

is the Missus," he said loudly, and amended, "Mrs. Cody."

The Italian bowed. "Good morning, Madame."

Mrs. Cody smiled, thinking how thin and sad the poor fellow looked—not a bit dangerous. "Dad'll show you where you are to sleep," she said kindly. "Take your things in, and I'll make you a cup of tea. I guess you're ready for it after your journey."

He bowed again. "You are verra kind."

"Don't take too long over it," shouted Cody. "There's plenty o' work waitin'."

"Si—boss."

"Gee-o," as the family called him, fitted swiftly and easily into life on the Cody farm. He was clean, willing and energetic. In addition to the work he was told to do, he took over little tasks on his own initiative. Mrs. Cody's wood-box was never empty. There was always a pile of dry kindling ready for the morning fire. On washing days, the tubs stood filled with water. He brought up a barrow-load of gravelly soil from the creek bed and filled in a muddy hole just outside the back door. If he saw Mrs. Cody carrying anything heavy, he would rush up to relieve her with a "Plis to allow me!" He never sat while she remained standing. He placed her chair at meal times, fetched and carried for her in many unobtrusive ways. Mrs. Cody liked it. She felt that her status had been raised. She was no longer Mum, drudge and slave of the family; but queen of the household.

"Isn't Gio polite, Mum?" Joan remarked once.

"Foreigners always are," said Mavis with superior knowledge, adding as an after-thought, "except Hitler."

There came a day when, to her husband's astonishment, Mrs. Cody decided to take the long train journey to Melbourne. "I want to buy a new dress," she explained.

"T'aint necessary to travel a coupler 'undred miles fer a dress, is it? Why don't ye get it at Carter's Stores, same as ye always done?"

"Carter's Stores! Lot of old-fashioned rubbish! Anyway it's time I had a bit of a holiday."

She returned a week later, wearing a gay flowered dress and blue coat. Her hair had been shorn and waved, and a smart hat was perched rakishly over one eye. What else she had done, only Mrs. Cody knew. Facial treatments, jars of cosmetics, lipstick—how Jim Cody scoffed!—new undies and corsets, shoes, gay "peasant" aprons. For her husband, a new pipe. Toys for the kids. And for Giovanni—a mandoline!

"Just an old second-hand one," she explained carelessly to Jim. "I saw it in a shop and thought he'd like it. He told me he used to play one."

"Wasting money on a Wog!" growled Cody.

"It was my money," replied his wife tartly, patting the undulations in her hair, "and don't call him a Wog. You copied that from that ignorant Tom Jackson. Gio's a decent young fellow, and a good worker. Poor chap, it wasn't his fault that Mussolini led the Italian people into war. They didn't want it. He told me. He says the Italians love England and France, and hated fighting us!"

"Fight us? I like that! All they did was run away."

"Of course. Their heart wasn't in it. They're musicians and poets, not soldiers."

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AFTER tea, as soon as the radio news session was finished, Jim Cody would yawn mightily, and go off to bed. The children finished their home lessons, and they too would retire. Then, as Mrs. Cody sat at the fire with her never-ending pile of mending, Gio would read to her—from the newspapers, or the woman's journal that came to her every week. Grim war news, recipes, short stories, advice to the love-lorn—all were read with the same quaint air of concentration and surprising accents that delighted his listener. Sometimes Jim Cody, waking from a work-haunted dream, would hear through the wooden partition that separated bedroom and living room the twang of the mandoline, and Gio's voice crooning a Sicilian love-song. Jim would draw the blankets over his head, and mutter, "Blast that Dago! Don't know how Annie can stand it! Wish he'd go to bed."

At ten o'clock, Mrs. Cody would put the iron kettle over the flames, and go to the pantry to rummage in her cake tin for some of Giovanni's favourite fruit cake. He always made and poured the tea, and waited on her. "Plis to allow me—more tea for you?" Mrs. Cody would smile up at him happily. "You spoil me, Gio!"

"But no—how could I spoil?"

He told her of Taormina, his lovely home on the Sicilian coast.

"Pretty place, is it?"

"Most beautiful in the whole world. After the war, when I am free again, I shall return, I cannot tell you how gladly!"

"Australia is beautiful, too," she said dismally. "Not this part, of course."

"You must excuse—I have seen so little of Australia. I am told there is great variety in scenery. But I will return to my home."

"Have you got a wife, Gio?"

"My wife died at the birth of her baby. There are my parents, my little daughter, and my sister—if they survived the war in Sicily. Where my brother is, I do not know."

"I wish I could have travelled and seen a bit of the world. But I've seen nothing and done nothing, and never likely to. I was a farmer's daughter and then a farmer's wife. Twenty-three years I've been married. Twenty-three years' hard labour!"

"But not unhappy years—no? At first, maybe, romance. And then your children, nice children?"

"Yes, they're good kids, all of them. Jim was in the last war."

Gio nodded. He had listened so often to Jim's tedious war stories, his narrow and prejudiced views.

"He got this farm under the Soldier Settlement scheme," she went on. "We had high hopes of making a lot of money. We haven't done bad, considering; but we've worked like slaves. I'm glad Cathie got out of it. I wonder will the boys want to carry on when they come back? There'll always have to be farmers, and farmers' wives, of course. But—oh, I don't know—it's a hard life!"

* * *

GIO had a birthday, and a Florentine friend whom he had known in Tatura camp sent him a book of Carducci's poems in an English translation. The woman's journal was neglected now, and

(continued on next page)

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