

CHAPTER X

They whack-whacked the white horse on the legs and he kneed himself up. The picador twisted the stirrups straight and pulled and hauled up into the saddle. The horse's entrails hung down in a blue bunch and swung backward and forward as he began to canter; the monos whacking him on the back of his legs with the rods. He cantered jerkily along the barrera. He stopped stiff and one of the monos held his bridle and walked him forward. The picador kicked in his spurs, leaned forward and shook his lance at the bull. Blood pumped regularly from between the horse's front legs. He was nervously wobbly. The bull could not make up his mind to charge.

Cat in the Rain

THERE WERE ONLY TWO AMERICANS stopping at the hotel.

They did not know any of the people they passed on the stairs on their way to and from their room.

Their room was on the second floor facing the sea. It also faced the public garden and the war monument. There were big palms and green benches in the public garden. In the good weather there was always an artist with his easel. Artists liked the way the palms grew and the bright colors of the hotels facing the gardens and the sea. Italians came from a long way off to look up at the war monument. It was made of bronze and glistened in the rain. It was raining. The rain dripped from the palm trees. Water stood in pools on the gravel paths. The sea broke in a long line in the rain and slipped back down the beach to come up and break again in a long line in the rain. The motor cars were gone from the square by the war monument. Across the square in the doorway of the café a waiter stood looking out at the empty square.

The American wife stood at the window looking out. Outside right under their window a cat was crouched under one of the dripping green tables. The cat was trying to make herself so compact that she would not be dripped on.

"I'm going down and get that kitty," the American wife said.

"I'll do it," her husband offered from the bed.

"No, I'll get it. The poor kitty out trying to keep dry under a table."

The husband went on reading, lying propped up with the two pillows at the foot of the bed.

"Don't get wet," he said.

The wife went downstairs and the hotel owner stood up and bowed to her as she passed the office. His desk was at the far end of the office. He was an old man and very tall.

"Il piove," the wife said. She liked the hotel-keeper.

"Sì, sì, Signera, brutto tempo. It's very bad weather."

He stood behind his desk in the far end of the dim room. The wife liked him. She liked the deadly serious way he received any complaints. She liked his dignity. She liked the way he wanted to serve her. She liked the way he felt about being a hotel-keeper. She liked his old, heavy face and big hands.

Liking him she opened the door and looked out. It was raining harder. A man in a rubber cape was crossing the empty square to the café. The cat would be around to the right. Perhaps she could go along under the eaves. As she stood in the doorway an umbrella opened behind her. It was the maid who looked after their room.

“You must not get wet,” she smiled, speaking Italian. Of course, the hotel-keeper had sent her.

With the maid holding the umbrella over her, she walked along the gravel path until she was under their window. The table was there, washed bright green in the rain, but the cat was gone. She was suddenly disappointed. The maid looked up at her.

“Ha perduto qualche cosa, Signera?”

“There was a cat,” said the American girl.

“A cat?”

“Sì, il gatto.”

“A cat?” the maid laughed. “A cat in the rain?”

“Yes,” she said, “under the table.” Then, “Oh, I wanted it so much. I wanted a kitty.”

When she talked English the maid’s face tightened.

“Come, Signora,” she said. “We must get back inside. You will be wet.”

“I suppose so,” said the American girl.

They went back along the gravel path and passed in the door. The maid stayed outside to close the umbrella. As the American girl passed the office, the padrone bowed from his desk. Something felt very small and tight inside the girl. The padrone made her feel very small and at the same time really important. She had a momentary feeling of being of supreme importance. She went on up the stairs. She opened the door of the room. George was on the bed, reading.

“Did you get the cat?” he asked, putting the book down.

“It was gone.”

“Wonder where it went to,” he said, resting his eyes from reading.

She sat down on the bed.

“I wanted it so much,” she said. “I don’t know why I wanted it so much. I wanted that poor kitty. It isn’t any fun to be a poor kitty out in the rain.” George was reading again.

She went over and sat in front of the mirror of the dressing table looking at herself with the hand glass. She studied her profile, first one side and then the other. Then she studied the back of her head and her neck.

“Don’t you think it would be a good idea if I let my hair grow out?” she asked, looking at her profile again.

George looked up and saw the back of her neck, clipped close like a boy’s.

“I like it the way it is.”

“I get so tired of it,” she said. “I get so tired of looking like a boy.”

George shifted his position in the bed. He hadn’t looked away from her since she started to speak.

“You look pretty darn nice,” he said.

She laid the mirror down on the dresser and went over to the window and looked out. It was getting dark.

“I want to pull my hair back tight and smooth and make a big knot at the back that I can feel,” she said. “I want to have a kitty to sit on my lap and purr when I stroke her.”

“Yeah?” George said from the bed.

“And I want to eat at a table with my own silver and I want candles. And I want it to be spring and I want to brush my hair out in front of a mirror and I want a kitty and I want some new clothes.”

“Oh, shut up and get something to read,” George said. He was reading again.

His wife was looking out of the window. It was quite dark now and still raining in the palm trees.

“Anyway, I want a cat,” she said, “I want a cat. I want a cat now. If I can’t have long hair or any fun, I can have a cat.”

George was not listening. He was reading his book. His wife looked out of the window where the light had come on in the square.

Someone knocked at the door.

“Avanti,” George said. He looked up from his book.

In the doorway stood the maid. She held a big tortoise-shell cat pressed tight against her and swung down against her body.

“Excuse me,” she said, “the padrone asked me to bring this for the Signora.”

CHAPTER XI

The crowd shouted all the time and threw pieces of bread down into the ring, then cushions and leather wine bottles, keeping up whistling and yelling. Finally the bull was too tired from so much bad sticking and folded his knees and lay down and one of the cuadrilla leaned out over his neck and killed him with the puntillo. The crowd came over the barrera and around the torero and two men grabbed him and held him and some one cut of his pigtail and was waving it and a kid grabbed it and ran away with it. Afterwards I saw him at the café. He was very short with a brown face and quite drunk and he said after all it has happened before like that. I am not really a good bull fighter.

Out of Season

ON THE FOUR LIRE PEDUZZI HAD EARNED by spading the hotel garden he got quite drunk. He saw the young gentleman coming down the path and spoke to him mysteriously. The young gentleman said he had not eaten but would be ready to go as soon as lunch was finished. Forty minutes or an hour.

At the cantina near the bridge they trusted him for three more grappas because he was so confident and mysterious about his job for the afternoon. It was a windy day with the sun coming out from behind clouds and then going under in sprinkles of rain. A wonderful day for trout fishing.

The young gentleman came out of the hotel and asked him about the rods. Should his wife come behind with the rods? "Yes," said Peduzzi, "let her follow us." The young gentleman went back into the hotel and spoke to his wife. He and Peduzzi started down the road. The young gentleman had a musette over his shoulder. Peduzzi saw the wife, who looked as young as the young gentleman, and was wearing mountain boots and a blue beret, start out to follow them down the road, carrying the fishing rods, unjointed, one in each hand. Peduzzi didn't like her to be way back there. "Signorina," he called, winking at the young gentleman, "come up here and walk with us. Signora, come up here.

Let us all walk together." Peduzzi wanted them all three to walk down the street of Cortina together.

The wife stayed behind, following rather sullenly. "Signorina," Peduzzi called tenderly, "come up here with us." The young gentleman looked back and shouted something. The wife stopped lagging behind and walked up.

Everyone they met walking through the main street of the town Peduzzi greeted elaborately. Buon dì, Arturo! Tipping his hat. The bank clerk stared at him from the door of the Fascist café. Groups of three and four people standing in front of the shops stared at the three. The workmen in their stonepowdered jackets working on the foundations of the new hotel looked up as they passed.

Nobody spoke or gave any sign to them except the town beggar, lean and old, with a spittle-

thickened beard, who lifted his hat as they passed.

Peduzzi stopped in front of a store with the window full of bottles and brought his empty grappa bottle from an inside pocket of his old military coat. "A little to drink, some marsala for the Signora, something, something to drink." He gestured with the bottle. It was a wonderful day. "Marsala, you like marsala, Signorina? A little marsala?"

The wife stood sullenly. "You'll have to play up to this," she said. "I can't understand a word he says. He's drunk, isn't he?"

The young gentleman appeared not to hear Peduzzi. He was thinking, what in hell makes him say marsala? That's what Max Beerbohm drinks.

"Geld," Peduzzi said finally, taking hold of the young gentleman's sleeve. "Lire." He smiled, reluctant to press the subject but needing to bring the young gentleman into action.

The young gentleman took out his pocketbook and gave him a ten-lira note. Peduzzi went up the steps to the door of the Specialty of Domestic and Foreign Wines shop. It was locked.

"It is closed until two," someone passing in the street said scornfully. Peduzzi came down the steps. He felt hurt. "Never mind," he said, "we can get it at the Concordia."

They walked down the road to the Concordia three abreast. On the porch of the Concordia, where the rusty bobsleds were stacked, the young gentleman said, "Was wollen Sie?" Peduzzi handed him the ten-lira note folded over and over. "Nothing," he said, "anything." He was embarrassed.

"Marsala, maybe. I don't know. Marsala?"

The door of the Concordia shut on the young gentleman and the wife. "Three marsalas," said the young gentleman to the girl behind the pastry counter. "Two, you mean?" she asked. "No," he said, "one for a vecchio." "Oh," she said, "a vecchio," and laughed, getting down the bottle. She poured out the three muddy looking drinks into three glasses. The wife was sitting at a table under the line of newspapers on sticks. The young gentleman put one of the marsalas in front of her. "You might as well drink it," he said, "maybe it'll make you feel better." She sat and looked at the glass. The young gentleman went outside the door with a glass for Peduzzi but could not see him.

"I don't know where he is," he said, coming back into the pastry room carrying the glass.

"He wanted a quart of it," said the wife.

"How much is a quarter litre?" the young gentleman asked the girl.

"Of the bianco? One lira."

"No, of the marsala. Put these two in, too," he said, giving her his own glass and the one poured for Peduzzi. She filled the quarter litre wine measure with a funnel. "A bottle to carry it," said the young gentleman.

She went to hunt for a bottle. It all amused her.

"I'm sorry you feel so rotten, Tiny," he said. "I'm sorry I talked the way I did at lunch. We were both getting at the same thing from different angles."

"It doesn't make any difference," she said. "None of it makes any difference."

"Are you too cold?" he asked. "I wish you'd worn another sweater."

"I've got on three sweaters."

The girl came in with a very slim brown bottle and poured the marsala into it. The young gentleman paid five lire more. They went out the door. The girl was amused. Peduzzi was walking up and down at the other end out of the wind and holding the rods.

"Come on" he said, "I will carry the rods. What difference does it make if anybody sees them? No one will trouble us. No one will make any trouble for me in Cortina. I know them at the municipio. I have been a soldier. Everybody in this town likes me. I sell frogs. What if it is forbidden to fish? Not a thing. Nothing. No trouble. Big trout, I tell you. Lots of them."

They were walking down the hill toward the river. The town was in back of them. The sun had gone under and it was sprinkling rain. "There," said Peduzzi, pointing to a girl in the doorway of a house they passed. "My daughter."

"His doctor," the wife said, "has he got to show us his doctor?"

"He said his daughter," said the young gentleman.

The girl went into the house as Peduzzi pointed.

They walked down the hill across the fields and then turned to follow the river bank. Peduzzi talked rapidly with much winking and knowingness. As they walked three abreast the wife caught his breath across the wind. Once he nudged her in the ribs. Part of the time he talked in d'Ampezzo dialect and sometimes in Tyroler German dialect. He could not make out which the young gentleman and his wife understood the best so he was being bilingual. But as the young gentleman said, "Ja, Ja,"

Peduzzi decided to talk altogether in Tyroler. The young gentleman and the wife understood nothing.

"Everybody in the town saw us going through with these rods. We're probably being followed by the game police now. I wish we weren't in on this damn thing. This damned old fool is so drunk, too."

"Of course you haven't got the guts to just go back," said the wife. "Of course you have to go on."

"Why don't you go back? Go on back, Tiny."

"I'm going to stay with you. If you go to jail we might as well both go."

They turned sharp down the bank and Peduzzi stood, his coat blowing in the wind, gesturing at the river. It was brown and muddy. Off on the right there was a dump heap.

“Say it to me in Italian,” said the young gentleman.

“Un’ mezz’ora. Piu d’un’ mezz’ora.”

“He says it’s at least a half hour more. Go on back. Tiny. You’re cold in this wind anyway. It’s a rotten day and we aren’t going to have any fun, anyway.”

“All right,” she said, and climbed up the grassy bank.

Peduzzi was down at the river and did not notice her till she was almost out of sight over the crest. “Frau!” he shouted. “Frau! Fräulein! You’re not going.”

She went on over the crest of the hill.

“She’s gone!” said Peduzzi. It shocked him.

He took off the rubber bands that held the rod segments together and commenced to joint up one of the rods.

“But you said it was half an hour further.”

“Oh, yes. It is good half an hour down. It is good here, too.”

“Really?”

“Of course. It is good here and good there, too.”

The young gentleman sat down on the bank and jointed up a rod, put on the reel and threaded the line through the guides. He felt uncomfortable and afraid that any minute a gamekeeper or a posse of citizens would come over the bank from the town. He could see the houses of the town and the campanile over the edge of the hill. He opened his leader box. Peduzzi leaned over and dug his flat, hard thumb and forefinger in and tangled the moistened leaders.

“Have you some lead?”

“No.”

“You must have some lead.” Peduzzi was excited. “You must have piombo. Piombo. A little piombo. Just here. Just above the hook or your bait will float on the water. You must have it. Just a little piombo.”

“Have you got some?”

“No.” He looked through his pockets desperately. Sifting through the cloth dirt in the linings of his inside military pockets. “I haven’t any. We must have piombo.”

“We can’t fish then,” said the young gentleman, and unjointed the rod, reeling the line back through the guides. “We’ll get some piombo and fish tomorrow.”

“But listen, caro, you must have piombo. The line will lie flat on the water.” Peduzzi’s day was going to pieces before his eyes. “You must have piombo. A little is enough. Your stuff is all clean and new but you have no lead. I would have brought some. You said you had everything.”

The young gentleman looked at the stream discolored by the melting snow. “I know,” he said,

“we’ll get some piombo and fish tomorrow.”

“At what hour in the morning? Tell me that.”

“At seven.”

The sun came out. It was warm and pleasant. The young gentleman felt relieved. He was no longer breaking the law. Sitting on the bank he took the bottle of marsala out of his pocket and passed it to Peduzzi. Peduzzi passed it back. The young gentleman took a drink of it and passed it to Peduzzi again. Peduzzi passed it back again. “Drink,” he said, “drink. It’s your marsala.” After another short drink the young gentleman handed the bottle over. Peduzzi had been watching it closely. He took the bottle very hurriedly and tipped it up. The gray hairs in the folds of his neck oscillated as he drank, his eyes fixed on the end of the narrow brown bottle. He drank it all. The sun shone while he drank. It was wonderful. This was a great day, after all. A wonderful day.

“Senta, caro! In the morning at seven.” He had called the young gentleman caro several times and nothing had happened. It was good marsala. His eyes glistened. Days like this stretched out ahead. It would begin at seven in the morning.

They started to walk up the hill toward the town. The young gentleman went on ahead. He was quite a way up the hill. Peduzzi called to him.

“Listen, caro, can you let me take five lire for a favor?”

“For today?” asked the young gentleman frowning.

“No, not today. Give it to me today for tomorrow. I will provide everything for tomorrow. Pane, salami, formaggio, good stuff for all of us. You and I and the Signora. Bait for fishing, minnows, not worms only. Perhaps I can get some marsala. All for five lire. Five lire for a favor.”

The young gentleman looked through his pocketbook and took out a two-lira note and two ones.

“Thank you, caro. Thank you,” said Peduzzi, in the tone of one member of the Carleton Club accepting the Morning Post from another. This was living. He was through with the hotel garden, breaking up frozen manure with a dung fork. Life was opening out.

“Until seven o’clock then, caro,” he said, slapping the young gentleman on the back. “Promptly at seven.”

“I may not be going,” said the young gentleman putting his purse back in his pocket.

“What,” said Peduzzi, “I will have minnows, Signor. Salami, everything. You and I and the Signora. The three of us.”

“I may not be going,” said the young gentleman, “very probably not. I will leave word with the padrone at the hotel office.”