

anean; the goal of the journey was so far away, the land where they were born and where they were to raise their young. They came in thousands: wood-pigeons, thrushes, turtle-doves, waders, quails, golden orioles, skylarks, nightingales, wagtails, chaffinches, swallows, warblers, redbreasts, and many other tiny artists on their way to give spring concerts to the silent forests and fields in the north. A couple of hours later they fluttered helplessly in the nets the cunning of man had stretched all over the island from the cliffs by the sea high up to the slopes of Monte Solaro and Monte Barbarossa. In the evening they were packed by hundreds in small wooden boxes, without food and water, and despatched by steamers to Marseilles to be eaten with delight in the smart restaurants of Paris. It was a lucrative trade, Capri was for centuries the seat of a bishop entirely financed by the sale of the netted birds. "*Il vescovo delle quaglie*."\* he was called in Rome. Do you know how they are caught in the nets? Hidden under the thickets, between the poles, are caged decoy birds, who repeat incessantly, automatically, their monotonous call. They cannot stop, they go on calling out night and day till they die. Long before science knew anything about the localisation of the various nerve-centres in the human brain, the devil had revealed to his disciple man his ghastly discovery that by stinging out the eyes of a bird with a red-hot needle the bird would sing automatically. It is an old story, it was already known to the Greeks and the Romans, it is still done to-day all along the southern shores of Spain, Italy† and Greece. Only a few birds in a hundred survive the operation, still it is good business, a blinded quail is worth twenty-five lire in Capri to-day. During six weeks of the spring and six weeks of the autumn, the whole slope of Monte Barbarossa was covered with nets from the ruined castle on the top down to the garden wall of San Michele at the foot of the mountain. It was considered the best *caccia*‡ on the whole island—as often as not over a thousand birds were netted there in a single day. The mountain was owned by a man from the mainland, an ex-butcher, a famous specialist in the blinding of birds, my only enemy in Anacapri\*\* except the doctor. Ever since I had begun building San Michele the war between him and me had been going on incessantly. I had appealed to the Prefect of Naples, I had appealed to the Government in Rome, I had been told there was nothing to be done, the mountain was his, the law was on his side. I had obtained an audience from the highest Lady in the land, she had smiled at me with her enchanting smile that had won her the heart of the whole of Italy, she had honoured me with an invitation to remain for luncheon; the first word I had read on the menu had been

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\* The quail bishop.

† Now forbidden by law since Mussolini came into power.

‡ Hunting-place.

\*\* Chief town on Capri.