreduzzo the Third, never! I will tell you what once he did. He was sitting at the head of the table in that same room, surrounded by lords and ladies. Everybody was gay as we are here now. Did Alfreduzzo say to himself, 'I am happy that my friends are gay'? No. There was a man who had once offended him, whose misfortune it was to be seated with the guests at the table. 'I have a game to play,' Alfreduzzo said. 'Blow out the candles.' The guests did not want to blow out the candles. They did not trust him in the light or in the dark. But they obeyed.

"Then this wicked and *grandioso* lord, who had fine,

] 41 [

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

sharp knives beside his plate, selected the sharpest and threw it where he believed the offender to be.

"There was no sound except the swish of the knife flying through the air. Then there was a thud and the spurting of blood and a cry of agony.

"Alfreduzzo had the candles lit again. The man was dead."

From somewhere above there was a crash. Nina and I jumped. The baron set down his glass and put on his black hat, took a lantern, calmly lit his pipe, and went out. In a few minutes he was back.

"A shingle or two have fallen from the roof of the north wing."

It was about eleven o'clock, and Nina and I were ready to turn in. "Tomorrow morning we will all meet again."

The Poggiolani picked up their lanterns and walked with us along the bare halls. It looked as if the whole village were going to bunk with us for the night.

Like so many things in the castle, the lord's bed was majestic. Ten people could have slept in it, with plenty of room to spare. It stood about four feet from the floor. It had a canopy of old cracked silk. At the corners were tall columns of aqua-blue. You can say they were posts if you want to, but to me they were columns. Not so high as telegraph poles, but high.

While the Poggiolani looked behind doors, I pecked under the bed. The baron stood at my side.

"The castle's lords slept in this bed with servants

] 42 [

MEET ALFREDUZZO THE THIRD

lying on couches at their feet," he said, with sweeping gestures in all directions. "Those were perilous days and they needed watchdogs."

"Is this where your Alfreduzzo the Third napped?" I asked.

"Ah, *si*, of course. Alfreduzzo the Magnifico slept in this bed."

"And lulled himself to sleep counting knives flying across tables, I suppose."

"I do not doubt it. But don't let this thought worry you. A holy man, Pope Innocent the Tenth, slept here also when he visited Poggio."

That was a more comforting thought.

"And here the good Countess of Cervara slumbered peacefully," Temistocle said.

The Poggiolani filed out the door. I began to feel lonely and wished they were going to stay all night and sleep on couches at my feet.

"Just call from the *loggiate* if you want anything," the baron said.

"We lock you in," we heard from the outside. "*Buona notte!*"

"*Buona notte!*" we called to them as our only connection with the world outside tramped home across the little square.

] 43 [

## WHISTLING GHOSTS

I WAS FAST ASLEEP when Nina screamed and woke me up.

"What's the matter?"

"A ghost," she whispered.

"I don't see anything. You just imagine it." I tried to go back to sleep, but Nina was choking with fear and mumbling things. I gave another look. In front of the oil lamp on the chest I saw something moving. My heart jumped to my throat and I covered my head.

] 44 [

## WHISTLING GHOSTS

"Near the lamp?" whispered Nina.

"Yes."

"Very dark?"

"Black."

There was a silence.

"Maybe it's gone. Then we could run downstairs," she pleaded. I gave another look and quickly covered my head again.

"Now it's right over my left shoulder."

A silence followed which neither cared to break. Soon I felt something on my leg, and I dared give another quick look.

"There are a whole lot of them! The room is full of them and they are all black! The people in the *osteria* must be right." Nina started to cry.

"Are they whistling, or is it in my ear?" I asked. Yes, they were actually whistling. I looked again.

Ghastly things were swooping around and around the room in black circles.

"They are birds, just little birds. Nothing to be afraid of."

"Birds?" Nina put her head out. "They are bats!" In single thought we rushed to the *loggiato*.

"Eh, Poggiolani! Come! *Aiuto!* Help!"

In a few seconds the doors of the little houses flew open and, like cuckoos in cuckoo clocks, people hurried out with lanterns and crossed the *piazza* to the castle door.

] 45 [

## LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

"Courage! Courage!" they called.

"The bats come inside at night if there is light," said Temistocle, breaking into the room, followed by the others.

The Poggiolani took towels and pieces of paper and wet them in the water jug. We threw these weapons at the bats. They flapped their wings, circled wildly, and fell as they were hit.

When they were all cleared out, Lorenzo went off to search for some netting to screen the windows. Eugenio stood guard to prevent other bats from flying in. Sleepily we sat around the room. Suddenly we discovered that Veneranda was no longer with us.

"She must have run down after Lorenzo," Serafino, her father, said. "Ah, Signore, what a problem to bring up a motherless girl!" The frail old man trembled with agitation.

An hour passed before the boy came hurrying up the stairs, the netting under his arm.

Temistocle and Eugenio screened the windows and said, "Good night. Now you will be safe." The townsfolk started to troop out.

"But where is Veneranda?" Nina asked.

Serafino said, "Didn't she find you, Lorenzo?"

"Why, no." The women looked at each other and Leontina started to sing, "Tra-la-la, la-la-la . . ."

And all the women followed: "Tra-la-la, la-la-la . . ."

Serafino raised his head in despair.

] 46 [

## WHISTLING GHOSTS

"When God sent me this daughter, he sent me too much—too much!"

The gentle sound of a flute woke up the castle lord. It came from outside the window. It was mellow and high, like the voice of a canary.

"Are they serenading us?" asked Nina.

"It must be the medieval custom of waking up castle lords," I said. "Quite early, though." We went to the window and lifted the netting. It was dawn. Sitting on a rock, the pink sky in the background, was a shepherd, blowing his flute while minding his flock. A big, white shepherd dog trotted in circles around them, and jumped with his head straight up, his white, long fur shining.

Elena came to the door, dressed in a long peasant dress. "Breakfast is ready," she said.

"Fine, *bambina*." We followed her to the *loggiato* and sat at the table. Down in the *cortile*, white, fan-tailed pigeons strutted and cooed up and down the stairway rails. The five young birds were still in the nest with their mouths open.

On the other side we looked over our little town, held between the encircling arms of the castle. There were no more than two dozen little houses. "It's a baby town," I thought, "just right for me, for I am not a big man."

In the *piazza* below, women were drawing water from the well.

] 47 [

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

Sitting on the steps of her house, sewing tiny things, was Delfina, Andrea's young bride.

"She looks like a girl in Botticelli's 'Spring,'" said Nina, who, being an artist, immediately picks up resemblances. "And she is expecting a baby, too, like the girls in the picture."

"She is the daughter of a shepherd of Orte," said Elena, as if that explained everything.

"That is fine, but," I said, puzzled, "do you see a roof over their house?"

"No," said Nina, a little startled, "I don't."

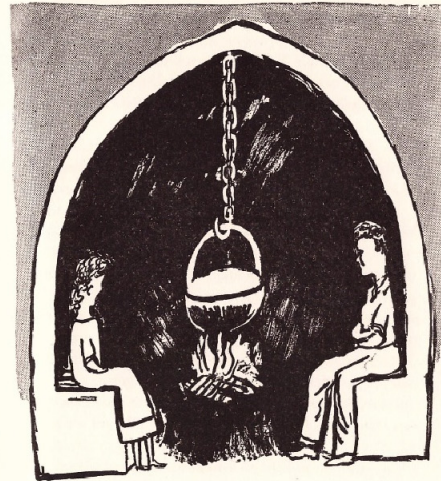
"There is no roof," said Elena positively.

I saw Genoveffa coming out of the house across the square. She went to draw water from the well and poured it over the carnations decorating her doorsteps. Hers was a miniature dwelling, built into an arch facing the castle.

"That window above the arch is the baron's bedroom," said Elena, who had followed the direction of my eyes. It was picturesque and unusual as the owner himself. On the top of it was the large, ancient bell that had welcomed us.

On the embroidered tablecloth Elena placed two crockery containers, one filled with hot coffee, the other with hot milk, and a plate of sweet *ricotta*, to be spread over bread toasted on charcoal. We were engaged in this pleasant occupation when a big crash was heard within the castle. Nina looked at me. "Shingles," I whispered.

] 48 [



abraham

ANDREA AND DELFINA

WHISTLING GHOSTS

"Marcellina, *ladra*! Marcellina, thief! Come here!" Elena called. I saw the little girl, in a red dress, stop reluctantly in a doorway.

"She has been stealing something," Elena explained, and grabbed Marcellina and brought her to us. The little one looked scared and kept both hands stuffed in her pockets.

"Let them see your pockets," Elena demanded.

Marcellina turned to Nina pitifully. "Signora, let me run home first, and then I will show them to you."

"No," said Elena. "Let them see them now."

"Signora, let me go into the next room. Then I will come back and show you my pockets."

Nina said, "*Si, si*. Let her go, Elena." Marcellina ran into the next room and dropped the contents of her pockets into a basket. Elena gave me a look. Yes, the child was a thief, all right. She had stolen three of my cigar butts.

Marcellina returned, all smiles, and showed us her empty pockets. I handed her a slice of bread with *ricotta*. She took a big bite and looked at me with gleaming eyes and smiled.

"Take this cigar to your father," I said.

"*Si, si*, Cheemy!" she cried, and ran away, proudly carrying the cigar to Temistocle. We went back to our *caffè e latte*.

After a while Temistocle came in, smoking my cigar.

] 51 [

"Grazie," he said, "it is a good flavor. I am going to fill the bats' holes. I got the cement."

"Baron," I said, "I will pay one lira for every bat you people kill."

He nodded appreciatively. I looked back over the town tops. I rested my eyes on Delfina's home and meditated.

So far the position of boss of this diminutive town had meant only a joke to me. Now, all of a sudden, it assumed different proportions. In this small town of mine, in that roofless house, a baby was going to be born, and I, after all, was the landlord.

Another crash of shingles from the left wing of our roof interrupted my thinking. I swallowed some more *caffè e latte*.

"Does this go on all the time—these shingles dropping, I mean?"

"As long as I can remember," said the baron.

Then I said resolutely, "There is no use in being the owner of a roofless castle. Baron! We are going to repair the roofs, all of them. Get me cement, get me shingles, get me—get me everything."

Nina swallowed some *ricotta* the wrong way and had a series of hiccups. Temistocle stared at me seriously, almost with reverence, then looked regally out over the town tops and, his arms outstretched, shouted to the women around the well in the piazza, "The roofs of the Rock of Poggio are going to be repaired *Viva! Viva! Viva!*"

] 52 [

## THE VILLAIN OF POGGIO

MARCELLINA CAME RUNNING to us crying hysterically, "Alfreduzzo has killed Bella Bella!"

It sounded horrible. Even though this was Umbria "*dolce e gentile*," just the same somebody had killed somebody.

"Who killed who?" I asked.

"Alfreduzzo has killed Bella Bella."

"Who is Bella Bella?"

"The goose. Bad Alfreduzzo!" she wailed.

] 53 [

"You mean the black-eyed one?" What's bad about that, I thought to myself.

"No. One of the baby geese. Small, like this. Come and see."

Nina and I followed Marcellina to her house. There sat Genoveffa surrounded by her neighbors. Her nose was as red as the carnations on her window sill. Her eyes were full of tears.

When she saw us she cried, "Alfreduzzo is a villain! He killed Bella Bella."

Up on the roof, his black curls tumbling down over his blinking eyes, crouched Alfreduzzo. He was trembling with fright.

"What a shame, Alfreduzzo," said Nina. He burst into tears, lost his balance, and came sliding down.

"She was hidden by the grass and I stepped on her. I could not see her," cried Alfreduzzo.

"I could have raised her and we would have eaten her in two months," said Genoveffa.

To the people of Poggio the death of a goose that could have been eaten is a serious business. There was angry talk on all sides as everyone sized up the loss.

"This boy is a troublemaker!"

"What can you expect from a boy named Alfreduzzo? A child with the name of that evil man can bring nothing but sorrow to his parents!"

"Si, is the curse of Alfreduzzo the Third," said his father, shaking his head.

] 54 [



ALFREDUZZO

"Curse, my eye!" I said to Nina, and started back to the castle.

"We must do something to make them change their ideas about Alfreduzzo. He's not really a bad boy."

"Sure he isn't. Let's show them that he isn't."

"But how? We must think of something."

"I've got it. We need some eggs. Let's send Alfreduzzo down to the farm to get them. They'll see that we trust him."

We sent for Alfreduzzo. He came in looking nervous and on guard. We could see that he was all prepared for more trouble. When Nina stretched out her hand to him, he jumped back like a scared rabbit.

"Don't be afraid, Alfreduzzo. I only wanted to pat your head," Nina said.

Half smiling, he nodded his head in Nina's direction, but his legs were ready to run.

"Alfreduzzo, would you like to do something for us?" I asked.

He looked up. His eyes were sparkling.

"Good. Here is some money. Go down to the farm and buy a dozen eggs."

He took the money, stared at us doubtfully, and walked away. Not more than five minutes passed before I heard a lot of commotion in the courtyard. News travels fast in Poggio. I went down ready to face the music. Everyone was jabbering excitedly.

"Alfreduzzo to buy a dozen eggs! He will break them."

] 37 [

"Do not send him! You will waste five lire."

Alfreduzzo was huddled in a corner of the square, weeping. I went over to him with the Poggiolani trailing along behind.

"Signor Savo," cried Alfreduzzo, "don't send me. I will break the eggs."

"No, you won't."

"I will. You will lose five lire. Don't send me."

In the meantime, Nina had sent Elena to the kitchen to bring a little basket with straw in the bottom. I handed it to Alfreduzzo and gave him several assuring pats on the back. He started slowly on his way, with tears streaming down his face.

The Poggiolani shook their heads as if they thought we were crazy. Five lire would be thrown away—the price of a woman's work for a whole day. Twenty-five cents. We could see that they were all hoping that Alfreduzzo would break the eggs. It would teach us a lesson.

Hours passed and there was no sign of Alfreduzzo. As the sun began to set, one by one everyone moved to the gate at the edge of the town. The Poggiolani grouped themselves on one side, and Nina and I stood on the other. As it grew darker, they became more and more pleased with themselves. Genoveffa buzzed in and out of the crowd lining up witnesses to the fact that she had warned us, that whatever happened, it wouldn't be her fault.

Finally, Delfina ran down the hill to look for Alfreduzzo. When it was almost dark, they appeared. Delfina

] 58 [

was carrying the basket, while Alfreduzzo followed her meekly.

"He didn't break the eggs!" shouted Delfina. She had found him, down on the mountainside, sitting beside the basket watching over the eggs.

The Poggiolani were so amazed that for once they were speechless.

To celebrate the occasion we asked Alfreduzzo to have dinner with us. He rushed away to wash his face and hands. In a few minutes he was back looking scrubbed and happy.

When we sat down at the table, the first thing he did was to snatch all the slices of bread in front of him and stuff them in his pockets. We did not say anything. After all, he was our guest.

When Lorenzo brought in the soup, Alfreduzzo didn't seem very interested. He took a little and finished it, but he was pretty blasé about the whole thing. Then came the roast chicken. Alfreduzzo's eyes lit up. He dove into his pocket and brought out a slice of bread, took his portion of chicken from his plate, and put it on the bread. Then he dug out another slice of bread and put it on top of the chicken. He jumped up, holding all of it as if it were a treasure. "I take it to my mother," he said, and ran away.

Then we understood about the soup. It hadn't appealed to him for the simple reason that he couldn't carry it off to his mother.

That was the end of our guest for that day. He never came back.

] 59 [

## VENERANDA'S GOOD NAME

IT WAS DAYBREAK when mules arrived carrying cement, lumber, and shingles. From his log, old Joe saw them winding up the path far below and gave the news to Alfredo, who spread it to us. Their faces shining with joy, the Poggiolani rushed to the gate to meet the little caravan and convoy it to the piazza.

Every shingle was laid on straw over the pavement. Eugenio and Calliope ran for shovel, pails, ladders. Settimia and Leontina began drawing water from the well to mix cement. Temistocle was distributing bundles

] 60 [

## VENERANDA'S GOOD NAME

of shingles to be carried to the castle and to the front of Poggio's homes, when the bell suddenly rang.

"Is it a storm?" I asked. No, the sky was as clear as ever.

"*Visite! Visite!*" Joe came to inform us. The Poggiolani deposited the shingles on the straw. It was evident that not often did visitors climb up to our town. The incident seemed important enough to call for everybody's presence. Women smoothed their aprons; men went to get their black hats; and we all moved to the arched entrance of Poggio.

Along the road up the mountain we saw a lady in white on a donkey, with the twins walking beside her. She was holding a white parasol open over her head. Nina, who had also looked up at the sky searching for the storm, now saw the lady with the parasol and recognized her mother. She ran down from the castle with old Emma and the children and met us at the gate. The small caravan meantime disappeared behind curves and trees.

The eyes of the people of Poggio gleaming with new hopes of banqueting, we all walked down to meet her. When they reappeared, the men of Poggio waved their large black hats with the greatest degree of enthusiasm.

"I came out camping, too," La Signora said. Nina's mother always reminds me of a little girl all ready to go to church and very careful not to get her dress soiled.

As we reached the gate, I lifted her from the donkey and put her on the ground.

"I am puzzled," she said. "In Rome you told me that

] 61 [

## LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

you would stay only a day or two, and now everybody in the valley is saying that you are going to rebuild the town—and have you bought twenty yards of netting for the windows to keep out ghosts?" She whispered in my ear worriedly, "Are there really ghosts here? If there are, I go right back."

"Bats," I said. "Just bats."

We escorted her to the castle and selected a room we thought would please her. As we walked across it, the floor shook under our feet.

"It isn't quite steady," she said uneasily.

"The right wing is all like this," I explained, "but I will fix it."

"You?" she asked, genuinely surprised.

"They have appointed me the town architect," I said modestly. "They think I can do everything and anything."

"Well," she said, "on second thought the floor is not really unsteady. After all, it has stood up for so long." She smiled at me. "Just put some netting at these windows."

Veneranda came in with La Signora's valises on her head.

"*Grazie, dear,*" said La Signora. "Put it over there. . . . What a lovely girl," she remarked.

"This girl would make a good maid for you," I said. "She is smart."

] 62 [

## VENERANDA'S GOOD NAME

"I need a maid," said Nina's mother, with an appreciative nod for my suggestion. "That's a good idea. I think I will call her to the castle and start teaching her while I am here," went on La Signora. "How would you like to come to Rome with me?" she asked the girl. "You could help me."

Veneranda's eyes blazed and then blinked like a camera shutter. She rushed to La Signora and kissed her hand. Then she turned and ran out of the room with so much vigor that it made the floor shake terribly.

Soon the town was buzzing. The *cortile* became crowded. We heard the sound of excited voices.

"Veneranda to be La Signora's maid? . . . Veneranda to live in the castle? . . . Veneranda to Rome?"

La Signora, Nina, and I leaned out of the windows over the *cortile*. All of Poggio seemed to be there.

"What's the matter with them?" I asked Nina.

"Signora, Veneranda is a bad girl. She'll be running out nights in Rome, too. She'll disgrace you. She'll disgrace us. She'll be the disgrace of all Poggio in Rome!" several voices said from the *cortile*.

"For Poggio's sake and reputation, do not take her to Rome!" Leontina said.

"You'll be sorry!" sang Marcellina.

La Signora leaned out from her window, which faced

] 63 [

ours. She held out her hands, and when the people of Poggio quieted down, she spoke.

"Veneranda is a bad girl? Well, my dear friends, one more reason for taking her into my custody. I promise you that I will make a good girl of her. It will be my duty and my mission. Rely on me!"

Nina and I stood at my window and admired her. She had been handling the situation like a Dale Carnegie. The Poggiolani's sense of indignation boiled down. The truth had been admitted. La Signora had accepted the fact that Veneranda was a bad girl. She had promised that she would undertake to reform her. The people of Poggio were spellbound. The rumble of their protests died out like a stormy sea changing to calm. But then little stabs of doubt crept up.

"Will she succeed? I doubt it, I doubt it," the people whispered to each other, and left the *cortile*.

Veneranda was sitting by the well in the piazza, weeping. La Signora went down the steps and over to her.

"Your tears are falling into the well. Don't you know that that is drinking water? You ought to know better!" And she took the girl by the hand and brought her up to the castle.

I was supervising the cleaning of Cervara Hall, which was to be our living room. Little Elena was listening to

] 64 [

my suggestions attentively. The women came into the hall with water and cleaning things. They let the pails down off their heads and set them on the floor. Then, without a word, they started to walk away.

"Where are you going?"

"We are sorry, Signor Savo," said Leontina with the attitude of one who has been highly offended, "but we cannot stay inside the castle while Veneranda is here."

"What's the trouble? I will fix it up."

"With her here, no," Settimia said. Leontina backed her up with a nod.

"Virtue ought to be rewarded, not sin," mumbled Settimia.

"She is like a stem with thorns and no blossoms," said Genoveffa.

"Why, she would not even dare to ask for her dowry, even if she found a man to marry her," Leontina declared.

"Dowry?" I asked, dumfounded.

"Veneranda is a flirt," said Genoveffa.

"Well, she's young," I said indulgently.

"But she tries to flirt with my husband!"

"And with mine?" said Leontina.

"And mine!" said Settimia.

"Well, then, one more reason to want to get rid of her."

"Yes, but not to Rome."

Veneranda came running up the stairs from the *cortile*.

] 65 [

She was suffering from another crying spell. When she saw me, she threw herself at my feet and grabbed my knees.

"They say La Signora will not take me to Rome!" she cried.

I am not used to beautiful blondes throwing themselves at my feet. I felt a little fidgety, but I tried to assume a debonair manner.

"Never mind what they say," I told her.

The three women had retired to a corner of the room and frowned and watched.

Veneranda went on, pleading, "Will you tell La Signora to take me to Rome?"

"Sure, sure, I promise. She will take you to Rome. Now go and dry your tears. And wash your face."

At last Veneranda let my knees go, got up, and made for the door. There she swiftly turned. Her tears had gone and she smiled. Then, quickly, she raised her right foot and, pointing the bare toe at me, wiggled it. She looked triumphantly at the three women in the corner and left. They exploded.

"Santo Dio!"

"Achee!"

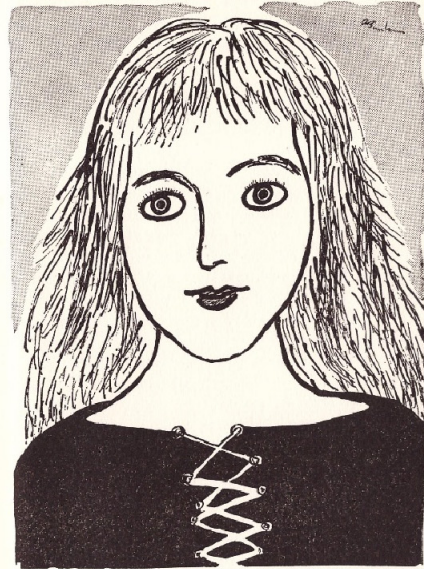
"Achee!"

"That's the evil she uses on my husband! That's what she does!" cried Settimia.

"But that's not so bad, that's not evil!"

I went to the library and looked out of the window.

] 66 [



VENERANDA

Temistocle was at work. He was just the man I wanted.  
"Come up, Baron, and have a glass of wine," I called to him.

He put his tools down hurriedly and ran up the steps. I poured the wine and we drank to each other's health.

"What's this I hear about Veneranda's dowry?" I asked. "Leontina said that Veneranda would never dare to ask for her dowry. How can Serafino, who is the poorest father I have ever known, give his daughter a dowry?"

Temistocle sat silent for a while, his lips tight, and looked straight ahead at the frescoes over the fireplace, an attitude he assumed when thinking. "That coat of arms," he said, "is fading. It should be restored. A grandfather of Carletto of Todi had the secret for restoring old frescoes. We should ask Carletto."

"I don't know any Carletto. Tell me about Veneranda."

"*Bene*. May I call your attention to the mountain over there?" He pointed out the window. "See the bastions and the towers left of what was once the Castello di Cervara? Four hundred years ago the Countess di Cervara came here to La Rocca di Poggio to marry—the coat of arms is hers. As you will notice, it represents a deer. A *cervo*. From *cervo* derives the name, Cervara. It should be restored."

"I will, if you say so. But not right this minute. How about the dowry?"

"*Amico*, with your permission, I am telling you. She is the one who left the dowry. The Countess."

] 69 [

"Who for? Veneranda?"

"Yes, for Veneranda, also for all the girls of Poggio. She left it written in her will. Forever and ever . . ."

"How much?"

"Six hundred lire."

"Thirty dollars." Not much, I thought.

"But there is a . . ."

"There is a catch?"

"Si."

"Thirty dollars and also a catch!"

"The girl must be of good reputation. They must all be virtuous girls."

I left him to his glass and went back to Cervara Hall. Veneranda was on her knees scrubbing the floor, all alone.

] 70 [

## 9

### GOODBYE, VENERANDA

SINCE DAWN, in every corner of the town, men, women, and children had been working and singing. When eleven o'clock came and the August sun was at its hottest, all tools were laid down. The workers returned to their homes for lunch. The morning's work was finished.

After lunch I sat in the *loggiate* in a big chair with my little cigar. I watched the Poggiolani come out of their houses, one by one, make for the nearest cool spot, stretch out, and go to sleep. It was the siesta hour. There would

] 71 [

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

be not a sound or a sign of life in Poggio until two o'clock. La Bionda was sleeping beside Lorenzo under the arch supporting the baron's bedroom and the bell. The geese lay by the well in the shadow. Everything was peaceful. I nodded.

I was lying with hands behind my head on a floating cloud of beautiful soapsuds. Little bubbles flew from the edges of the clouds, orange-colored crystal bubbles that became gold pieces, landing on the lap of Veneranda, who was sitting in the field.

Around her the women of Poggio stood singing, "She is bad, she is bad, tra-la-la-la . . ."

Then I found myself in the castle, wrapped in a bed sheet, with bats around me swooping and hissing, and the hiss became so strong it woke me up.

"Sssssss!"

It was a sound to which I had become accustomed. I leaned over the rail and looked down. Black Eye stretched his head up at me and hissed impudently.

That one is the worm in the apple, I thought, watching the dreadful goose. That one must be the reincarnation of Alfreduzzo the Terrible.

I got up and strolled down the steps and out of the castle. I tiptoed across the square, passed under the arch, and reached the gate of Poggio.

Old Joe was sitting on the log looking at the scenery. I sat down near him. I gave him a lozenge and we gazed at the scenery together.

] 72 [

GOODBYE, VENERANDA

Gian-Domenico had led his three sheep to the pasture in the fields below and was now heading back to Poggio to join the others at work.

"Joe," I said, "is it true that Gian-Domenico has never spoken in twenty years?"

"Sì, Sì."

"Twenty years. It's a long time not even to say *buon giorno* or *buona notte*. Why won't he talk?"

For some time Joe sat pondering, scuffing the dirt with his cane.

"Every year, the day of the festa of the Saint Patron of Orvieto, Gian-Domenico left Poggio at dawn and walked sixteen miles to the home of his childhood friend who had settled in that town," Joe said.

"The last time, though, he found a note on the door knob. 'Goodbye, my friend,' the note said. Some neighbors related that the poor man had been taken away with his wife and children in a truck in the middle of the night. Why? Nobody knew why for sure. Some people believe it was all because he had the habit of cursing the king—he used to do it every day—and sometimes even others in high places. The poor man was never heard of since.

"Now we tell Gian-Domenico, 'We only say *chee-chee* when we curse. Why won't you talk?' But still he will not talk."

Old Joe scuffed some more dirt with his cane and we quietly gazed over the green valley.

] 73 [

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

After a while I asked, "What does *chee-chee* mean?"

"It is a way of cursing without paying the fine."

"Are you talking about cursing? Swearing?"

"Sì. Here to curse is forbidden by law. If one curses and is heard, one is fined, so we invent words that are meaningless, like *achee*, but that permit us to express our feelings. To us they are curses. To the government it is as if we were sneezing."

Old Joe hesitated, then asked, "Signore, can you curse in America without paying a fine?"

"Sure," I said.

"Ah, America is for me," old Joe said, and silently we gazed out over the valley, dreaming of the happy land where a man can swear for nothing.

The siesta was over. We returned to the castle. The Poggiolani started to move industriously. Settimia and Emma came into the *cortile* with buckets of cement on their heads.

La Signora, Nina, and Veneranda descended from the guest apartment. La Signora held the white parasol over her head, and in the other hand an Alpine stick. Nina carried one, too. Veneranda had a picnic basket swinging over her arm.

"Join us for a walk in the woods?" asked Nina.

"No, thank you. I am busy. How is your floor?" I asked La Signora.

"A bit shaky," she said. "But I am quite comfortable," she added, somewhat uncertainly.

] 74 [



OLD JOE

"Comfortable!" How could she possibly be comfortable in a room with a floor that shook as if there were an earthquake every time she walked across it? A guest should be given more consideration. As soon as she walked out of the gate of Poggio, I called, "Lorenzo, Calliope, Gian-Domenico, Eugenio!"

They came in a hurry. I explained what I had in mind. The men went to get rope, blocks, iron bars, and hammers. When they returned, we went off together to the cellar under the guest wing. It was a jumble of pillars and arches. Overhead was a forest of beams. They all looked alike. For a moment I was stumped. Then I announced, "This is the bad one!" They said, "Sì, sì," and that was all. I had only put out a feeler, sure that they knew more than I did, but they just yessed me. I hit the beam with a big hammer. It was the right one, no mistake about that. It was so loose it flew through the air. I yelled, "Timber! Timber!"

Too late. One end hit Gian-Domenico a glancing blow. He spun around and fell to the ground. We all ran to him.

For a second I thought the poor bell ringer was dead. He lay still, with his eyes closed. Then he began to moan.

Immediately I sent Lorenzo down the hill for a doctor. We made a stretcher out of a blanket and took Gian-Domenico home to bed.

Leontina, Emma, Andrea, Delfina, Serafina, Elena,

] 76 [

the baron, and old Joe came in. Though visibly upset, the Poggiolani didn't complain—not loudly, anyway. They seemed willing to accept anything that came with me as the work of fate. They were the picture of resignation. Elena took off her father's shoes. They were as worn out as my stage shoes which I had patched over and over again for twenty years.

"Give him a sip of wine," said old Joe. But Leontina had no wine. Temistocle, with an approving nod for Joe's suggestion, sent Elena to the castle's kitchen for a jug. Gian-Domenico's sheep came in, one following the other, and circled around the room. It was their pasture time.

Elena came running back with the wine jug. Leontina poured some wine in a glass, lifted Gian-Domenico's head with her arm, and gave him to drink.

"Feel better?" Temistocle asked.

Gian-Domenico nodded and took a deep breath. Leontina smiled. Temistocle poured himself one and raised his glass to a toast.

"That it may not rain till Gian-Domenico feels well again."

"Bene," I said wholeheartedly.

"Bene," said everyone.

Lorenzo had come back. He had not found the doctor, who had been called by a farmer in the valley. But Napoleone had come with him. She had some experience as a nurse. She rolled her sleeves up over her fat arms and

] 77 [

got hold of Gian-Domenico's shoulder and massaged it vigorously. She pulled his arm back into shape and wrapped it tight.

"Stay in bed," she said. "You must keep still and you will be well."

"Gian-Domenico was so glad to have work," said Leontina sadly.

I gave her some money. Then I picked up Gian-Domenico's stick and led his sheep to the pasture.

The sheep knew the way. They led and I followed. The wind was blowing, bending the branches of the olive trees and carrying the sound of the shepherd's flute. A small white rabbit crossed the path.

Who ever thought I would become a shepherd? I should learn to play the flute, too. And buy myself a pair of hob-nail shoes . . . As my sheep paused to eat some greens, I sat on a stone. When they went, I followed. The sound of the flute was now closer.

Suddenly, from behind a bush, an enormous white dog jumped at me, barking viciously. It was the shepherd's dog. Around his neck he had a collar with long nails sticking out. They were intended for the teeth of an assailing wolf, but the sight of them added to my discomfort. I held him off with my stick and, my heart in my mouth, backed to a tree. In no time I had climbed up a branch.

The dog barked furiously and tried to jump to my branch. I looked at my three sheep for protection, but

] 78 [

they were running down the slope. "Let them run to Rome," I said to myself. "I am not going to stir from this branch till someone comes to my rescue." But another voice scolded from within. "Poor Gian-Domenico. First I put him in bed; then I lose his sheep . . ." The dog was staring at me with red eyes.

I heard three staccato notes, like a call. The dog dropped his tail and his fierce head. He gave me a side glance with a *sotto-voce* grumble and turned in the direction of the whistle. The flute continued to fire staccato notes, evidently a reproachful language to the dog but a very happy one for me. I looked around and saw the shepherd sitting on a rock, like a faun. His flaming-red hair curled down his neck. With bare tanned arms sticking out of a white sheepskin vest, his fingers fluttered up and down the flute, like butterfly wings. When the dog reached him, he rose from the rock, and together they ran down the slope.

Then I heard the melody of the flute again. The shepherd reappeared leading Gian-Domenico's three sheep to me.

"Grazie. How gracious of you," I said from the tree.

"These are Gian-Domenico's sheep," he said, without looking up at me. Strange shepherd! He didn't seem curious about anything outside his world.

"Yes. I am minding them for him," I said. Unlike him, I was very curious. From the tree I could see only the top

] 79 [

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

of his red curly hair. I had never met a shepherd before. His simple life was puzzling to me.

"Shepherd," I asked, "all alone in the middle of mountains and woods, always alone, don't you get lonesome sometime?"

His head turned down and his hand patted the head of his dog. He didn't answer for a while. Then he turned to the scenery ahead and slowly his open hand indicated the fields and valleys to the horizon.

He had no other answer for me. He put his flute to his lips and went back to his flock. The fearful dog followed, tame as a lamb.

I was about to descend from the tree when I discovered Nina, her mother, and Veneranda climbing the path. I hoped they wouldn't see me. I didn't stir. There would be too much questioning. But Veneranda, her picnic basket swinging on her arm, saw me.

"The Lord of the Rock! What is he doing up on that branch? And these are Gian-Domenico's sheep!" cried Veneranda.

"Yes," I said, trying to be casual. "I am just minding them for him."

Nina's mother looked at me a little worriedly. Veneranda was astonished. I could see she considered it all very unfitting a lord of the Rock of Poggio. Nina had taken her handkerchief out to smother a smile.

] 80 [

GOODBYE, VENERANDA

I jumped from my branch and led the sheep back to Poggio, where more explanations would have to be given.

The floor of the apartment rocked more than ever every time someone passed over it. La Signora said she had to go to Rome next morning on urgent matters. Nina and I were very sorry and embarrassed, but Veneranda made the castle's floor shake under her dancing feet. La Signora was really taking her to Rome!

"Can you imagine! I'll be the only one here who ever saw Rome! Is it true that there are spraying fountains in Rome with the rainbow in them, and women have beautiful dresses?" she asked.

"You will have to have shoes," said La Signora practically, looking at the girl's feet.

"Shoes? With big nails at the bottom?"

"In Rome you will not need nails."

Next morning, in silent protest, the women of Poggio did not come to say goodbye. They remained in their homes behind window sills. But the men of Poggio were all by the gate to see Veneranda off, and Serafino looked at his daughter with eyes full of tears. She threw her arms around him.

"*Paparino*, I will send you all the money I'll make," she cried, and hugged him. And he handed her a loaf of bread as a farewell present.

] 81 [

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

"Do they have a gate in Rome, too, so they can watch if she goes out at night?" asked old Joe.

"I will watch," promised La Signora.

"Go to see the Pope," said Andrea, "and be good."

"And visit the Colosseum!" said Temistocle.

We started down the hill.

"*Addio, mamma!*" said Nina, as we helped La Signora into a car down on the white road. I felt a twinge of guilt as I said goodbye to her, but she was a good sport.

"Don't feel badly about the floor. I really had to go to Rome." And she whispered in my ear, "I hate sponge baths!"

As Nina and I climbed soberly back up the winding path to the castle, we heard the melody of the faraway flute echoed by the mountains.

] 82 [

10

THE FACE IN THE WINDOW

IN A FEW WEEKS it would be time for the annual fiesta of Poggio. People from miles around would come to visit us. For this occasion I had ordered two barrels of wine. The twins, who had escorted me the day of our arrival, came into the *cortile* with La Bionda, who carried the barrels, one on each of her sides. Old Joe led the group into the armory, where the two men started to unstrap the barrels. Temistocle rushed in, beaming.

"Taste the wine, *Barone*," said Joe. "See if it's the

] 83 [

best." With the air of a connoisseur, Temistocle poured himself one from the spigot.

"It has the bouquet. It has the taste. It is a comfort to the tongue, a friend of the palate, a boon. Ah, *amico*, this is good wine!"

There was a rustle of wind outside. In a few minutes it began to get dark. Some drops of rain pattered on the mossy stones. I filled glasses and passed them.

We drank. The rain was coming down in big drops. The armory filled with Poggiolani. I passed them wine as they came in.

Out over the valley a rumbling of thunder was heard. It worried me. What if there should be lightning, with Gian-Domenico lying in bed with his arm in a sling? Quickly I passed more glasses around and turned to Temistocle.

"Barone, how about that story you were going to tell me over that glass of wine?"

Old Joe called for the story of the treasure in the tower, and I would have liked it best, too. But the women were more eager for the story of the beautiful wife of Alfreduzzo the Third. I didn't even know he had a wife, but O.K. All I wanted was to keep their minds off Gian-Domenico. For the first time the bell wasn't going to ring during a storm.

The baron stood still, arranging his thoughts. His right leg dropped back of the left.

"Here in the great halls of this castle and in all the country around, as our grandfathers said, Alfreduzzo

] 84 [

was once an illustrious name. Alfreduzzo the First built the castle. He was a good man. After him came Alfreduzzo the Second, another good man. Then came Alfreduzzo the Third, the last, except for our Alfreduzzo."

Everybody turned to look at the boy, who was sitting beside me.

"Alfreduzzo the Third was a rogue, a knave, a tyrant, a foul and bloody murderer. He destroyed the illustrious name of La Rocca di Poggio, brought misery to everyone."

"Just like our Alfreduzzo!" interrupted Calliope. The rest nodded in sad agreement. I looked at our Alfreduzzo, who they said was a rogue, a foul and bloody murderer, a tyrant, and laid everything waste. Naturally, he was a little embarrassed.

The baron went on.

"Alfreduzzo was violent, unscrupulous, and greedy. Everything he saw he coveted—gold, jewels, land, serfs, women. With his army of cutthroats he marched over the land, attacking, murdering, plundering. His wickedness reached such heights that finally as a punishment Pope Innocent the Tenth took the Rock of Poggio away from him."

I patted Alfreduzzo on the head.

"You see?" I said. "They'll take away your marbles if you don't behave!"

Thunder rumbled closer. The baron looked at me. I refilled the glasses.

Fortified by the wine, the baron took up the tale.

] 85 [

"Alfreduzzo the Third had a beautiful wife. Blonde she was, and kind, a slender, gracious woman with a soul like a poem by Dante. But her life was a life of misery. She had married this monster not because she wanted to, but because he had torn her from her family. She wandered through her gardens and about the castle. Her robes were of golden cloth and scarlet satin, and the pearls and rubies of her evil husband hung about her neck like chains. In her heart was only suffering. *Una donna miserabile!*

"While Alfreduzzo was away plundering his fellows, she had a few moments of felicity. When he returned, life was *un tormento!* The moment he stepped into the castle he would yell for her to bring him a goblet of wine."

Here the baron paused. I took the hint.

"For a time after his homecoming, he was soothed by the company of his wife. History says that he was even known to smile." I began to hope that Temistocle would be soothed for a while, or he would drink up all my barrel.

"Now comes the part I like the best," whispered Joe.

"It's wonderful what he is going to tell now," said Genoveffa, looking at her husband with adoration.

I was glad they thought so, for now the rain was coming down harder than ever.

"After a long absence one day Alfreduzzo arrived in Poggio at daybreak with a great clamor, his horsemen clattering behind him, drunk and shouting. As he rode

] 86 [



TEMISTOCLE

up the mountain, he looked up at the castle. What he saw made his heart jump. It was the white face of the exquisite Francesca at the window. He thought she was watching for him. He was transported. No man ever had such an excellent wife.

"But the next day, as he passed through the halls of the castle, he saw her at the window again. And it seemed to him that she was listening to something. He looked over her shoulder, but could see nothing but a shepherd sitting on a rock some distance away, playing his flute.

"Hark!" said the beautiful Francesca. "Is it not sweet, the music of the flute?"

"By Bacco!" roared Alfreduzzo, and he dragged his wife from the window. One of his men was sent to fetch the shepherd. The shepherd could not be found.

"The next day she was there again, listening, and the next day and the next. Alfreduzzo roared curses at the shepherd."

"And nobody could fine him for it," said Joe, leaning over to me.

"He swore that he would find a way to keep her from that window. Before leaving for his next war, he had the window walled up." The baron looked at me.

"That was the window next to your bedroom, *amico*," he said.

There was a terrible peal of thunder, and lightning flashed. I jumped up and filled all the glasses.

"The terrible Alfreduzzo left," went on Temistocle,

] 88 [

"sure that the beautiful Francesca's pleasure was ended. Passed weeks and months. Stories of castles looted and burned came back to the people of Poggio, and finally Alfreduzzo himself returned, only to find Francesca at another window. Alfreduzzo roared louder than before, '*Per Bacco!*'"

"And he had that window walled up, too." And turning to me Temistocle explained, "That is the second window you see in the wall next to your bedroom."

I took a drink. Two of my best windows! How dare he wall up my windows! I was getting mad. Go on, go on! Wall them all up! I shouted, in my mind. *Per Bacco!*

The baron continued.

"Stealing around the castle at dawn in search of her, Alfreduzzo would find the exquisite Francesca seated on the carved bench built into the recess of a window, her beautiful hair pouring gold down over her shoulders and her blue eyes fixed on the same shepherd playing the flute as before."

"Yes!" I yelled to myself. "Get her away from my window!"

"And he had that window walled up. And that is the third window you see in the left wing, next to the tower."

Then there was a beautiful flash of lightning. The light shot through the window as thunder crashed right over the castle roof. The women shrank and crossed themselves.

I filled all the glasses as fast as I could. What service

] 89 [

the Poggiolani were getting! And how they could put it away!

"Again she went back to the windows, drawn by the hope of hearing the shepherd's flute once more, until at last, one morning as she listened for the thin sweet notes that had become her passion, she heard a cry."

"Now comes the sad part," announced Joe.

"Alfreduzzo's men had tracked down the poor shepherd, dragged him below the window, and what the *squisita* Francesca saw was her husband driving a dagger into the young man's heart."

"Ah, *misericordia!*" murmured the Poggiolani.

"First they had tortured the boy to make him admit his relations with Francesca."

"Wasn't he innocent?" I asked. All the Poggiolani cried, "Of course he was innocent!"

"Innocent as a child! He was playing his flute only for his own pleasure and was too shy even to raise his eyes to the castle. He would never have dared to look at Alfreduzzo's lady. But Alfreduzzo could think good of no one, not even of the exquisite Francesca. The shepherd died in agony."

"Now," went on Temistocle, "what did Francesca do? She was at the window every day as before, listening to faraway music. The shepherd was dead, but she heard his music still. Alfreduzzo was beside himself."

"Oh, gosh!" I said. "Now he'll begin on the door."

] 90 [

"When he taunted her, she only smiled her saintly smile and said, 'Hark! Is it not beautiful, the music of the flute?' Alfreduzzo was mad with rage. He loved his wife, even so evil a man as he. But he threw her into the well—in that well in the *cortile*, where her face is still to be seen at night, when the moon is full."

The baron had picked the right moment for his climax. At that instant there was the most terrifying crash of thunder and a ball of fire struck the stones of the *cortile*. Genoveffa was thrown to the floor. Even Temistocle was shaken. Little Ambrosina sprang up and ran out the door, screaming.

In the flash I saw the twins, motionless against the wall as if they were a fresco painted on it. Only their eyelids drooped.

There was a dreadful silence and another flash. By the light of it we saw a figure silhouetted in the doorway. It was Ambrosina, holding a dead goose.

If the goose that Ambrosina held in her arms had been Black Eye, my spirits would have soared. But Black Eye was alive. And, if I were to credit the Poggiolani's whispering, this goose, whose name was Carina, had been gifted with all the virtues—long neck like a swan's, fat, beautiful white feathers that would have made a soft pillow, and, above all, she had laid big eggs that Genoveffa sold to Napoleone. Carina would have even sold for a big

] 91 [

prize at the fair, perhaps twenty-five lire. While the goose we were left with, Black Eye, didn't lay eggs, not being that kind of a goose.

Because the Lord of the Rock himself was the one responsible for the loss of Carina, Genoveffa couldn't even voice her sorrow. She just sat at the window of her ground floor, brooding. The storm had blown away and the square was glistening.

I was looking at her from a slit in the armory when Marcellina came to me holding a big egg in her little hands.

"This is Carina's last egg," she said, looking at me with sorrowful eyes, and gave me the egg. I went into the square, to the window where Genoveffa was brooding, and placed the egg in her hand. She fondled it and said, "We'll never get eggs like this any more." Then in her other hand I placed some bills. She was surprised. For a while she held them in a tight fist, then opened the fingers slowly.

"I never had so much wealth in my life!" she said. "Well, Carina was getting old, anyway," she added, and she gave me back the egg. "Eat it," she said.

] 92 [

## THE OLD AND THE NEW

SINCE THE CASTLE had very little furniture in it when we came, we were in the market for old pieces that would fit into a thirteenth-century place. In a farmer's kitchen we found an ancient table that Nina felt sure was at least four hundred years old. It certainly looked it. The farmer's wife had given up using it. We asked the farmer, "How much do you want for it?" He shrugged and said, "I would be glad if you would take it away." We did, and got a bright new city table for him with some modern

] 93 [

gadgets on it. He and his wife were delighted.

Naturally the word got around that "the Americans" were queer people who would buy things that other people were tired of looking at.

"I know where there are some old things, very old, worn out," said Joe.

"Where?" I asked eagerly.

"In Todi."

"How can I get there?"

"With La Bionda it will be an easy trip." Then he added bluntly. "But you would be a fool to buy them."

Next day at dawn I left, holding La Bionda by the bridle, with old Joe trudging along by my side.

In the town down the valley, next to Napoleone's inn, we met the shoemaker in front of his shop. I stopped and explained to him that I needed a pair of shoes with nails at the bottom—"the kind appropriate for taking sheep to pasture."

The effect of my request was unfortunate. The little man was so startled that he turned white and had to sit down.

"*Scusi, Signore*," said Joe, "it would be better to leave him now. He is not used to making shoes for foreigners. But he will make them when he has recovered."

Before showing me the road to Todi, Joe took me to a farmer who had things that had been around for a long time. We stopped at a house with a neat line of trees at each side of the entrance.

] 94 [

"I bring you the Lord of the Rock," said Joe to the farmer.

"Ah. The Americano who likes what is old." He was very pleased to meet me and showed me a hope chest.

"Another hope chest." We had plenty of them in every room. "I'm afraid we couldn't use it," I said. The farmer frowned.

"Is it worthless?" he asked.

"No, no. It's not that at all," I said. The farmer brightened.

"Come with me. I have something else."

"Fine."

"In this direction," he said. We followed him out into the fields. I was wondering why he kept an antique in the fields. It must be a statue. We arrived at a spot just below a cliff. A road ran above it. He looked at me expectantly and pointed to an object in the grass.

It was the chassis of a rusty old automobile. It must have fallen off the cliff in its youth.

"What about it?" he asked encouragingly.

"Thank you," I said. "Thank you. I would take it, but the horn is missing. Goodbye."

At a crossroad Joe and I separated. Joe went back to Poggio, and La Bionda and I went on to Todi.

The next morning at dawn I was climbing into a salmon sky. Across La Bionda's back lay a beautiful ancient bathtub which I had bought in Todi. It was of

] 95 [

marble and carved in figures. Once, thousands of years ago, it had been a *sarcófago*,\* the man who sold it to me said, but I didn't know the meaning of the word.

It had been a long trip. I was nearly asleep on my feet when the sweet sound of a flute made my drowsy eyelids open. On a hill under the castle wall sat the shepherd minding his flock. I looked up at the castle. In one of those windows Alfreduzzo the Third had walled up and I had just reopened appeared the face of a beautiful woman with blonde hair. *Squisita!* Just as the baron had described her! The ghost of Alfreduzzo's lovely Francesca was leaning out, listening to the shepherd's music. I nearly fell on my face. Was that a mirage? Was I that tired?

To make sure I put my head down, closed my eyes, waited a minute, and then quickly looked again. She was still there. It was no illusion.

Temistocle had warned me that it would be a mistake to reopen the windows. I closed my eyes again and, whispering a silent prayer, I grabbed La Bionda's tail and followed her to Poggio.

I had expected the whole town would be waiting to greet me, but when I arrived in Poggio Black Eye was the only living thing in sight.

From the direction of the castle, though, came the sounds of excited voices. Women and men of Poggio were gathered in the *cortile*.

\* *Sarcófago*: An ancient Roman casket.

"She has her lips painted," Settimia was saying.

"Just like a lady," young Elena said.

"Did you see the pretty shoes with high heels and open toes?" Delfina asked.

"It must be the style in Rome," Genoveffa, open-eyed, remarked. They looked so confounded. What was happening to them?

"Hello," I said.

They didn't even hear me. Their eyes and their attention were glued to the windows on the floor above. "Hello!" I called, louder. "Hello!" I repeated, a little mad. They turned and surrounded me.

"Veneranda is back. And she is wonderful!" Delfina clasped her hands.

"Her hair is cut and waved in curls. She is dressed as if for a fairy tale!" said Genoveffa.

That was the image of lovely Francesca I saw at the window, I thought. "But are you raving about Veneranda?" I asked. "The same girl you despised just a short while ago?"

"She is altogether another girl now," said Settimia.

"She is the darling of Poggio," said Leontina.

"Baron," I called to Temistocle, who seemed lost in dreams in the shadow under an arch. "Baron, explain all this to me."

The baron passed a thoughtful finger over his thick mustache. "Women are like cucumbers, *amico*. They can turn into sour or sweet pickles."

When she saw me, La Signora expressed nothing but the highest of praise, for I had fixed the floor of her apartment. I motioned her to follow me to the window and look down into the *cortile*. When she saw the antique tub that Lorenzo was taking down from La Bionda's back, and I told her it was meant for her apartment, she said, "Jeemy, it makes me feel like remaining here as long as you stay in Poggio!" And she called to Lorenzo, "Get pails of water boiling for that tub!"

Veneranda looked lovely indeed. A fashionable dress the color of Scottish bluebells, hair professionally bobbed and waved, open-toed shoes with high heels and silk stockings, had transformed a barefooted country girl with a pail of bricks on her head into a city beauty. But it was evident that riches do not make for happiness, for Veneranda did not look at all as a happy girl should look. Actually, she was crying. Nina, who was trying to console her, grabbed me and said, "Serafino has learned that she has cut her hair and he is very angry. He does not want to see her."

The Poggiolani did their best not to improve the situation by assuring her that she would be beaten. Veneranda sobbed louder. La Signora said that she should go to see her father just the same. She pulled her hair down low on the back of her neck, and pinned it into a small knot.

"He will never notice how short it is," La Signora said.

Reluctantly, Veneranda headed toward her father's

house. The little door was shut. Veneranda hesitated, then opened it and stood waiting. We who had followed saw Serafino gazing at her for a while, then his head nodded on one side, and he smiled.

"Daughter," he said proudly, "you look more like an angel than the angel at the entrance to the cathedral of Orvieto."

And Veneranda took from around her neck the ribbon from which hung the medal she had received in St. Peter's and put it around her father's neck.

PLEASE, VENERANDA,  
GET MARRIED!

THE POGGIOLANI boasted that a prettier girl than Veneranda could not be found in Todi, nor in Assisi, nor in Orvieto, and some said not even in Perugia. She was a credit to Poggio.

"There is no girl more beautiful in all Umbria!" said Temistocle, taking in more territory than the rest.

"You have never been farther away than Todi, Baron," said Joe, "but, I grant you, she is beautiful."

] 100 [

PLEASE, VENERANDA, GET MARRIED!

The news soon spread. The day after Veneranda came back new faces were seen in Poggio. People came from neighboring villages to have a look at our beauty.

The next night a young fellow was singing under my window:

Ve—ner—anda!  
I—fell in love  
With the dimples of your knee,  
With the dimples of your knee . . .

I said, "Fine!" and leaned out the window and joined in the singing. I became so wrapped up in the song that I gave out with my best tenor notes. He stopped singing, but kept accompanying me with his guitar, and when I finished he applauded. I took a bow, then gallantly pointing to a window, I whispered, "Veneranda is there."

"Grazie," he whispered back, and moved along strumming his guitar and started singing:

I—fell in love—  
With the dimples of your knee,  
With the dimples of your knee.  
I—fell in love—

Nina's mother appeared at the window. She said, "It's lovely, but you have the wrong window, my boy."

] 101 [

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

The tenor was not to be discouraged, however. He began to stroll up and down, crooning as he went. Finally, in the dark, we heard a giggle, and a young voice called softly, "I am over here, young man!"

The boy ran to her window, and his voice rang out:

I fell in love  
With the dimples of your knee . . .

The following night there was a beautiful moon. Once again we heard a guitar and a young voice singing a lovely Italian song. Nina sat at the window sill and looked puzzled.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Doesn't it sound different tonight?"

I listened closely.

"There are two different voices!" Nina said. "They come from different directions."

"Swell! Veneranda has two suitors. That's wonderful."

Because there were two of them, the music lasted a little longer. Each tried to outstay the other.

But that night was only the beginning. Soon we had five serenaders coming to Poggio.

One song they liked to sing particularly was that Italian folk song Tchaikovsky used as the melody for his *Caprice Italien*. It was all about beautiful Veneranda with the blonde braids and goes like this:

] 102 [

PLEASE, VENERANDA, GET MARRIED!



From inside the citadel the Poggiolani echoed:



The boys sang:



The Poggiolani chimed in:



A wave of romance swept Poggio. The men combed their hair smoothly when they appeared in the morning. Some wore their Sunday ties. Temistocle draped his coat over one shoulder all day. Leontina had a flirtatious air and a carnation dangled from her ear. Everyone whistled and sang the songs of the night before. The Poggiolani had fallen in love again.

Temistocle was gayer than any of the rest, but he

] 103 [

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

couldn't help saying that when he used to serenade Genoveffa he *had* a voice. "It was much nicer in my time. We *could* sing."

Wasn't it *meraviglioso*, the Poggiolani said. Veneranda could take her pick of five young men.

Five tenors courting made quite a lot of music for one evening. Since they were rivals, they wouldn't sing together and get it over with. This was good in that it gave everyone a chance to be heard, but no one suitor would risk leaving the field clear for the others. The result was that they played and sang until all hours. They even made up a song especially for the occasion that said:

Veneranda, you are the single flower  
in the garden of our hearts . . .

The sun no sooner went down than the orchestra struck up. We managed to get a few hours' sleep when they left at dawn. Then, before we knew it, it was night again. The tenors would be grinding out the same old tunes.

Pretty soon Poggio became a village of sleepwalkers. The Sunday ties disappeared. Leontina took the carnation from behind her ear and looked her age again. Temistocle left his coat at home. The Poggiolani grumbled. Ah, love, what a nuisance!

There was no relief in sight. Tradition said that the boys had a right to keep on courting Veneranda until she made her choice.

] 104 [

PLEASE, VENERANDA, GET MARRIED!

In the square we gathered sleepily around her. "Veneranda, make up your mind!" Eugenio begged.

"That boy, Antonio, is a fine boy," said Serafino. "He'll make a good family man. His father was so, and so was his grandfather."

"I don't doubt it, *papà*, but he is just the type to never let me dance the tarantella," Veneranda said.

Temistocle smiled complacently. "Smart girl."

Veneranda walked away and we of Poggio, old and young, followed her, pleading.

"Get married," said Calliope, wild-eyed and nervous.

"Choose," said Leontina.

"Have pity on us, *bambina mia*," said sweet Genoveffa.

Veneranda turned and sang, "Tra-la-la-la!" Then she wiggled her toes and ran away.

We shook sorrowful heads. Old Joe lifted outstretched arms to the sky. "I pray the Lord," he implored, "to send rain for forty nights." And we responded, "Amen!"

] 105 [

13

A COW IS A FORTUNE

ONE MORNING as I was loafing in the shade of the *cortile*, old Joe came to me, accompanied by a tall, angular farmer.

"This is Signor Savo," he said to the man, and to me he explained, "This is a neighbor, Signore, who would like to talk to you about his boy."

The farmer rubbed his chin and shifted from one foot to the other. I pointed to a chair, but he spoke without waiting to sit down.

] 106 [

A COW IS A FORTUNE

"Pardon, Signore," he said, "but my boy cannot sleep."

"Can he hear them serenading way down at your place?" I said. "You should hear it up here."

"It is the girl," he said. "Why does she not make up her mind? Every night my son sings to her, better than the others, and all day he must work on the farm. It is wearing him out. A young man must sleep."

"I see what you mean."

He described the boy. It was the one with the voice I liked best.

"A girl should make up her mind and get married," the farmer said.

"Yes, we wish she would, too. But who should she marry? That's the question."

"What about my son? He's a strong boy. He doesn't drink and he'll raise a big family."

"Oh, sure. But the other boys want her, too."

"Can we not talk together and arrange it?"

"You ought to speak to her. Or to her father. I'm only a neighbor."

"Of what use would it be to speak to her father? He has nothing."

"I see." I sensed that he wanted to do a little horse trading.

"Look," I said, "the girl can make a good marriage. She is the most beautiful girl around."

"But—the dowry?"

] 107 [

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

"Don't worry. She has a couple of dowries."  
"What do you mean by that?"  
"The Countess of Cervara's—and mine. What can you offer for your son?"  
"It is the girl who should bring something."  
"She brings something. What does the boy bring?"  
He hesitated. Old Joe winked at me. He was proud of the way I was handling it.  
"In addition to the dowry I will give her three sheep," I said, "if you will give a cow."  
"A cow is expensive."  
"Si. And three sheep are expensive, too."  
"I will give a pair of rabbits," said the farmer.  
"A cow. A full-grown cow. A good cow that gives lots of milk," I said firmly.  
"And what is her dowry?"  
"One hundred and fifty dollars."  
His eyes popped. He stared at me. Joe stared at me.  
"She is a beautiful girl and we all value her highly and will not let her marry unless it is a good marriage," I said.  
He shook his head dubiously. He just didn't want to give anything.  
"A pair of rabbits I will give," he said, "and a pair of chickens."  
"Good!" I said. "And I will give three sheep and a hope chest, an old bathtub, one hundred and fifty dollars, and Black Eye, my favorite goose, which I will buy for them. All for your rabbits and chickens, and a cow."  
] 108 [



DAYDREAM

A COW IS A FORTUNE

The farmer got up.  
"Signore, I must say good day. Happy slumber!" He walked to the door and turned.  
"A cow is a fortune," he said with a sigh, and clattered off in his hobnailed shoes.  
Old Joe, who had followed him, turned to me with a knowing squint in his eyes.  
"You'll get the cow. He'll give in."  
I was so tired I leaned back in my chair and dozed. In a little while someone was tapping me on the shoulder.  
"What! A cow?" I said, waking up.  
"No, it's the *carabiniere*," said old Joe.  
"Oh, my! What for?"  
The *carabiniere* came into the *cortile* with long steps. He stopped in front of me as if he were sitting on a horse.  
"You must have put the American spell on that girl. These boys are all bewitched."  
The *carabiniere* stretched himself higher astride his imaginary horse.  
"If my son keeps this up, I will have to lock him in jail."  
"Fine. I wish you would lock the rest of the tenors up with him."  
He raised his shoulders higher.  
"What is the dowry?"  
"Three sheep, a hope chest, an ancient bathtub, one hundred and fifty dollars, and Black Eye, the goose. And what is yours?"  
] 111 [

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

For the first time he smiled. "I've got a piece of land."  
"Good! Where is it? Let's have a look at it! Tomorrow morning I'll be there with La Bionda."

"No, we can't quite do that. It was left to me by my uncle in Brazil and it is there." He raised the palm of his hand to stop any comment from me. "That's my offer. Think it over." And he was gone.

Old Joe turned to me from the door and gave me the Roman thumbs down.

] 112 [

14

MARCELLINA, LADRA!

I WENT BACK to sleep in the shade, but not for long. Someone was calling from the *loggiate* above.

"Marcellina, *ladra*!"

It was the voice of Elena. I got up quickly and tried to slip away before she would make me act like a policeman with the kid as she usually did, but I wasn't quick enough. Running down the steps came the little robber.

"Ah!" I said.

"Ah!" said Marcellina.

] 113 [

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

She was holding both hands against her stomach, which seemed twice its natural size.

"Marcellina, what have you got there?"

She looked up, gave me a broad smile, and started to go. But Elena was looking at me from the top of the steps, so I said reluctantly, "Stop."

I could have spanked the kid, not so much for stealing as for putting me on the spot.

"I have a stomach-ache," said Marcellina after some thought.

"Come here." She turned on her little bare toes, like a dancer, and ran over to me, still holding her middle.

"What is that lump on your stomach?"

Elena came along and helped me out. She lifted her skirt and a big, round loaf of bread appeared.

"Marcellina, *ladra*!" said Elena, and took the bread away.

I had to look the kid in the eye and say something. But what? She stood there in front of me, very unhappy. It was hard. We loved each other. I wanted to say, "Look, take all the bread you want, but since it is called stealing, don't get caught at it." Instead, I said, "Wait here a minute, please."

I went indoors and got some rubber balls that we had brought from New York. Then I called the other children and gave everyone a ball except Marcellina.

She showed no emotion, but turned and walked out of the *cortile*. In a few minutes she was back with all the

] 114 [

MARCELLINA, LADRA!

little presents we had given her since we arrived—a beaded necklace, a doll, even the red ribbon which she took from her hair. She put them down, looked at me proudly, and marched away.

It was only when she saw the other children playing with the balls that she lost her dignity. She burst into yells, stamped her feet, and wrung her hands. I couldn't understand what she said. When she was mad, she had a language all her own. As she carried on, she took stolen cigar butts from her pocket and threw them on the ground.

"She listens to the devil," Ambrosina, her seven-year-old sister, said.

That night, as the songs of the serenaders rose to the sky of Poggio, I sneaked across the piazza with a pocketful of cigar butts and dropped them carelessly in front of Marcellina's door, spreading them around, so that it would look as if they had been tossed away.

"She'll find them the first thing in the morning," I said to myself. "They'll come to her hereafter, every night, regularly. But how I do hope we've cured her of stealing!"

] 115 [

LOVE IS BETTER THAN  
MILK AND EGGS

I WAS WANDERING AROUND in the woods outside the walls trying to get away from the sounds of love with guitar accompaniment. Even the insects were singing to each other.

I—fell in love  
With the dimples of your knee . . .

The moon, probably as much to blame for all the trou-  
] 116 [

LOVE IS BETTER THAN MILK AND EGGS

ble as Veneranda herself, shone through the trees. I stretched out on a comfortable little slope.

When I woke it was dawn. The singers had gone. I started to climb toward the castle. The sun's first rays revealed the figure of the shepherd sitting on the rock, blowing on his flute. It was a narrow and unusually long flute, a little bumpy and tapering toward the end. It looked as if carved out of the roots of the silvery trees that grew down the valley near the stream.

His long fingers moved up and down over the holes of the flute, improvising melodies. A tremolo, a high note. Chippering birds, the morning dew, the butterflies. A nightingale did a solo. A little lamb jumped and bucked, and the dog swished around to keep him with the flock. A staccato note—the little lamb didn't want to stay.

The tremolo became a steady stream, depicting the serenity of the blue sky, then the wind agitating the branches of the trees . . . the bumble bees . . . the farmer plowing the land . . . a train in the distance . . . the crickets.

I had reached the gray walls of Poggio. Ah, now I could go to bed. I looked up at the high windows of the castle and again I saw Veneranda, sitting on the window sill. "Gosh," I thought, "what persistence! All night she listens to the crooning of her suitors, and when they leave she sits up to wait for the shepherd with his flute."

Then it hit me! Could she be in love with the shepherd?  
] 117 [

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

Why not? If I were a girl, wouldn't I fall in love with such a romantic figure? Why shouldn't she be in love with him?

What relief it would be for Poggio! It's only a flute, and he only plays in the daytime!

I entered Poggio. Everybody had gone to sleep but Veneranda, whom I saw entering the church. I was determined to talk to her. I followed her and stood at the entrance, unnoticed. She was kneeling in front of the portrait of the Madonna con Bambino on a gold background, the one Temistocle attributed to the school of Giotto. And she was praying, "Mother of God, make him fall in love with me!"

I tiptoed out of the church, went to bed, and caught up with a few hours' sleep.

When the Poggiolani woke up, I spread the good news.

"Bene," Temistocle said. "Bene! She has decided. The serenades are over."

"With whom is she in love?" asked Serafino.

"With a shepherd," I said.

"No," screamed Serafino, who had been dreaming and planning that his daughter would marry the son of the farmer who owned a cow. "A cow is so necessary for a family. It gives milk. And chickens—they give eggs. Cows and chickens, they are needed for a happy marriage."

"Yes," admitted Joe, "you are right."

] 118 [



THE ELUSIVE SHEPHERD

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

"Ah," said Temistocle, "but love is better than milk and eggs."

"Back in my country," I said, "people make good money by crooning on a flute like that fellow does. They could afford many cows."

"If only this shepherd were an American," said Serafino in despair.

The women called Veneranda. She came down from the castle barefooted.

"At last you are in love, *bambina mia*," said Emma.

"We are so relieved," said Genoveffa.

"We'll make the announcement to the serenaders tonight," said Calliope.

Veneranda's face became very red. "No, you can't," she said. The Poggiolani looked puzzled.

"Why not?" asked Calliope. Then a horrible suspicion came to him, and he cried like an owl, "Isn't it true, then, that you love him?" The others brought their hands to their chests and held their breath. Only Serafino revived like a watered flower and smiled.

Veneranda hung her head. "He has not asked me yet."

"Why? Maybe he is shy," asked Andrea.

"I don't know."

"Surely you can tell if a boy is in love with you," said the baron.

Veneranda hesitated, then said, "We have never met."

The Poggiolani lifted their eyes to the sky, then lowered them reproachfully to me.

] 120 [

LOVE IS BETTER THAN MILK AND EGGS

"She is always at the window at dawn, looking at him," I said.

"It's sight love," said Genoveffa.

"That'll never get us anywhere!" exclaimed Calliope.

"Well then, how do you know that you love him?" asked the baron.

"When I look at him," said Veneranda with dreamy eyes, "every one of his fingers moving over his flute makes my heart beat. It's like the fireflies when they light up at night. And when I steal away and go to sit on his rock, I look at the moon that twinkles at me, then I know that I am in love!" And she broke down and began to cry. The women looked at her sympathetically.

"She feels inside like the oven we bake the bread in," said old Joe.

"And I chiseled my heart over his rock, so he would see it when he sits there at dawn," said Veneranda, "but has he?"

"Gian-Domenico should know," said the baron.

The bell ringer was still in bed on account of his arm. We went to his house.

Temistocle spoke for all of us. "Have you ever noticed, when you take your sheep to pasture, what is in the shepherd's mind when he gazes up at the castle's windows? Does he play the flute for Veneranda, as the serenaders do? For the love of restful nights, answer!"

Gian-Domenico kept silent.

] 121 [

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

"Veneranda is in love with the shepherd," said Genoveffa.

"Does he want to marry her?" asked Calliope.

"For once in your life, this is *the time you must speak*!" said Temistocle.

"Speak, this is important!" said old Joe.

"Speak!" said everyone.

Gian-Domenico looked at us, wide-eyed. Then he shook his head, closed his eyes, and rested his chin on his chest.

With heavy hearts, we went back to the piazza.

There Emma proposed, "Let us ask him to come to Poggio for a little pizza party. I will make the pie in the oven."

At dawn we sent Marcellina off to invite the shepherd, but when she reached the rock, he had disappeared.

"We'll get him tomorrow morning," we said. We had hope now, so we endured the serenades that night with less pain.

] 122 [

16

THE BOTTOM OF THE WELL

EVENING CAME and the serenaders were off on another marathon. That night I strolled over to the vine-covered well in the *cortile*. It occurred to me that if I stuck my head down the well, perhaps I wouldn't hear so much of the music. There is something very soothing about looking down a well. It is a little like going fishing. If I could only have let myself down, I would have had a good, restful night.

] 123 [

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

The moonlight made strange patterns on the surface of the water. I could see in it the stars, dancing figures of animals, birds, and flowers. There's a big bear. And a rabbit. I made out a face like the man in the moon. I even figured out the face of a woman. There were dark spots where eyes should be. The lips were white instead of red. What a pretty woman!

I walked over and sat down on a piece of marble among the geraniums. Funny how you imagine things. That face was just as clear in my mind as if it had really been there. If I went back and looked down, of course it would be gone. I'd find something else—a white goose, perhaps. I went back. No, I could see the same face. It was strange that the light moving on the water should have given me the same impression twice.

I strolled down the winding steps and along a path that ended on the brink of a precipice. I sat on the edge. The Romeos were busy on *Caprice Italien*. The face in the well still haunted me. I went back again. There it was, looking right up at me. It hadn't moved. For a minute I thought I must be crazy. What I had been looking at was not just moonlight playing on water. I had not imagined it. It was a face—a beautiful, pale face!

I almost fell into the well.

"Temistocle is right. The people are right. The place is haunted, after all! It is the face of Francesca, the unlucky wife of Alfreduzzo!"

What a bad time she had had. I smiled down at her.

] 124 [

THE BOTTOM OF THE WELL

She smiled back sadly. I leaned far down and waved at her, and my beret fell into the water.

The face was gone.

When I was up and around again the next day, I told no one but Alfreduzzo about my adventure. He was not at all surprised.

"Sì," he said, "my father says there is a face."

When I mentioned that my beret had fallen into the well, he was very much concerned. This was a matter in which he could be of assistance.

"I will recover it, do not fear," he said, and dashed away.

A little later I found him with his head down the well. He was fishing with a long branch. It wasn't easy. The hat got quite a pushing around as he tried to hook it. At last, with a great heave, he brought it up. I shook his hand.

"Grazie, grazie, Alfreduzzo."

"E' niente."

"You did a good job."

He laughed. Just being able to do something for me gave him a big thrill.

"It was hard to get hold of it," he said. Reviewing the difficulties, we looked down into the well together. He gaped.

"E' vero! It is true!"

] 125 [

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

The face was there again. As clear as the night before. No, as a matter of fact, it was clearer. Now, in broad daylight, I could see that it was the face of a statue lying at the bottom of the well.

Calliope and Eugenio passed by the *cortile* and stopped to look down the well.

"The romantic face of Francesca, wife of Alfreduzzo the Third, eh? Ah, ah, ah," said Eugenio.

"Seen in the light of the moon," said Calliope, mimicking Temistocle's mannerism.

"Baron! Baron!" we called. Temistocle ran eagerly.

"Look at Francesca!" said Calliope. "The *pale* Francesca."

Temistocle peered down the well and looked very sad. I could see that it bothered him even more than I expected.

"It was one of my best stories, the dearest to the women of Poggio," he murmured. Then he recovered himself. He looked back into the well and gave it his professional eye.

"Possibly Etruscan," he said.

Calliope and Eugenio brought a rope and let Alfreduzzo down into the well. He tied it around the statue. We lifted her tenderly out and placed her in the *cortile* with the other antique stones.

With the geraniums around her, she looked prettier than ever.

] 126 [

17

SOMETHING MUST BE DONE

TEMISTOCLE'S FACE WAS dark and troubled and I knew what was the matter.

"I am not satisfied," he said, "with the way things are in Poggio." He put a hand on my shoulder. "*Amico*, something must be done. The men want action. Marcelina has gone again and again to invite the shepherd. He can never be found."

"I'll tell you what, Baron. Let us send Veneranda to him. Let her go and find him herself tomorrow morning."

] 127 [

Next day, before sunrise, La Signora dressed Veneranda like a shepherdess in a picture—the small white shawl, the full, gray skirt, the little flowered apron. Nina placed a fresh sprig of honeysuckle in the girl's hair.

All Poggio was up.

"Do not talk," Genoveffa suggested. "You can talk after you are married."

"I'll just hold his hand," said Veneranda.

"Make him say yes," Joe said. "Encourage him."

"I look in his eyes," said Veneranda.

"And smile," recommended Calliope.

"And when he kisses you, do not run home as Genoveffa did with me," said Temistocle.

Old Emma came with a piece of bread hot from the oven. Settimia brought a piece of cheese on a fig leaf.

The red sun appeared on the horizon. Radiant with hope, Veneranda left the gates of Poggio. We crowded windows and turrets and saw her circling the walls and approaching the rock where the shepherd sat playing. In one hand she carried the bread, in the other the cheese.

With suspense we watched Veneranda climbing the rock. At the same time we saw the shepherd sliding down the other side.

"The fool, he ran away!" screamed Calliope. "From bread and cheese, too!" We were all very upset.

Veneranda sat on the deserted rock and started to cry. Then, slowly, she ate the cheese.

The men of Poggio got together and asked to talk over

] 128 [

this disgraceful affair with me. We retired into the armory for a conference. We sat around the long table with a fine collection of worried lines on our foreheads.

Calliope spoke first and briefly: "We want action."

All those present backed him. "Si, sì," old Joe said. "Our hope lays with La Signora. Can you, Signor Savo, persuade La Signora to take Veneranda back to Rome?"

I pondered. "She doesn't want to go," I said. "She believes it is her duty to see that Veneranda gets married. But," I went on, "I think I know how to get her to leave."

Later in the day, while La Signora was taking her walk in the woods with Nina and Veneranda, the *sarcòfago* was removed from her apartment.

"My bathtub has been stolen!" exclaimed La Signora when she returned to the castle. The next day she took Veneranda to Rome.

The Poggiolani made it their business to see that the news would be spread for miles around. The result was that the boys didn't show up that night. The air was free from melodies; we slept peacefully. Then, at dawn, a surprise awaited us: the flute was silent. The shepherd had not come that morning.

Genoveffa said it was a sign of love.

] 129 [

## CHEEMY IS MISSING

ANOTHER SUN HAD SET and Poggio was as tranquil as a convent. We were looking over the old books in the library when a blast of gunfire made us jump.

"What is happening?" I said.

Elena, who was sitting by the fireplace, said, "The hunting season has started."

"Yes, so I heard, but who hunts in the dark?"

There was another burst of fire.

"It is inside the castle," said Nina.

] 130 [

"I'll see about this." I reached for one of the oil lamps.

"Jimmy, please, call the men and they will go with you. Elena, see if any of the men are in the kitchen."

Elena went and returned.

"I cannot find any," she said.

I took the lamp and walked cautiously through the halls.

The shots came from the ground floor. The nearer I got to the Hall of the Hundred Horsemen the louder they sounded.

I stood at the door, jumping with each explosion. After each shot there was a voice.

"Five!"

Bang!

"Six!"

Bang!

"Seven!"

The door opened and Temistocle and Calliope emerged, carrying hunting bags. Serafino, old Joe, Lorenzo, Eugenio, and Gian-Domenico followed. They hailed me jovially and emptied their bags on the floor. They were full of dead bats.

"It is good you have come, amico," said Temistocle. "You can watch us count and be sure. Will you count as we count, please?"

"Count? Why should I count a lot of dead bats? It's bad enough to have to look at them!"

"But if you do not count, you cannot be sure."

] 131 [

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

"I don't want to count. Take them away and bury them."

"But, Signore, it is a matter of business," said Joe. "You pay, therefore you should count."

"The second day you were here, *amico*, you said, 'One lira for every bat you kill,'" said Temistocle, twisting his mustache to a point.

"I did?"

"Sì, sì, *amico*. And the hunting season has begun."

"All right, if I said so. But do you have to shoot them at night? Shoot tomorrow."

"Ah, but the bats do not come out in the daylight, *amico*. They are like serenaders!"

The others had finished counting.

"Twelve," said Lorenzo.

"Ten," said Calliope. Each announced the number he had killed.

"Altogether, sixty-three bats, so far," said Temistocle. "It is, then, sixty-three lire."

"It is, then, two dollars and sixty-five cents," I said to myself, and aloud I added, "Don't bother knocking off any more of them tonight. Rest yourselves."

"There is not time enough. There are many bats and the hunting season is short," Serafino said.

"But we're all worn out from the singing. Take it easy!"

"Ah, Signore," said Joe, "every day before you came

] 132 [

CHEEMY IS MISSING

we rested. Every day when you are gone we can rest. But it is not every day that we can make money."

"I see." I looked at the dark flock lying around the hall. "You can make all your expenses here. Maybe also a small reserve for rainy days."

He looked speculatively at the bats.

"O.K.," I said, "shoot if you must, but I'm going to take a long, long walk, far away!" And I started off, cursing in the economical way. I couldn't afford any other. All my money would be going for bats. There must be thousands of them. Nina called to me from a window.

"What is it, Jimmy?"

"Just the hunting season," I said. "Don't be worried. Bats are being killed in the armory, that's all. Just another night without sleep." As I passed through the castle door into the piazza, Joe called after me. "Please, Signore," he pleaded, "stay inside. It will be dangerous to go outside. Some shots may fly out of the lids of the hall."

I will go to some high place, I said to myself, and take along that spyglass Nina's mother has brought me, and have a look around.

With my lantern I went to the third floor, passed through a trap door, climbed a rickety old ladder, and I was at the top of the tower.

There it was fine. I could gaze at the stars, and just be

] 133 [

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

a lookout, like Joe's ancestors. Instead, I soon dropped off.

When I woke up, the sun was shining on my face. White fog, surrounding Poggio like a calm cotton sea, extended to the horizon and there met with the blue sky. The wind moved the fog, giving me the impression of standing on a little world, floating in the sky. A little world with its big fortress walls and small houses and a well. A tight little world, all by itself, and good.

I waved my hand to it. "Little world, hello!" I called to it.

The wind started to blow away the white fog and patches of green mountains appeared. The sun began to get hot. I decided to go down. I moved over to the trap door and put my foot down. No ladder! Somehow, it had moved out of my reach.

I lay down and peered into the darkness below. When my eyes became accustomed to the change, I saw what the trouble was. Black Eye was jumping against the ladder and flapping his wings and hissing.

Down in the piazza Nina was asking Elena, "Did Signor Savo go to the village?"

No, no one had seen me go to the village. Joe said I could not have passed through the gate without his knowing it.

] 134 [

CHEEMY IS MISSING

The Poggiani whispered to each other, "Il Signore della Rocca is missing."

The children of Poggio began to search for me. I saw them running down the slopes into the woods. Someone said, "He must have gone to the town."

"He did not!" said Joe.

"He can do tricks on a stage," said Temistocle. "He might have slipped past you, Giovannino! I will look for him. I will go and find him at the *osteria*."

That started a search for me down in the village. I was sought in the baker's shop, the grocery store, the shoemaker's. No sign of The Lord of the Rock anywhere.

Temistocle was downcast when he did not find me at the *osteria*, so he had a few glasses of wine to drown his disappointment.

In the meantime I yelled. It did no good. My voice went right up into the sky, where only the angels heard me.

The sun got hotter. The Tiber looked cool. I was thirsty. A farmer with two big white oxen ploughed a field, then stopped in the shade of a tree, threw some hay on the ground for the oxen, and sat down himself to eat his lunch. It looked like a good lunch.

Leontina, Genoveffa, and old Emma came out into a field with baskets on their heads. They spread newly washed clothes on the grass to dry and sat down and talked. I wondered how I could attract their attention.

I took off my shirt and waved it. They went on talking.

] 135 [

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

Quite a time passed. Leontina got up to see if the clothes were drying and noticed my shirt waving. The others looked up. Who was up there on the tower?

I waved my arms, signaling them to come and get me down. They recognized me at last and ran to the castle.

As they came hurrying into the *cortile*, Marcellina and Ambrosina rushed out with big news. They had made a discovery.

They had been hunting for me through the castle.

"Up! Up!" cried Marcellina, while Ambrosina wept for the poor signore who got lost on his own roof. "Up! Black Eye has Cheemy a prisoner on top of the tower!"

For the first time in weeks Poggio had a perfect night for sleeping. Not a sound could be heard. Gentle breezes made the little village cool. The singers were all home in bed. The shotguns were silent. It was just such a night as I had been longing for, but I couldn't sleep a wink. I had a bad case of sunburn.

] 136[

THERE WAS A TERRIFIC HUSH

SINCE I UNSPELLED THE WELL, it occurred to me that I might be able to persuade the Poggiolani to help me with a plan I had. I wanted to open up the tower and get the treasure.

It was a delicate matter. I would have Temistocle to deal with. He did not want me to spoil any more of his stories. But with him out of the way there might be a chance. I must find some way to distract him and win over the people.

] 137[

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

For some time Nina had thought we ought to get a wrought-iron gate for the stairway in the *cortile*. We had talked it over with Temistocle. I decided to ask him to go to Todi or even to Perugia, which was farther, to buy it for us. We could trust his natural good taste. He would pick out something that would be exactly right. And I knew he would enjoy doing it.

At siesta time I knocked at the door of his little house. Genoveffa was asleep in the adjoining bedroom. Temistocle received me in the kitchen by the fireplace.

"About the iron gate, Baron," I said.

"Ah, the *ferri battuti*!"

"We have decided to buy the *ferri battuti*. It would be right for this place."

"Sì, sì, it has the character."

"Would you mind taking a little trip to buy it?"

Then my eyes wandered over a white wall of the kitchen, at a fresco representing a large tree painted with light strokes of warm colors and cobalt blue. "Your work?" I asked.

"Sì."

"Delightful. What is the title?"

"The Tree of the Sun."

It gave me another idea. "I wish you would do me a favor. The armory looks very bare. How would you like to paint frescoes on the walls?"

His face lighted up. Nothing like this had ever happened to him.

] 138[

THERE WAS A TERRIFIC HUSH

"But I have no paint, *amico*," he said.

"That's just what I was coming to. I wish you would take a day or two off and go and buy some for me, along with the wrought iron. Go to Perugia, say. Take as long as you want. Get good paints."

"*Meraviglioso*," he said softly, as if he had difficulty believing it. Then he couldn't say any more for a little while. When he spoke again, it was very humbly. "And—no, it is too much."

"What, Baron?"

"Could I buy brushes, too? Real brushes—artist's brushes?"

"Sure, sure, Baron. Colors, brushes, knives, palettes, everything. Everything you need."

I knew how he felt. He had never used a brush he hadn't made himself. I felt mean, asking him to do this as a trick. I should have known enough to get him paints and things before. We could have had fine frescoes all over Poggio.

"You will make beautiful paintings," I said. "Buy the best. And take your time." I gave him enough money to cover everything.

He got right up and without a word put on his hat, threw his coat over his shoulder, shook my hand, threw a kiss in the direction of the bedroom, and went out. We waved goodbye to each other as he started down toward the gate.

When the Poggiolani heard the news, they wouldn't

] 139[

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

believe it. They got it first down in Poggio Nuovo, where Temistocle paused at Napoleone's for a little conversation.

"Temistocle says he will paint frescoes in the castle, Signore. Think of it!" the *carabiniere* told me.

"It is true," I said. "He will paint the armory room."

But Andrea came to me and said, "Signor Savo, do you know what you have done? You have made possible the dream Temistocle has dreamed of since he was a boy. If you had come before, we might have had an artist who would bring Poggio reputation."

For a minute I was so ashamed I almost gave up the whole idea of the treasure in order to persuade myself that my good deed was genuine. However, before I knew it I was calling the Poggiolani together in the *cortile*, taking my stand on the balcony, and addressing them. I had to work fast.

"Poggiolani," I said, "we are going to open the tower!"

There was a terrific hush.

I waited.

"It is forbidden," said Joe.

"The tower is cursed. Who opens the tower will die," moaned Genoveffa.

"Signore, do not do this!" begged Serafino, wringing his hands.

"Listen," I said. "Don't you people worry. If there is

] 140 [

THERE WAS A TERRIFIC HUSH

a curse on the tower, I will take it on myself. It will be my responsibility. I leave you free from any spell."

"Signore!"

"Listen. I will make you rich with the treasure in the tower. I take the curse. You take the treasure. How about it?"

"He takes the burden of the spell upon himself," Joe said. "*Pazzo!* No, it is not just."

"If he wants to, he can," said Calliope. "It is his business."

"We will begin work tomorrow," I said to the Poggiolani.

Only Andrea remained quiet. When the others had gone, he approached me and said, "Forgive me if I do not help you dig in the tower. I do not believe there is a treasure. There remains still much work to be done on the roof of the home we are preparing for Veneranda, and with your leave I will continue working there."

That evening we all sat around the fire and discussed the opening of the tower. From which side should it be opened? The women thought it would be best to start digging from the outside, near the woods. I was all for it until old Joe brought up a point. He said if we found the treasure we would have to bring it out in the open and people from other towns might come and take some of it. But if we opened the tower wall inside the castle, nobody would know anything about it. I was afraid that

] 141 [

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

if we started going through the walls from the inside, we might find a trap and fall into it. But the other Poggiolani agreed with Joe, and so it was set.

The next day we went to the Hall of the Hundred Horsemen and started to break through into the tower. It was so dark we had to have torches and lanterns.

For the first time since we had been in Poggio, a whole day passed in silence. We worked as if we were deaf and dumb. There were moments when I wondered if I weren't the dumbest one of them all.

] 142 [

20

LIQUID JEWELS

IT WASN'T EASY.

Centuries had made the stone work tough as a wall of diamonds. It looked as if it would take weeks to tunnel through. In a few days Temistocle would be back. Then what would I do?

When he arrived I met him at the gate and led him directly to the armory, so that he could start the frescoes.

"Now," I said, "I leave you absolutely free to express

] 143 [

yourself. Nobody will disturb you. I will keep everybody out."

"You will not regret choosing me to do this," he replied, and took off his coat and set to work.

A few hours later, at about ten o'clock in the morning, we were all hammering and digging and sweating at the wall when without warning Temistocle appeared in the doorway of the hall. He stood there glowering at us, holding his brushes over his head. He seemed inches taller.

"May the Hundred Horsemen come and get you!" he thundered. "They who are buried here to protect the treasure from thieves and robbers and barbarians and vandals! May they come and get every one of you! Giovannino, Eugenio, Serafino, Gian-Domenico, Settimia, Leontina, Delfina, Elena, Lorenzo, even my dear wife Genoveffa and my children, and even my uncle, Calliope! And Signor Savo!"

I could, of course, understand Temistocle's feelings. I had already spoiled one of his stories. Now he was fighting for his reputation.

The people looked sheepish. Temistocle sneered at them. Joe dropped his hammer. The others hesitated a moment—then dropped their tools.

I was frantic. I moved over to Temistocle as he towered in the doorway. I raised my hands above my head as he had done. I was smaller, which was not so good, but I had a pickax in my hand that reached higher than his brushes,

making up for the difference. I was so frantic that I didn't know what to say, so I bellowed a speech in English which none understood—a speech I used to make in vaudeville years ago. I used it at the Palace in New York and in every city on the big circuit and the small time, too.

"Ladies and gentlemen! You have been very nice to me. The audiences of Detroit are the best audiences in the world!"

The Poggiolani stopped dead. Even Temistocle opened his mouth in astonishment. I wheeled on the Poggiolani. "Ladies and gentlemen, you have been very kind to me here in the Bushwick Theater . . ."

They were sure I was cursing them. I went on about how it was the twelfth time I had played this theater, but I thought the people of Philadelphia wonderful. It was very corny.

After a while I changed my tone and began to coo all the little pieces of poetry I ever knew. This had a fine effect. It softened them up and made them feel guilty. Then I let out again. I stood on my toes, I let the pickax go, shook both fists in front of my face, and, with a good ring in my voice, shouted, "Indianapolis! Indianapolis!"

I bent down and, looking as tragic as I could, I pleaded, "I'm not breaking your heart, don't start breaking my heart! River, stay away from my door!"

Delfina came running toward me, holding out her hands.

"Poor Signor Savo! Poor Lord of the Rock!"

"*Misericordia!*" wailed Genoveffa.

I stuck my chest out proudly, drew my shoulders back like a man ready to accept the worst without flinching, and said quietly, "Cats, meows, and kittens. This is only the scratch of the earth. Follow your tommyhawks."

"No, no, no!" old Joe objected.

Temistocle gaped at me with admiration. I could see I had him on the ropes. Pulling my voice up till it towered above his six feet, I taunted him: "Did you ever see a dream walking?"

He raised his arms helplessly over his head.

"*Per carità!*" he exclaimed, and walked away, a beaten man.

I kept on pleading, though I was running out of speeches. I slumped down and looked heartbroken. There were tears in Genoveffa's eyes. All the women were wiping their eyes with their aprons. I was crying, too.

The women turned to their husbands. The husbands went slowly back to their hammers. The women put the buckets full of broken stone on their heads and carried them away.

All was quiet.

Gradually our thoughts returned to the treasure, our picks and shovels went on pecking at the walls, and a song rose to the vaulted ceiling, the one the children had sung the day of our arrival:

There is a treasure in the tower,

Ohee lee, ohee la.

It was buried there by Alf the coward,

Ohee lee, ohee la.

At six every morning we paraded through the Hall of the Hundred Horsemen and chipped our way painfully into the rock walls. At seven, prompt as a letter carrier, Temistocle appeared on the threshold and gave us a lecture on the life and exploits of Alfreduzzo. Then he usually wound up by pointing out the slight possibility of our not living much longer.

I noticed that his voice was mellowed each day. As a matter of fact, his breath had a distinct aroma.

"Seven o'clock in the morning!" complained old Joe. "Where does he get it at this time of day?"

"He has been down to Napoleone's," snorted Calliope.

"No," said Joe, "he did not pass the gate."

"But only vino could make Temistocle's voice so rich," Serafino said.

"*Per Bacco!* How does he do it?" Eugenio said.

"Has he found a mountain spring that gushes wine?" Calliope said.

Ignoring the whispers, Temistocle roared on. "With his Hundred Horsemen Alfreduzzo robbed all the barons of Umbria. From each battle he came back to La Rocca di Poggio with more wealth, and wine! Ah, what treasure

is greater? He brought back wines most rare—the vintages of Siena, Florence, Perugia, subtle juice of the grape that grows on the sunny hills of Palermo. I only wish I had been born in his time.”

“You do very well,” said old Joe.

“May all the bones in the tower come to life and rattle at you!” bellowed Temistocle, and went back to his frescoes, locking the armory door after him.

It went on for days. We got so we did not mind his threats. And yet, when he talked of those wonderful wines, a lot of mouths around me watered.

We wondered about his frescoes. What was he painting? He would permit no one to see. But I didn’t mind his locking himself in. What I wanted was for him to stay in.

We paused for lunch and came out into the sunlight. My hands and face were grimy; my back ached; my trousers were ruined. A little figure dashed across the cortile and headed for the armory.

“Marcellina! Come back! Marcellina, *ladra!*” Elena’s voice again. Once more she had caught her stealing. I pretended not to hear. I didn’t feel up to scolding her. All I wanted was my lunch and a little siesta.

“Signor Savo, she is stealing!”

It was no use. I said, “Marcellina, you must come back.”

She stood before the door of the armory. In her hands she had an earthen jug.



MARCELLINA

“What is it now, Marcellina?”

“A jug, Cheemy.”

“I see it’s a jug, but what’s inside?”

“You can see inside?”

“Yes, I can. It’s wine.”

Joe was quite excited. “Wine!” he said. “And, Signore, you see where she is going!”

“Yes, yes, you see! We all see!” cried Eugenio.

“That is how he gets it!” Joe said. “That is where the many words and the aroma come from at seven in the morning!”

“Take it back to the kitchen,” Elena said to Marcellina.

“Lock it up, Signore! Lock it up! And he cannot insult us any more at our work,” said Calliope. “It is not fair for him to drink alone,” he added.

Marcellina walked slowly with the jug in her hand to the kitchen.

Temistocle did not appear to taunt us that afternoon.

At six the next morning we dragged ourselves into the Hall of the Hundred Horsemen and wearily tackled the walls. At seven the familiar figure filled the doorway. His voice was dry and his look was cynical. He addressed his remarks chiefly to me.

“Alfreduzzo was generous. Above everything, generous. He was wicked, he was cruel, he was a brute, but he gave freely. He filled the castle with the most delectable wines and everyone of Poggio could help himself. He was

not a petty man. He did not watch every drop. ‘Come,’ he said, ‘drink, drink up! Drink and be merry! In wine is happiness!’ Ah!”

Temistocle bowed, smirked, and retired to his frescoes, only to come back at the regular intervals to serve us another drink and make our tongues hang out.

“Think of the wine of Orvieto!” he said, watching our faces as we thought of the wine of Orvieto. “Delicate, a poet’s wine, bringing beautiful fancies into your head. It flickers inside you. Everything you see is a picture—white horses climbing over steep clouds. You forget all the sorrowful details of your daily life. You feel as playful as a spring spouting from the earth. . . .”

“Go away!” said Calliope. “It is criminal to talk so of wine while we slave. Go away!”

“Uncle, I go,” said Temistocle. “I go to my studio and create great things, while you dig your graves.”

A few hours before sunset that night we broke through a wall and came to a hollow place with another wall beyond. In the hollow, all covered with old straw and dust, we found a dozen jugs.

“Wine!” cried Eugenio.

“Ah! *Per Bacco*, the wine of Perugia!” exclaimed Calliope.

“The wine of Siena!” cried Serafino.

“Let’s make sure,” said old Joe. “Let’s dust off the jugs.”

“Alfreduzzo’s wine!” sang Marcellina.

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

"The beautiful wine we have been longing to taste!" We dusted off the jug. It was wine, all right. "Lorenzo, go call the baron. He must taste it first. He said it was here!" old Joe said. "It is only just," he exclaimed to me.

"But he will drink it all up," I remarked.

"Do not call him," Calliope said.

But Temistocle had heard our commotion and had come running. "I told you," was the first thing he said. Then he started pulling out corks.

Elena and Delfina ran and brought glasses. We carried the wine out into the Hall of the Hundred Horsemen and got ready to taste it.

Temistocle went through his ritual of sipping and looking off into the distance.

"Ah, it is regal wine. Liquid jewels! This is the most rare wine of Alfreduzzo."

He poured me a glass. Then he filled all the glasses. We drank. It was wonderful.

Old Joe made a toast.

"To the baron, who for years told us we would find the precious wine."

Marcellina said, "*Papà* was right! *Papà* was right! Another glass, Cheemy," and she held out a big mug.

"Are you going to drink all that?"

Another jug was opened.

"I don't think we should drink it all," I said.

"When one has the desire to drink, one drinks," said Temistocle.

] 152 [

LIQUID JEWELS

"It will make you live to be a hundred," said Joe.

Marcellina was holding up her mug again. "That kid can't drink so much," I said to myself. "I don't care who her father is." I filled the mug and this time I watched her. She ran out of the hall and in a few minutes she was back with the empty mug. Storing it up for a rainy day for papa.

All at once we heard a voice. It came from the black passage where we had been digging.

"*Presto! Presto!* Come! The treasure!" It was the voice of Eugenio. A conscientious man, he had gone back to work. "Come! *Subito!*"

Eugenio had his arm in the wall.

"I have found something!"

"The treasure! Already!"

"Yes, I can feel it."

He pulled something out and held it up.

Temistocle examined it thoughtfully.

"Part of the treasure. I was right. It is a helmet. Alfreduzzo's helmet!"

"How did it get there?" I asked.

"He put it away with his wine," said Temistocle. "It is the helmet worn by Alfreduzzo the Third in his second battle against Todi."

He polished a spot with his paint rag. It shone like gold. He put the helmet on his head. It made him look like a big, handsome circus horse.

"What are these?" asked Joe, pointing to little ivory things hanging down from it.

] 153 [

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

"The teeth of African tigers," said Temistocle.

"But there aren't any tigers in Africa," I said, taking a chance.

"Oh, *amico*, that was before your time."

He took the helmet off and we all examined it. Then he put it on again, held his paint brush over his head, and started to speak.

But I headed him off.

"Tomorrow," I said, "we will go on digging and get through the other wall that is still between us and the inside of the tower. We will have the treasure, all of it. We will all be rich." Then I added, especially for him, "Now we know there is no curse on it."

He held his glass up to me.

"Signore della Rocca di Poggio," he said, "perhaps you will find more of the beautiful wine. Your health, Signore."

It was a great day.

The next day was awful. We all were as sick as if we had been in a sea storm.

] 154 [

21

DARK DAYS

THE HALL OF THE HUNDRED HORSEMEN and the tower remained deserted. We felt so miserable that we could not get out of bed. Only the children could hold up their heads.

It didn't hit Temistocle as hard as the rest of us. His stomach was a seasoned traveler. It could accommodate the whole wine list, good or bad.

In another day, things looked better. I was ready to go to work again. Temistocle was back at his frescoes. But

] 155 [

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

the Poggiolani had been talking to each other and took a different attitude. They came to me and old Joe spoke up.

"The people of Poggio have awakened to a hard realization," old Joe said. "The curse has started to materialize and—well—the curse has not fallen on you alone. It has fallen on all of us, too." The Poggiolani silently withdrew and I was left alone in a bad spot.

A change had come over the silver-tongued Temistocle, too. He realized now that there might be a treasure in the tower, after all. If that were the case, it wouldn't ruin his prestige as a storyteller. Rather, his stories would be proved to be true. It changed his whole attitude toward the excavation of the tower. So he came out in favor of keeping up the work. He spoke to the Poggiolani about it. But not even the eloquence of Temistocle could convince them. They knew better. No more treasure for them!

There would have been no use on insisting. I understood their characters now. Like children, or poets, they were ever ready to feed their fantasy with any sparkle of a legend, any illusion, and Temistocle's tales acted as an escape from their problems. It was just another way of lulling their hunger. Often I had seen the women of Poggio boil old crusts of bread for their families' din-

] 156 [



DINNERTIME

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

ner and season them with leaves of basil and salt. In Poggio, as in so many parts I had visited in Italy, making a living was a very hard thing.

I had learned that Andrea walked to an electrical factory several miles away, when he could get work there, to earn ten lire a day—at that time fifty cents in American money.

I also knew that old Joe's life had not been spent watching. All his years he had been a farmhand in the farms in the valley. Too old to work, now he and Emma were supported by their son, Romeo, who, like his father, wanted to be a farmer. But farmers' families grow fast and no extra hands were now needed. Romeo had applied for work at the Pontine marshes, where the pay was eight lire a day for a chance to die of malaria. There he was told the only way to get a job was to wait for another worker to drop. As the last resort, Romeo had volunteered in the army, and Old Joe and Emma lived now on two lire a day they collected from the government.

Gian-Domenico's income came from his three sheep and from what Leontina and Elena collected in grains and cereals, calling on farmers in the valley after Gian-Domenico had rung the bell and kept the lightning away during the storms.

And sickly little Serafino was even worse off. He only had his daughter, Veneranda, and whatever she could manage to bring home to him. His hope of a good marriage for her was now also fading away.

] 158 [

DARK DAYS

Enough, the Poggiolani had said, and they had gone back to work at the town roofs. Temistocle gave them a scornful glance and disappeared in the armory.

"Weaklings," he said.

I went into the black holes and hammered away all alone. It was pretty grim.

After a half hour or so, I heard the patter of bare feet beside me. Someone picked up a shovel and began to scrape away the dirt and cement I had loosened.

"Do not be discouraged, Signore," said a small voice. It was Alfreduzzo.

"Thank you, thank you, Alfreduzzo," I said. "You are the only brave one now."

"My father is not afraid," he said proudly. "Why should I be, Signor Savo?"

"Call me Jimmy," I said.

"Grazie," he said. Then he patted me on the back and said, "Courage, Cheemy!"

"Look, Al," I said, "you and I discovered the truth about the well. Now if we stick together we can debunk the tower." I didn't mention being scared myself. I felt braver with him beside me. When we came to the end of the day, my pants were all ripped.

"You see, the curse!" said the Poggiolani.

I protested that it was not the curse at all, that I just tore the trousers on a rock. Even if I had ruined them, I said, I would go right on working. I swore that I would give up my last pair of pants to get into that tower.

] 159 [

That night I sewed up my trousers. The next morning saw Al and me back on the job.

A letter arrived from Nina's mother, saying that they were coming back to Poggio for the fiesta. It was a blow. We got together and decided that the women should go down in the fields and look for the shepherd and talk to him, give him a pep talk.

I trudged back into the black hole to dig. At sunset when I came out my trousers were going fast.

The women came back worn out and discouraged. They had not found the shepherd.

I repaired the trousers as best I could, and the next day struggled back to my pick and shovel, while the Poggiani fretted about Veneranda's return and the reopening of the opera season. I was too busy to stay out and fret with them. I had to reach the treasure by Sunday, the day of the fiesta.

From dawn to nightfall Alfreduzzo and I worked. I pictured myself as the hero of the fiesta. I made it a scene to be proud of.

"I will open the tower with all the Poggiani around to admire me. It will be the grand climax."

"Look!" said Alfreduzzo.

In the doorway were the Poggiani gazing at us with compassion. They stood like deaf-mutes, shaking their heads from side to side. Their hearts bled for me.

] 160 [

Alfreduzzo raised his eyebrows in a way that reminded me of his father, pursed his lips, and made a contemptuous noise. "*Avanti!*" he said. The Poggiani left the hall. We attacked the walls again. Pretty soon Temistocle appeared in the doorway.

"*Bene! Bene!*" he called cheerfully. "Good work. Keep it up. You will find his treasure. You are a man after his own heart. Courage, *amico!* Let your spirit never flag."

"Thanks," I said. "You can count on us."

"My boy," he said, looking proudly at his son, "he is your friend." Then, turning to me, he said,

"Remember, he bears the name of Alfreduzzo. Lean upon him. Keep your heart strong. Lean upon both of us. If you will excuse me now, I must go back to my work of art."

Friday morning the Poggiani paid us another gloomy visit. As soon as they had gone, Temistocle arrived to cheer us up.

"*Amico*, you are doing a beautiful job. *Magnifico!* You will soon find beyond that wall gold brought to Italy in ancient vessels over the blue Mediterranean two thousand years ago. Vessels laden with gold, Aeolus, the god of winds, puffing the gentle breezes into their orange sails. Feel the breeze, *amico*. Feel the breeze."

The drops of perspiration on my brow seemed to dry

] 161 [

under the zephyrs. I don't know if it was the breeze of Aeolus, god of winds, that I felt, but I can swear it had garlic on it. The baron bowed low and made his exit. I picked up my hammer and worked away with new energy.

By Friday night a single stone lay between me and the treasure, and my trousers were gone. I was not able to get from the Hall of the Hundred Horsemen to the shelter of my room without the sharp eyes of Marcellina spotting me. However, she was considerate enough to make no comment.

A few minutes later I heard a gentle knock at my door. I opened it. Marcellina was there with a finger on her lips and a pair of very, very old pants in her left hand.

"*Bambina!*" I murmured. "You're a real, true friend."

So far she had stolen from me to give to her father. Now she was stealing from someone else to give to me.

] 162 [

LA SIGNORA had brought Veneranda back to us the day before the fiesta. The girl was all decked out with a large Florentine straw hat sprayed with marguerites, but we were not impressed. We just wondered how long she was going to stay. We had so little use for her and so little hope of peaceful slumber for us, that when we caught her gazing out to the rock to him who was not there, Calliope said, "No use looking," and old Joe added, "We'll only waste another piece of cheese."

] 163 [

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

"So, you found my old bathtub," said La Signora, spotting it in the *cortile* among the other marble pieces. And she had it brought up to her room.

Like a flock of bees flying toward a juicy flower, that same night all the serenaders were back.

The rest had done them good, judging from the loudness of their voices. A new Romeo had come, carrying, of all things, a harp. He played a solo, and for a novelty it was interesting. We of Poggio invaded windows and turrets listening. It was the first harp serenade our town had ever had. We went for it in a big way. We even called out to Veneranda to come to her window.

"Marry him and get that harp inside Poggio!" cried old Joe, absolutely overboard. "A fine idea," I thought. "Sì, Sì, marry the harpist!" shouted the others.

I looked at the harpist with my spyglass. I had to admit that we didn't have a chance unless we fed him with vitamins and shaved his drooping mustache.

He played a *Virtuoso* and an *Adagio Lento*, and when he was finished we gave him a good hand. There were several requests for encores, but the other serenaders would not allow it. They said his time was up. I understood that they were jealous of his success, even though only among us. Veneranda had remained in her room.

We had asked Napoleone to come to Poggio the day of the fiesta, to stuff with chestnuts and spices the pig to be roasted. She arrived at four in the morning, while the serenaders were still at work.

] 164 [

FIESTA

"I don't mind them," she said. "I had a good night's sleep." She went gaily to work at the largest oven in the kitchen on the ground floor, while we all went to bed.

Temistocle and I were on edge. For this was the day that he was to uncover the frescoes and I was to discover the treasures.

The Poggiolani had worn their Sunday clothes, the men in their black hats, the women attired in dresses inherited from grandmothers.

The big hot oven of the castle became their hangout. The traffic was terrific. Napoleone once in a while opened the oven door and poured gravy over the roasting pig, while the Poggiolani on hand opened their eyes wide and sniffed.

"It's turning a nice golden color," said Genoveffa.

"I can almost taste it," said old Joe.

People started to arrive in Poggio, from mountains and valleys—farmers and mountaineers, shepherds and tradespeople, musicians, priests, children, women with babes in arms.

Tradespeople who sold things at fairs set up booths in our town. They sold sausages and fried smelts, French fried potatoes, soda water, wine, and other refreshments. Others had colorfully displayed stands of crockeries.

Old farmers had brought little presents for me. Lorenzo ushered them into the armory and accepted the

] 165 [

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

gifts. A couple of pigeons, a small round cheese, a dozen eggs, a bouquet of flowers, a half-dozen artichokes . . .

"Why do they bring me presents?" I asked Lorenzo.

"They are the fathers of the serenaders," he explained.

"They want to get into your good graces, for each hopes that you will favor his son and persuade Veneranda to marry him."

The serenaders' mothers had come, too, and called on La Signora. She received them in the Cervara Hall. They all admired the fresco over the fireplace, the coat of arms of the good countess who had left the dowries for the good girls of Poggio. An old farmwoman showed a small picture in a silver medal that hung from her neck.

"It is my Marcello when he was a baby," she said. "The picture of health is he. Our farm has a nice spring of mineral water, and if Veneranda marries my boy, you can come every year to rest on our farm. And wait till you drink our mineral water. You'll never get sick."

"We have a prize duck," said another mother with pride. "She has laid one egg every day for the last two years."

Each mother enumerated the advantages that her boy and her farm had to offer, and did some further investigating of the American dowry. La Signora sighed, thinking of the shepherd who had no mineral spring water, no ducks' eggs, absolutely nothing he could call his own, and was furthermore so shy that Veneranda would probably die an old maid.

] 166 [



LA SIGNORA

# LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

When Alfreduzzo dashed in to tell me that the band had arrived, I went out of the castle to welcome them. A number of the tradespeople from Poggio, Nuovo, Todi, and Orvieto were in the band. The man who had sold me the *sarcófago* was there, and the shoemaker, too. He played the triangle and had brought me my pair of hobnailed shoes. The merchant who sold us the window netting and now played the horn stepped forward and respectfully presented me with a bill.

There was a bigger crowd this year, the Poggiolani estimated, than any previous year. Everyone had climbed up to Poggio with two questions on his lips: "Where can I see the Americans?" and "Could I visit the castle?"

At these requests the Poggiolani felt important. Having secured my permission, Temistocle made a little speech:

"I bring you good news," he said. "As the favored of the Lord of the Rock, I have been appointed to show you our castle.

"Built in the thirteenth century by the Marquis Alfreduzzo, this castle of Poggio was consequently ruled by several lords, good and bad, none as fine as our present lord, Jimmy Savo, who will be named The Good, none as bad as Alfreduzzo the Third, named The Terrible."

"We know everything," protested various voices from the crowd. "You told us all that several times before."

Temistocle was not discouraged. "I'll be brief if you prefer so. Being appointed by this good lord to show you

] 168 [

# FIESTA

the castle, just form a single line. Let's go. Follow me. This way. And, please, do not push."

The line turned out to be endless, because by this time there were about two thousand visitors in Poggio, and more were arriving. In serpentine file they climbed and descended steps and alleys, halls and terraces. The jails and booby traps on the ground floor turned out to be the things of major interest, though later even they were topped by the enthusiasm of those who, through my spy-glass, recognized from the window of the Cervara Hall their own farmhouses in the valley.

Finally they reached the Hall of the Hundred Horsemen. The time had come to remove the last rock that blocked the entrance to the tower. An expectant silence settled over everyone.

"Fear nothing," I said, addressing the crowd. "This dark passage may lead me to treasure and fame. But remember, the treasure is still yours. And if there is a curse, that is only for me."

Temistocle said, "A truly noble speech. Worthy to be preserved. May I shake your hand?" He shook my hand as if he weren't sure he were going to see me again. I got down on my hands and knees and crawled into the tunnel until I came to the last big stone. The children were singing:

There is a treasure in the tower,  
Buried there by Alf the coward . . .

] 169 [

# LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

I pushed. It didn't budge. I grunted. It was not a stone that could be moved with one grunt. The Poggiolani, realizing this, helped with hearty grunts of their own.

One more big push. The stone moved and fell out of sight.

Bright light shone in my eyes. The treasure! The shining treasure! It must be all pure gold! Big, round, gold coins! I stuck my head through the hole.

Below me was the valley, with La Bionda eating grass in the field.

The Poggiolani realized what had happened and were laughing *sotto voce*. I crawled back into the hall.

"It was the curse, after all," said Temistocle in good spirits. He put his hand on my shoulder. "You are a good man, *amico*. Alfreduzzo the Third knows that. So he made the curse in your case a light one. He took away from you only your sense of direction. You dug in the wrong way."

"I guess so," I said. I was too disappointed and embarrassed to say any more.

The kids started to chant again:

There is a treasure in the tower  
Ohee lee, ohee la.  
Buried there by Alf the coward  
Ohee lee, ohee la.

] 170 [

# FIESTA

We came out into the *cortile*. I was feeling pretty low.

"I will go and change my clothes," I said wearily.

"Look out, look out, Cheemy!" Marcellina exclaimed, pointing in back of me.

Black Eye was there, glaring at the back of my trousers. I was about to jump when I noticed a perplexed look in his eye. He turned his attention calmly to the ground, stretched his neck casually, and began to pick a couple of strands of tender grass.

"He does not bite you!" exclaimed Marcellina.

"He knows you at last," said old Joe, smiling warmly. "He has made his decision."

"Yes, the goose is saying that you are one of us," said Temistocle. "I congratulate you."

This comforted me. I said to Nina, "I'll go up and put on clean clothes and then we'll dance and sing."

From the balcony I turned back to her.

"Well, I didn't find the treasure, but I made them my friends. Did you see how at last Black Eye didn't go after me? He accepted me as a friend. What are you laughing at?"

"Jimmy, it was the color of your trousers. The pair that you are wearing—don't you know whom they belong to?"

"Who?"  
"Temistocle!"

Temistocle took the pose of a bullfighter in the arena,

] 171 [

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

adjusted his coat over one shoulder, and looked his best. He spoke to us, standing in front of his frescoes covered with netting.

"People of Poggio," he said, "I see eyes around me, eyes looking at me with humility and expectation. Yes, in a few seconds, when this netting will drop, you will feel tiny as the little ants. You will say, 'He deserved every tribute from us, yet we have neglected him so. But, my friends, I will be generous. I will forgive the past neglect. It is in such fraternal spirit that I remove the netting.' And Temistocle unhooked the netting.

All the Poggiolani, Marcellina included, snorted. Old Joe said, "You have spoiled the walls! And with expensive paint!"

Temistocle said, "No one is prophet in his country." And he retired to a corner to pour himself a glass of wine.

I, for one, thought Temistocle's frescoes good. Primitive, mostly lines and flat shades and the color used directly from the tubes, without mixing, but they were delightfully genuine. Their conception was unmistakably out of Temistocle's rich imagination and documentative of the history of Poggio. Besides, he had put me in the picture.

I was standing by the well in the square, in Temistocle's own special way of standing when he is being most impressive, one foot in back of the other. And Black Eye was near me in the same pose, except that my hand was resting

] 172 [

FIESTA

on the saddle of one of Alfreduzzo's horses. A fine race horse, with one ear spread like a fan.

In the background was the town. The Poggiolani could be seen working on the walls, filling holes, repairing roofs, and shooting bats. Birds were flying around, sparrows and geese, together with big jugs overflowing with wine.

Then there were the Hundred Horsemen, headed by Alf the Terrible, big, bold, fearless, but comical. Marcellina was the first to discover what made him look so funny. She screamed with joy.

"It is Cheemy's eyes! It is Cheemy's eyes!"

It was true. The Hundred Horsemen had eyes like mine, too. It amused the Poggiolani.

In another picture, in the lower corner of the fresco, I was bending down, taking out a treasure chest. Black Eye was helping me drag it out, his beak pulling a rope, and our expressions were that of two partners saying, "We hit the jack pot!"

They had come down from the mountains, the women with the tambourines and the men with the bagpipes. And now they circulated inside our town among hundreds of couples dancing the tarantella in the square and over the steps and down in the circle, and while circulating the men and women from the mountains blew into the bagpipes and thundered and waved the tambourines and cracked them on elbows and knees and banged at them with their knuckles.

] 173 [

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

Suddenly a slim, sun-golden figure appeared under the arched entrance to our town. Clad in dark-green corduroy trousers, his bare chest showing through the open white sheepskin vest, he held a flute in one hand and in the other a bunch of wild flowers.

He advanced among the dancers barefooted, his red head erect, the hair curling down the back of his long neck. His fearful white dog followed him. Some of the dancers stopped at his passing. Veneranda saw him and stood petrified. The shepherd went up to her and for the first time she looked into his face, at his sharp jaw, the straight nose, his flaming hair, now streaming down over one side of his forehead, partially covering one eye. One eye that was shuttered, without a pupil!

Slowly Veneranda's hand reached for the flowers. And when she took them out of his hand, he ran away.

A pause. Then the suitor whose voice I had liked the best laughed out. "What a lover! Ha, ha, ha—with only one eye. Ha, ha, ha!"

Veneranda's face turned white. Clutching the flowers with one hand, she hit him so hard with the other that he was knocked to the ground. Then she ran after the shepherd.

The men from the mountains kept moving among the dancers, while their women banged and waved the tambourines. We of Poggio left them to follow Veneranda, but were stopped by the shepherd's dog who had picked a quarrel with Napoleone's wolf dog. They had their

] 174 [

FIESTA

teeth into each other's fur. Their roars were so loud that the music stopped. The shepherd dog was the better scrapper and would have killed the other if Alfreduzzo hadn't got hold of him by the tail. Temistocle and I grabbed the other dog's tail and pulled them apart. Then we of Poggio went on to the gate.

At the gate under the arch, we met old Joe. He whispered, "She is in the church; I told her the shepherd had gone there."

I asked the Poggiolani to remain outside. I would tiptoe into the church and come back to report.

Veneranda and the shepherd were kneeling in front of the altar. The rays of the sun coming through the ancient stained glass bathed them in violet, green, and orange. I stood near the door for a long while, silently. Then I saw Veneranda place an arm over his shoulder.

That was enough for me. I tiptoed out.

"Everything is fine," I announced. And we all broke into radiant smiles of relief.

It was then that we heard a "Psssst. Psssst."

The tall, angular farmer who had once come to ask me for Veneranda's hand and dowry for his son was standing to one side, looking at me with a big smile. I smiled back at him. With open eyes and uplifted brows he indicated a big white cow near him.

] 175 [

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

My God, I thought. That's the dowry. He's brought the dowry!

Serafino said, "He brought the cow."

"I know," I said. There was a big thump. Serafino had fallen to the floor in a faint.

Just then the band struck up a tune. It was the signal for the procession to start. Everybody fell in line behind the priest. Candles were distributed. The men walked with their hats in their hands, heads bowed. Women and children followed. Young wives proudly carried babies in their arms, while small children trotted beside them with baskets of fresh-cut flowers.

My people sat around the long table, swaying on their seats like a jeep over a bumpy road and aware of every little movement Napoleone made near the oven. Temistocle and old Joe stood at each of her sides with an iron poker.

Napoleone smiled with great pride, fork in hand, and announced, "It's ready!" And every face around the table glowed. She opened the oven. We saw the golden pig rolling on the spit, with the pan holding the gravy under it. We all exclaimed, "Ahhhhh!" It sounded like the harmony of a chord in a symphony. The blazing heat didn't affect the gleam in our eyes.

Like graceful weight lifters, Temistocle and Andrea at one side and Calliope and old Joe at the other raised the

] 176 [

PiSTATA

spit with poker irons from the oven and brought it over the iron lid at the center of the table in the middle of a crown of bay leaves, garnished with olives, celery, radishes, broiled potatoes, and slender jugs of wine. Then they rested on their pokers with the satisfaction of performers who had accomplished their featured trick.

Napoleone took over. She stabbed the meat with a fork and started to carve.

It was siesta time, but in the square people were still dancing. The Poggiolani sat contentedly sipping their wine and keeping time with their feet to the music.

"Wouldn't you like to join the others and dance?" I asked. No, they wouldn't. They were content. "Thank you." . . . "Grazie." All of a sudden they looked different to me. They looked stout, all padded up. Their blouses and pockets were bulging out.

I understood. Today was today, but there would be other days. "Go home," I said. "Put your dishes away and keep the glasses here." They all got up—"Sì, sì"—and left, holding pockets and blouses. They returned looking much thinner, and joined the dancers in the square.

The sky had become dark with big clouds and suddenly it started to pour. Thunder and lightning crossed the sky. The dancers rushed into the little houses and the castle, invaded the Hall of the Hundred Horsemen, the

] 177 [

LITTLE WORLD, HELLO!

armory, the jails. The band and the bagpipes and the tambourines climbed to the *loggiate* and from there they kept playing. The wind howled and thunder crashed like cracking whips.

I saw the women of Poggio glancing at me mournfully. I felt uncomfortable. I'm in hot water again, I thought. Gian-Domenico's arm is still in a sling. How can he ring the bell and keep the lightning away? Is someone going to be hit by lightning?

The band and the bagpipes and the tambourines subsided for a while, and we heard the faint sound of a flute coming from the church. It gave me the impression of calling for me, though the shepherd surely had something else in mind. I rushed out in the storm. Reaching the church, I took hold of the cord of the bell and pulled and pulled. But I was an amateur and my arm got sorer and sorer. Later, though, they told me that I had kept time with the band.

] 178 [

23

EXIT

THE CABLE ARRIVED and old Joe brought it to me in the *loggiate* while La Signora, Nina, and I were at breakfast. It was from my agent, calling me back to New York to play in George Abbott's *The Boys from Syracuse*. I passed the cable to Nina and I looked over my little town with the new roof tops. I saw Andrea, who was placing the last shingle on the roof of Veneranda's future home.

"My work is done," I thought.

From the piazza a murmur arose. Temistocle came run-

] 179 [

ning up the steps of the *cortile* and entered the *loggiate* with an apprehensive look.

"It's goodbye," I said. He looked at me with sorrow, then looked out over the town tops and cried to the Poggiani assembled in the piazza, "The lord of Poggio is leaving!"

The murmur arose, now amplified. I excused myself, got up, and went inside the castle's halls and stopped at the window from which Veneranda had listened to the flute at dawn.

I looked far off, to the clear sky with the little pillows of white clouds. The trees were still, the birds had stopped singing.

The next day was a hard day. The Poggiani were waiting for us in the *cortile*. Nobody spoke. I just went over to Gian-Domenico and handed him the key of the castle and said, "Keep it for us till we come back." He took the key and stared at me. Then he went to the door and with seven turns locked it.

The two men with the donkeys had come to carry down our suitcases. Old Joe took my arm and squeezed it. Del-fina asked Nina to name her child that was expected soon.

"If it's a girl, call her Fiorcella," Nina said.

"Si, and if it is a boy we will call him Lord Cheemy." Genoveffa, Settimia, Leonina, Lorenzo, Temistocle—

] 180 [

all of little Poggio walked silently down the hill following us. Alfreduzzo walked close to me, looking up at me with eyes that said he was losing his last friend. I heard a quack. I turned and saw Black Eye, who had stopped under the arch of the gate.

Surrounded by sheep, Veneranda and the shepherd, holding hands, looked at us standing on the rock. Veneranda was holding a rope the other end of which was tight around the neck of that beautiful white cow I had bought from the sercnader's father as my wedding present to her. She handed the rope to the shepherd. He gave her his flute and she ran down to me.

"He wants you to have it," she said, and placed it in my hands and ran away.

We kept walking down the slope. When we reached the cross, we stopped and prayed.

At the bottom of the mountain the car was waiting. We drew together and silently shook hands. Marcellina motioned me aside and took something from her pocket.

"It's the pig's tail, Cheemy, from the roast." She gave it to me.

We got into the car. Gian-Domenico came slowly to the door, his lips twitching.

I said, "Goodbye, my friend."

Then, for the first time in twenty years, he spoke.

"We live for your return."

] 181 [

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JIMMY SAVO was playing two a day in vaudeville when most boys his age were playing marbles. He is one of those rarities, an authentic New Yorker, having been born on East 97th Street of poor Italian immigrants. To help support the family he sold papers on street corners and in saloons. He soon discovered that by singing, dancing, and juggling while he peddled he could earn a lot of extra pennies. When he was nine he began playing the amateur night circuit. By the time he was thirteen he had made his professional debut as a juggler in a New Bedford vaudeville house.

From then on Jimmy's career unfolded in true Horatio Alger form. Today critics rank him as one of this country's outstanding mimes. Brooks Atkinson wrote: "Jimmy belongs in the company of the aristocrats of the profession with Charlie Chaplin, Joe Jackson, the Frères Fratellini." Portraits of Jimmy by several American artists hang in museums; E. E. Cummings celebrated his genius in a poem; his fans are legion and from all walks of life.

Savo lives in New York City with his wife, Nina. He is a familiar figure in Central Park, whose birds and squirrels can always depend upon him for a free meal. He is also a befriender of stray dogs and a passionate fisherman.

Gilbert Seldes once wrote of Savo: "He is always sweet, as fresh water is sweet." This is the flavor of Little World, Hello!



From:  
**Cynthia Kerns**  
131 Joya Circle  
Harrisburg, PA 17112  
United States

Ship to:  
**Franco Della Rosa**  
Piazza G. Marconi, 2  
Amelia, TR 05022  
Italy

**Invoice / Packing Slip**

Date Nov-14-2013  
Record # 340  
Price \$8.50  
Subtotal \$8.50  
Subtotal: \$8.50  
Shipping & Handling (Standard Int'l Shipping): \$14.95  
Sales Tax N/A  
Seller discounts (-) or charges (+): \$0.00  
Total: \$23.45

Quantity 1  
Item # 111201043216  
Item Name Little World, Hello! - Jimmy Savo - 1947 1st Ed. - 2nd print  
HC/DJ - RARE - OOP

Shipping & Handling (Standard Int'l Shipping):

Sales Tax  
Seller discounts (-) or charges (+):  
Total:



Cynthia Kerns  
131 Joya Circle  
Harrisburg, PA 17112  
USA

LC0476533BUS

Detailed description of contents (1)		Qty (2)	Weight (3) (lb. oz)	Value (4) (US \$)	HS Tariff Code (5)	Country of Origin (6)
Book		1	4.50	4.50	1709	USA

Comments: ☒ Commercial sample ☐ Merchandise ☐ Dangerous Goods  
☐ Gift ☐ Humanitarian Donation ☐ Other

Signature of Shipper: [Signature]  
Signature of Addressee: [Signature]  
Date: 11/14/13

PS Form 2976, September 2012 PSN 7505-01-000-9033