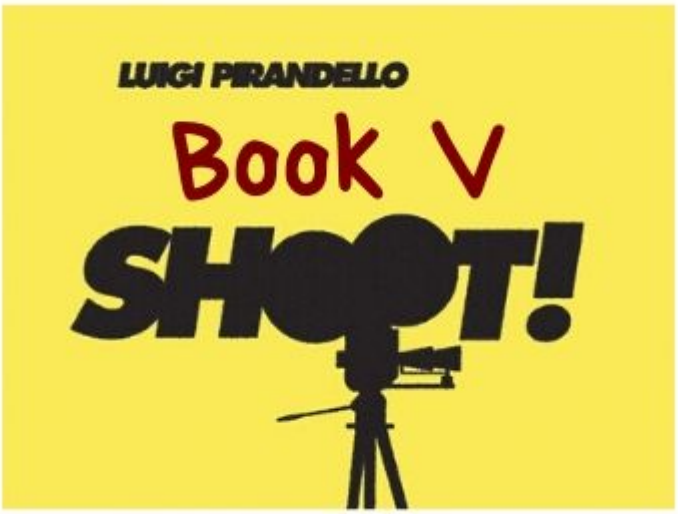
# Shoot! – Book V

scritto da Pirandelloweb.com
**In Italiano – Quaderni di Serafino Gubbio, operatore**



*Translated from the Italian by C. K. Scott Moncrieff*
by A Project Gutenberg of Australia eBook




## Shoot! – Book V

### 1.

I have just come from Aldo Nuti's room. It is nearly one o'clock. The house—in which I am spending my first night—is asleep. It has for me a strange atmosphere, which I cannot as yet breathe with comfort; the appearance of things, the savour of life, special arrangements, traces of unfamiliar habits. In the passage, as soon as I shut the door of Nuti's room, holding a lighted match in my fingers, I saw close beside me, enormous on the opposite wall, my own shadow. Lost in the silence of the house, I felt my soul so small that my shadow

there on the wall, grown so big, seemed to me the image of fear.
At the end of the passage, a door; outside this door, on the mat, a pair of shoes: Signorina Luisetta's. I stopped for a moment to look at
my monstrous shadow, which stretched out in the direction of this door, and the fancy came to me that the shoes were there to keep my shadow away.  Suddenly, from inside the door, the old dog Piccini, who had already perhaps pricked her ears, on the alert from the first sound of a door being opened, uttered a couple of wheezy barks. It was not at the sound that she barked; but she had heard me stop in the passage for a moment; had felt my thoughts make their way into the bedroom of her young mistress, and so she barked.
Here I am in my new room. But it should not be this room. When I came here with my luggage, Cavalena, who was genuinely delighted to have me in the house, not only because of the warm affection and strong confidence which I at once inspired in him, but perhaps also because he hopes that it may be easier for him, by my influence, to find an opening in the Kosmograph, had allotted to me the other room, larger, more comfortable, better furnished.
Certainly neither he nor Signora Nene desired or ordered the change. It must be the work of Signorina Luisetta, who listened this morning in the carriage so attentively and with such dismay, as we drove away from the Kosmograph, to my summary account of Nuti's misadventures. Yes, it must have been she, beyond question. My suspicion was confirmed a moment ago by the sight of her shoes outside the door, on the mat.

I am annoyed at the change for this reason only, that I myself, if this morning they had let me see both rooms, would have left the other to Nuti and have chosen this one for myself. Signorina Luisetta read my thoughts so clearly that without saying a word to me she has removed my things from the other room and arranged them in this. Certainly, if she had not done so, I should have been embarrassed at seeing Nuti

lodged in this smaller and less comfortable of the rooms. But am I to suppose that she wished to spare me this embarrassment? I cannot. Her having done, without saying a word to me, what I would have done myself, offends me, albeit I realise that it is what had to be done, or rather precisely because I realise that it is what had to be done.
Ah, what a prodigious effect the sight of tears in a man's eyes has on women, especially if they be tears of love. But I must be fair: they hare had a similar effect on myself.
He has kept me in there for about four hours.  He wanted to go on talking and weeping: I stopped him, out of compassion chiefly for his eyes. I have never seen a pair of eyes brought to such a state by excessive weeping.
I express myself badly. Not by excessive weeping.  Perhaps quite a few tears (he has shed an endless quantity), perhaps only a few tears would have been enough to bring his eyes to such a state.
And yet, it is strange! It appears that it is not he who is weeping. To judge by what he says, by what he proposes to do, he has no reason, nor, certainly, any desire to weep. The tears scald Ms eyes and cheeks, and therefore he knows that he is weeping; but he does not feel his own tears. His eyes are weeping almost for a grief that is not his, for a grief that is almost that of his tears themselves. His own grief is fierce, and refuses and scorns these tears.
But stranger still to my mind was this: that when at any point in his conversation his sentiments, so to speak, became lachrymose, his tears all at once began to slacken. While his voice grew tender and throbbed, his eyes, on the contrary, those eyes that a moment before were bloodshot and swollen with weeping, became dry and hard: fierce.

So that what he says and what his eyes say cannot correspond. But it is there, in his eyes, and not in what he says that his heart lies. And therefore it was for his eyes chiefly that I felt compassion. Let him not talk and weep; let him weep and listen to his own weeping: it is the best thing that he can

do.

There comes to me, through the wall, the sound of his step. I have advised him to go to bed, to try to sleep. He says that he cannot; that he has lost the power to sleep, for some time past.  What has made him lose it? Not remorse, certainly, to judge by what he says.

Among all the phenomena of human nature one of the commonest, and at the same time one of the strangest when we study it closely, is this of the desperate, frenzied struggle which every man, however ruined by his own misdeeds, conquered and crushed in his affliction, persists in keeping up with his own conscience, in order not to acknowledge those misdeeds and not to make them a matter for remorse. That others acknowledge them and punish him for them, imprison him, inflict the cruellest tortures upon him and kill him, matters not to him; so long as he himself does not acknowledge them, but withstands his own conscience which cries them aloud at him. Who is he? Ah, if each one of us could for an instant tear himself away from that metaphorical ideal which our countless fictions, conscious and unconscious, our fictitious interpretations of our actions and feelings lead us inevitably to form of ourselves; he would at once perceive that this _he_ is _another_, another who has nothing or but very little in common with himself; and that the true _he_ is the one that is crying his misdeeds aloud within him; the intimate being, often doomed for the whole of our lives to remain unknown to us! We seek at all costs to preserve, to maintain in position that metaphor of ourselves, our pride and our love. And for this metaphor we undergo martyrdom and ruin ourselves, when it would be so pleasant to let ourselves succumb vanquished, to give ourselves up to our own inmost being, which is a dread deity, if we oppose ourselves to it; but becomes at once compassionate towards our every fault, as soon as we confess it, and prodigal of unexpected tendernesses.  But this seems a negation of self, something unworthy of a man; and will ever be so, so long as we believe that our humanity consists in this metaphor of ourselves.

The version given by Aldo Nuti of the mishaps that have brought him low—it seems impossible!—aims above all at preserving this metaphor, his masculine vanity, which, albeit reduced before my eyes to this miserable plight, refuses nevertheless to humble itself to the confession that it has been a silly toy in the hands of a woman: a toy, a doll filled with sawdust, which the Nestoroff, after amusing herself for a while by making it open its arms and close them in an attitude of prayer, pressing with her finger the too obvious spring in its chest, flings away into a corner, breaking it in its fall.
It has risen to its feet again, this broken doll; its porcelain face and hands in a pitiful state: the hands without fingers, the face without a nose, all cracked and chipped; the spring in its chest has made a rent in the red woollen jacket and dangles out, broken; and yet, no, what is this: the doll cries out no, that it is not true that that woman made it open its arms and close them in an attitude of prayer to laugh at it, nor that, after laughing at it, she has broken it like this. It is not true!
By agreement with Duccella, by agreement with Granny Rosa he followed the affianced lovers from the villa by Sorrento to Naples, to save poor Giorgio, too innocent, and blinded by the fascination of that woman. It did not require much to save him! Enough to prove to him, to let him assure himself by experiment that the woman whom he wished to make his by marrying her, could be his, as she had been other men's, as she would be any man's, without any necessity of marrying her.  And thereupon, challenged by poor Giorgio, he set to work to make the experiment at once. Poor Giorgio believed it to be impossible because, as might be expected, with the tactics common among women of her sort, the Nestoroff had always refused to grant him even the slightest favour, and at Capri he had seen her so contemptuous of everyone, so withdrawn and aloof! It was a horrible act of treachery. Not his action, though, but Giorgio Mirelli's! He had promised that on receiving the proof he would at once leave the woman: instead, he killed himself.

This is the version that Aldo Nuti chooses to give of the drama.
But how, then? Was it he, the doll, that was playing the trick? And how comes he to be broken like this? If it was so easy a trick?  Away with these questions, and away with all surprise. Here one must make a show of believing.  Our pity must not diminish but rather increase at the overpowering necessity to lie in this poor doll, which is Aldo Nuti's vanity: the face without a nose, the hands without fingers, the spring in the chest broken, dangling out through the rent jacket, we must allow him to lie! Only, his lies give him an excuse for weeping all the more.
They are not good tears, because he does not wish to feel his own grief in them. He does not wish them, and he despises them. He wishes to do something other than weep, and we shall have to keep him under observation. Why has he come here?  He has no need to be avenged on anyone, if the treachery lay in Giorgio Mirelli's action in killing himself and flinging his dead body between his sister and her lover.
So much I said to him.
"I know," was his answer. "But there is still she, that woman, the cause of it all! If she had not come to disturb Giorgio's youth, to bait her hook, to spread her net for him with arts which really can be treacherous only to a novice, not because they are not treacherous in themselves, but because a man like myself, like you, recognises them at once for what they are: vipers, which we render harmless by extracting the teeth which we know to be venomous; now I should not be caught like that: I should not be caught like that! She at once saw in me an enemy, do you understand? And she tried to sting me by, stealth. From the very beginning I, on purpose, allowed her to think that it would be the easiest thing in the world for her to sting me. I wished her to shew her teeth, just so that I might draw them. And I was successful.  But Giorgio, Giorgio, Giorgio had been poisoned for ever! He should have let me know that it was useless my attempting to draw the teeth of that viper…."

“Not a viper, surely!” I could not help observing. “Too much innocence for a viper, surely! To offer you her teeth so quickly, so easily…. Unless she did it to cause the death of Giorgio Mirelli.”
“Perhaps.”
“And why? If she had already succeeded in her plan of making him marry her? And did she not yield at once to your trick? Did she not let you draw her teeth before she had attained her object?”
“But she had no suspicion!”
“In that case, how in the world is she a viper? Would you have a viper not suspect? A viper would have stung after, not before! If she
stung first, it means that… either she is not a viper, or for Giorgio’s sake she was willing to lose her teeth. Excuse me… no, wait a minute… please stop and listen to me… I tell you this because… I am quite of your opinion, you know… she did wish to be avenged, but at first, only at the beginning, upon Giorgio. This is my belief; I have always thought so.”
“Be avenged for what?”
“Perhaps for an insult which no woman will readily allow.”
“Woman, you say! She!”
“Yes, indeed, a woman, Signor Nuti! You who know her well, know that they are all the same, especially on this point.”
“What insult? I don’t follow you.”
“Listen: Giorgio was entirely taken up with his art, wasn’t he?”
“Yes.”
“He found at Capri this woman, who offered herself as an object of contemplation to him, to his art.”
“Precisely, yes.”
“And he did not see, he did not wish to see in her anything but her body, but only to caress it upon a canvas with his brushes, with the play of lights and colours. And then she, offended and piqued, to avenge herself, seduced him (there I agree with you!); and, having seduced him, to avenge herself further, to avenge herself still better, resisted him (am I

right?) until Giorgio, blinded, in order to secure her, proposed marriage, took her to Sorrento to meet his grandmother, his sister."
"No! It was her wish! She insisted upon it!"
"Very well, then; it was she; and I might say, insult for insult; but no, I propose now to abide by what you have said, Signor Nuti! And what you have said makes me think, that she may have insisted upon Giorgio's taking her there, and introducing her to his grandmother and sister, expecting that Giorgio would revolt against this imposition, so that she might find an excuse for releasing herself from the obligation to marry him."
"Release herself? Why?"
"Why, because she had already attained her object! Her vengeance was complete: Giorgio, crushed, blinded, captivated by her, by her body, to the extent of wishing to marry her! This was enough for her, and she asked for nothing more! All the rest, their wedding, life with him who would be certain to repent immediately of their marriage, would have meant unhappiness for her and for him, a chain. And perhaps she was not thinking only of herself; she may have felt some pity also for him!"
"Then you believe?"
"But you make me believe it, you make me think it, by maintaining that the woman is treacherous! To go by what you say, Signor Nuti, in a treacherous woman what she did is not consistent. A treacherous woman who desires marriage, and before her marriage gives herself to you so easily…"

"Gives herself to me?" came with a shout of rage from Aldo Nuti, driven by my arguments with his back to the wall. "Who told you that she gave herself to me? I never had her, I never had her…. Do you imagine that I can ever have thought of having her? All I required was the proof which she would not have failed to provide… a proof to shew to Giorgio!"
I was left speechless for a moment, gazing at him.
"And that viper let you have it at once? And you were able to

secure it without difficulty, this proof! But then, but then, surely…”
I supposed that at last my logic had the victory so firmly in its grasp that it would no longer be possible to wrest it from me. I had yet to learn, that at the very moment when logic, striving against passion, thinks that it has secured the victory, passion with a sudden lunge snatches it back, and then with buffetings and kicks sends logic flying with all its escort of linked conclusions.
If this unfortunate man, quite obviously the dupe of this woman, for a purpose which I believe myself to have guessed, could not make her his, and has been left accordingly with this rage still in his body, after all that he has had to suffer, because that silly doll of his vanity believed honestly perhaps at first that it could easily play with a woman like the Nestoroff; what more can one say? Is it possible to induce him to go away? To force him to see that he can have no object in provoking another man, in approaching a woman who does not wish to have anything more to do with him?
Well, I have tried to induce him to go away, and have asked him what, in short, he wanted, and what he hoped from this woman.

“I don’t know, I don’t know,” he cried. “She ought to stay with me, to suffer with me. I can’t do without her any longer, I can’t be left alone any more like this. I have tried up to now, I have done everything to win Duccella over; I have made ever so many of my friends intercede for me; but I realise that it is not possible. They do not believe in my agony, in my desperation.  And now I feel a need, I must cling on to some one, not be alone like this any more. You understand: I am going mad, I am going mad! I know that the woman herself is utterly worthless; but she acquires a value now from everything that I have suffered and am suffering through her. It is not love, it is hatred, it is the blood that has been shed for her!
And since she has chosen to submerge my life for ever in that

blood, it is necessary now that we plunge into it both together, clinging to one another, she and I, not I alone, not I alone! I cannot be left alone like this any more!”

I came away from his room without even the satisfaction of having offered him an outlet which might have relieved his heart a little. And now I can open the window and lean out to gaze at the sky, while he in the other room wrings his hands and weeps, devoured by rage and grief.  If I went back now, into his room, and said to him joyfully; “I say, Signor Nuti, there are still the stars!  You of course have forgotten them, but they are still there!” what would happen?  To how many men, caught in the throes of a passion, or bowed down, crushed by sorrow, by hardship, would it do good to think that there, above the roof, is the sky, and that in the sky there are the stars. Even if the fact of the stars’ being there did not inspire in them any religious consolation. As we gaze at them, our own feeble pettiness is engulfed, vanishes in the emptiness of space, and every reason for our torment must seem to us meagre and vain. But we must have in ourselves, in the moment of passion, the capacity to think of the stars.  This may be found in a man like myself, who for some time past has looked at everything, himself included, from a distance. If I were to go in there and tell Signor Nuti that the stars were shining in the sky, he would perhaps shout back at me to give them his kind regards, and would turn me out of the room like a dog.

But can I now, as Polacco would like, constitute myself his guardian? I can imagine how Carlo Ferro will glare at me presently, on seeing me come to the Kosmograph with him by my side. And God knows that I have no more reason to be a friend of one than of the other.

All I ask is to continue, with my usual impassivity, my work as an operator. I shall not look out of the window. Alas, since that cursed Senator Zeme has been to the Kosmograph, I see even in the sky a _marvel_ of cinematography.

## 2

“Then it is a serious matter?” Cavalena came to my room, mysteriously, this morning to ask me.
The poor man had three handkerchiefs in his hand.  At a certain point in the conversation, after many expressions of pity for that “dear Baron” (to wit, Nuti), and many observations touching the innumerable misfortunes of the human race, as though they were a proof of these misfortunes he spread out before me the three handkerchiefs, one after another, exclaiming:

“Look!”

They were all three in holes, as though they had been gnawed by mice. I gazed at them with pity and wonder; after which I gazed at him, shewing plainly that I did not understand.
Cavalena sneezed, or rather, I thought that he had sneezed. Not at all. He had said:
“Piccini.”
Seeing that I still gazed at him with that air of bewilderment, he shewed me the handkerchiefs once more and repeated:
“Piccini.”
“The little dog?”
He shut his eyes and nodded his head with a tragic solemnity.
“A hard worker, it seems,” said I.
“And I must not say a word!” exclaimed Cavalena.  “Because she is the one creature here, in my house, by whom my wife feels herself loved, and is not afraid of her playing her false. Ah, Signor Gubbio, nature is really wicked, believe me. No misfortune can be greater or worse than mine. To have a wife who feels that no one loves her but a dog! And it is not true, you know. That animal does not love anyone. My wife loves her, and do you know why? Because it is only with that animal that she can play at having a heart in her bosom that is overflowing with charity. And you should see how she consoles

herself! A tyrant with all the rest of us, the woman becomes a slave to an old, ugly animal; ugly isn't the word—you've seen it?—with claws like bill-hooks and bleared eyes. … And she loves it all the more now that she sees that an antipathy has been growing up for some time between the dog and me, an antipathy, Signor Gubbio, that is insuperable! Insuperable! That nasty beast, being quite certain that I, who know how she is protected by her mistress, will never give her the kick that would turn her inside out, reduce her—I swear to you, Signor Gubbio—to a jelly, shews me with the most irritating calmness every possible and imaginable sign of contempt, she positively insults me: she is always dirtying the carpet in my study; she lies on the armchairs, on the sofa in my study; she refuses her food and gnaws all my dirty linen: look at these, three handkerchiefs, yesterday, not to mention shirts, table-napkins, towels, pillow-slips; and I have to admire her and thank her, because do you know what this gnawing means o my wife? Affection! I assure you. It means that the dog smells her masters' scent. 'But how? When she eats it?' 'She doesn't know what she is doing,' would be my wife's answer. She has destroyed more than half our linen-cupboard. I have to keep quiet, put a stopper in, otherwise my wife would at once find an excuse for reminding me once again, in so many words, of my own brutality. That's just how it is! A fortunate thing, Signor Gubbio, a fortunate thing, as I always say, that I am a Doctor! I am bound, as a Doctor, to realise that this passionate adoration for an animal is merely another symptom of the disease! Typical, don't you know?"

He stood gazing at me for a while, undecided, perplexed: then, pointing to a chair, asked:

"May I?"

"Why, of course!" I told him.

He sat down; studied one of the handkerchiefs, shaking his head, then, with a wan, almost imploring smile:

"I am not in your way, am I? I am not disturbing you?"

I assured him warmly that he was not disturbing me in the least.

“I know, I can see that you are a warmhearted man… let me say it, a quiet man, but a man who can understand and feel for other people. And I…”
He broke off, with a worried expression, listened intently, then sprang to his feet:
“I think that was Luisetta calling me….”
I too listened for a moment, then said:
“No, I don’t think so.”
Sorrowfully he raised his hands to his wig and straightened it on his head.
“Do you know what Luisetta said to me yesterday? ‘Daddy, don’t start again.’ You see before you, Signor Grubbio, an exasperated man. Inevitably. Shut up here in the house from morning to night, without ever setting eyes on anyone, shut out from life, I can never find any outlet for my rage at the injustice of my fate! And Luisetta tells me that I drive all the lodgers away!”
“Oh, but I…” I began to protest.
“No, it is true, you know, it is true!” Cavalena interrupted me.
“And, you, since you are so kind, must promise me that as soon as I begin to bore you, as soon as I am in your way, you will take me by the scruff of my neck and fling me out of the room! Promise me that, please. Eight away; you must give me your hand and promise.”
I gave him my hand, smiling:
“There… just as you please… to satisfy you.”
“Thank you! Now I feel more at my ease. I am conscious, Signor Gubbio, you wouldn’t believe! Conscious, do you know of what? Of being no longer myself! When a man reaches this depth, that is when he loses all sense of shame at his own disgrace, he is finished! But I should never have lost that sense of shame! I was too jealous of my dignity! It was that woman made me lose it, crying her madness aloud. My disgrace is known to everyone from now onwards? And it is obscene, obscene, obscene.”
“But no… why?”

“Obscene!” shouted Cavalena. “Would you care to see it? Look! Here it is!”
And so speaking, he seized his wig between his fingers and plucked it from his head. I was left thunderstruck, gazing at that bare, pallid scalp, the scalp of a flayed goat, while Cavalena, the tears starting to his eyes, went on:
“Tell me, can it help being obscene, the disgrace of a man reduced to this state, whose wife is still jealous?”
“But you are a Doctor! You know that it is a disease!” I made haste to remind him, greatly distressed, raising my hands as though to help him to replace the wig on his head.
He settled it in its place, and said:
“But it is precisely because I am a Doctor and know that it is a disease, Signor Gubbio! That is the disgrace! That I am a Doctor! If I could only not know that she did it from madness, I should turn her out of the house, don’t you see? Procure a separation from her, defend my own dignity at all costs. But I am a Doctor! I know that she is mad! And I know therefore that it is my duty to have sense for two, for myself and for her who has lost hers! But to have sense, for a madwoman, when her madness is so supremely ridiculous, Signor Gubbio, what does it mean? It means covering myself with ridicule, of course! It means resigning myself to endure the holocaust that madwoman makes of my dignity, before our daughter, before the servants, before everyone, in public; and so I lose all shame at my own disgrace!”
“Papa!”
Ah, this time, yes; it really was Signorina Luisetta calling. Cavalena at once controlled himself, straightened his wig carefully, cleared his throat by way of changing his voice, and struck a sweet little playful, caressing note in which to answer:
“Here I am, Sesè.”
And he hurried out, making a sign to me, with his finger, to be silent.
I too, shortly afterwards, left my room, to pay Nuti a visit. I listened for a moment outside the door of his room. Silence.

Perhaps he was asleep.  I stood there for a while in perplexity, then looked at my watch: it was already time for me to be going to the Kosmograph; only I did not wish to leave him, particularly as Polacco had expressly enjoined me to bring him with me.  All of a sudden, I thought I heard what sounded like a deep sigh, a sigh of anguish. I knocked at the door.  Nuti, from his bed, answered:

“Come in.”
I went in. The room was in darkness. I went up to the bed.
Nuti said:
“I think… I think I have a temperature.  …”
I leaned over him; I felt one of his hands. It was trembling.
“Why, yes!” I exclaimed. “You have a temperature, and a high one. Wait a minute. I am going to call Signor Cavalena. Our landlord is a Doctor,”
“No, don’t bother… it will pass off!” he said. “I have been working too hard.”
“Quite so,” I replied. “But why won’t you let me call in Cavalena? It will pass away all the sooner. Do you mind if I open the shutters a little?”
I looked at him by daylight; his appearance terrified me. His face was a brick red, hard, grim, rigid; the whites of his eyes, bloodshot overnight, were now almost black between their horribly swollen lids; his straggling moustache was glued to his parched, tumid, gaping lips.
“You must be feeling really bad.”
“Yes, I do feel bad…” he said. “My head.”
And he drew a hand from beneath the blankets to lay it with his fist clenched on his forehead.
I went to call Cavalena who was still talking to his daughter at the end of the passage. Signorina Luisetta, seeing me approach, stared at me with an icy frown.
She evidently supposed that her father had already found an outlet in me. Alas, I find myself unjustly condemned to atone thus for the excessive confidence which her father places in me.

Signorina Luisetta is my enemy already. But not only because of her father's excessive confidence in me, because also of the presence of another lodger in the house. The feeling aroused in her by this other lodger from the first moment rules out any friendliness towards me. I noticed this immediately. It is useless to argue about it.  It is one of those secret, instinctive impulses by which our mental attitudes are determined and which at any moment, without any apparent reason, alter the relations between one person and another. Now, certainly, her ill-feeling will be increased by the tone of voice and the manner in which I—having noticed this—almost unconsciously, announced that Aldo Nuti was lying in bed, in his room, with a high temperature. She turned deathly pale, first of all; then blushed a deep crimson. Perhaps at that very moment she became aware of her still undefined feeling of aversion towards myself.
Cavalena at once hurried to Nuti's room; she stopped outside the door, as though she did not wish me to enter; so that I was obliged to say to her:
"May I pass, please?"
But a moment later, that is to say when her father told her to go and fetch the thermometer to take Nuti's temperature, she came into the room also. I did not take my eyes from her face for a moment, and saw that she, feeling that I was looking at her, was making a violent effort to conceal the mingled pity and dismay which the sight of Nuti inspired in her.

The examination was prolonged. But, apart from a high fever and headache, Cavalena was unable to diagnose anything. When we had left the room, however, after fastening the shutters again, so that the patient should not be dazzled by the light, Cavalena shewed signs of the utmost consternation. He is afraid that it may be an inflammation of the brain.
"We must send for another Doctor at once, Signor Gubbio! I, especially as I am the owner of the house, you understand, cannot assume responsibility for an illness which I consider serious."

He gave me a note for this other Doctor, his friend, who receives calls at the neighbouring chemist's, and I went off to leave the note and then, being already behind my time, hastened to the Kosmograph.
I found Polacco on tenterhooks, bitterly repenting his having let Nuti in for this mad enterprise. He says that he could never, never have imagined that he would see him in the state in which he suddenly appeared, unexpectedly, because from his letters written first from Russia, then from Germany, afterwards from Switzerland, there was nothing to be made. He wished to shew me these letters, in self-defence; but then, all at once, seemed to have forgotten them. The news of the illness has almost made him cheerful, it has at any rate taken a great weight off his mind for the moment.
"Inflammation of the brain? I say, Gubbio, if he should die…. By Jove, when a man has worked himself into that state, when he has become a danger to himself and to other people, death… you might almost say… But let us hope not; let us hope it is a good sign. It often is, one never knows. I am sorry for you, poor Gubbio, and also for that poor Cavalena…. What a business…. I shall come and see you this evening. But it's providential, you know. So far, he has seen nobody here except yourself; nobody knows that he is here. Mum's the word, eh! You said to me that it would be advisable to relieve Ferro of his part in the tiger film!

"But without letting him suppose…"
"Simpleton! You are talking to me. I have thought of everything. Listen: yesterday afternoon, shortly after you people left, I had a visit from the Nestoroff."
"Indeed? Here?"
"She must have felt in the air that Nuti had come. My dear fellow, she's in a great fright! Frightened of Ferro, not of Nuti. She came to ask me… like that, just as if it was nothing at all, whether it was really necessary that she should continue to come to the Kosmograph, or for that matter remain in Rome, as soon as, in a few days from now, all four

companies are employed on the tiger film, in which she is not to take part. Do you follow? I caught the ball on the rebound. I answered that Commendator Borgalli's orders were that, before all four companies were amalgamated, we should finish the three or four films that have been hung up for various nature scenes, which will have to be taken out of Rome. There's that one of the Otranto sailors, the story Bertini gave us. 'But I have no part in it,' said the Nestoroff. 'I know that,' I told her, 'but Ferro has a part in it, the chief part, and it might be better perhaps, more convenient for us, if we were to release him from the part he is taking in the tiger film and send him down South with Bertini. But perhaps he won't agree. Now, if you were to persuade him, Signora Nestoroff.' She looked me in the face for a time… you know how she does… then said: 'I might be able to….' And finally, after thinking it over, 'In that case, he would go down there by himself; I should remain here, in his place, to take some part, even a minor part, in the tiger film….'"

"Ah, no, in that case, no!" I could not help interrupting Polacco. "Carlo Ferro will not go down there by himself, you may be certain of that!"

Polacco began to laugh.

"Simpleton! If she really wishes it, you may I be quite sure he will go! He would go to hell I for her!"

"I don't understand. Why does she wish to remain here?"

"But it's not true. She says she does…. Don't you understand that she's pretending, so as not to let me see that she's afraid of Nuti? She will go too, you'll see. Or perhaps… or perhaps… who knows? She may really wish to remain, to meet Nuti here by herself, without interference, and make him give up the whole idea. She is capable of that and of more; she is capable of anything. Oh, what a business! Come along; let us get to work. Tell me, though: Signorina Luisetta? She simply must come here for the rest of that film."

I told him of Signora Nene's rage, and that Cavalena, the day before, had come to return (albeit unwillingly, so far as he was concerned) the money and the presents. Polacco said once

more that he would come, this evening, to Cavalena's, to persuade him and Signora Nene to send Signorina Luisetta back to the Kosmograph.  We were by this time at the entrance to the Positive Department: I ceased to be Gubbio and became a hand.

**3**

I have laid these notes aside for some days. They have been days of sorrow and trepidation.  They are still not quite over; but now the storm, which broke with terrific force in the soul of this unhappy man whom all of us here have vied with one another in helping compassionately and with all the more devotion in that he was virtually a stranger to us all and what little we knew of him combined with his appearance and the suggestion of fatality that he conveyed to inspire in us pity and a keen interest in his most wretched plight; this storm, I say, seems to be shewing signs of gradually abating. Unless it is only a brief lull. I fear it. Often, at the height of a gale, a formidable peal of thunder succeeds in clearing the sky for a little, but presently the mass of clouds, rent asunder for a moment, return to accumulate slowly and ever more menacingly, and the gale having increased its strength breaks out afresh, more furious than before. The calm, in fact, in which Nuti's spirit seems gradually to be gathering strength after his delirious ravings and the horrible frenzy of all these days, is tremendously dark, just like the calm of a sky in which a storm is gathering.
No one takes any notice, or seems to take any notice of this, perhaps from the need which we all feel to heave a momentary sigh of relief, saying that in any case the worst is over. We ought, we intend to adjust first, to the best of our ability, ourselves, and also everything round us, swept by the whirlwind of his madness; because there remains not only in all of us but even in the room, in the very furniture of the room, a sort of blind stupefaction, a strange uncertainty in the appearance of everything, as it were an air of hostility, suspended and diffused.

In vain do we detach ourselves from the outburst of a soul which from its profoundest depths hurls forth, broken and disordered, the most recondite thoughts, never yet confessed to itself even, its most serious and awful feelings, the strangest sensations which strip things of every familiar meaning, to give them at once another, unexpected meaning, with a truth that springs forth and imposes itself, disconcerting and terrifying. The terror is due to our recognition, with an appalling clarity, that madness dwells and lurks within each of us and that a mere trifle may let it loose: release it for a moment from the elastic web of present consciousness, and lo, all the imaginings accumulated in years past and now wandering unconnected; the fragments of a life that has remained hidden, because e could not or would not let it be reflected in ourselves by the light of reason; dubious actions, shameful falsehoods, dark hatreds, crimes meditated in the shadow of our inward selves and planned to the last detail, and forgotten memories and unconfessed desires burst in tumultuous, with diabolical fury, roaring like wild beasts. On more than one occasion, we all looked at one another with madness in our eyes, the terror of the spectacle of that madman being sufficient to release in us too for a moment the elastic net of consciousness. And even now we eye askance, and go up and touch with a sense of misgiving some object in the room which was for a moment illumined with the sinister light of a new and terrible meaning by the sick man’s hallucinations; and, going to our own rooms, observe with stupefaction and repugnance that… yes, positively, we too have been overborne by that madness, even at a distance, even when alone: we find here and there clear signs of it, pieces of furniture, all sorts of things, strangely out of place.

We ought, we intend to adjust ourselves, we need to believe that the patient is now in this state, in this brooding calm, because he is still stunned by the violence of his final outbursts and is now exhausted, worn out.

There suffices to support this deception a slight smile of gratitude which he just perceptibly offers with his lips or eyes to Signorina Luisetta: a breath, an imperceptible glimmer which does not, in my opinion, emanate from the sick man, but is rather suffused over his face by his gentle nurse, whenever she draws near and bends over the bed.

Alas, how she too is worn out, his gentle nurse!  But no one gives her a thought; least of all herself.  And yet the same storm has torn up and swept away this innocent creature!
It has been an agony of which as yet perhaps not even she can form any idea, because she still perhaps has not with her, within her, her own soul. She has given it to him, as a thing not her own, as a thing which he in his delirium might appropriate to derive from it refreshment and comfort.
I have been present at this agony. I have done nothing, nor could I perhaps have done anything to prevent it. But I see and confess that I am revolted by it. Which means that my feelings are compromised. Indeed, I fear that presently I may have to make another painful confession to myself.
This is what has happened: Nuti, in his delirium, mistook Signorina Luisetta for Duccella and, at first, inveighed furiously against her, shouting in her face that her obduracy, her cruelty to him were unjust, since he was in no way to blame for the death of her brother, who, of his own accord, like an idiot, like a madman, had killed himself for that woman; then, as soon as she, overcoming her first terror, grasping at once the nature of his hallucination, went compassionately to his side, lie refused to let her leave him for a moment, clasped her tightly to him, sobbing broken-heartedly or murmuring the most burning, the tenderest words of love to her, and caressing her or kissing her hands, her hair, her brow.

And she allowed him to do it. And all the rest of us allowed it. Because those words, those caresses, those embraces, those kisses were not intended for her: they were for a

hallucination, in which his delirium found peace. And so we had to allow him. She, Signorina Luisetta, made her heart pitiful and loving for another girl's sake; and this heart, thus made pitiful and loving, she gave to him, as a thing not her own, but belonging to that other girl, to Duccella. And while he appropriated that heart, she could not, must not appropriate those words, those caresses, those kisses…. But she trembled at them in every fibre of her body, poor child, ready from the first moment to feel such pity for this man who was suffering so on account of the other woman. And not on her own behalf, who did really pity him, did it come to her to feel pitiful, but for that other, whom she naturally supposes to be harsh and cruel. Well, she has given her pity to the other, that the other might pass it on to him, and by him—through the medium of Luisetta's body—be loved and caressed in return.  But love, love, who has given that? It was she that had to give it, to give love, together with her pity. And the poor child has given it. She knows, she feels that she has given it, with all her soul, with all her heart; and at the same time she must suppose that she has given it for the other.

The result has been as follows: that while he, now, is gradually returning to himself and collecting himself, and shutting himself up again darkly in his trouble; she remains empty and lost, held in suspense, without a gleam in her eye, as though she had lost her wits, a ghost, the ghost that entered into his hallucination. For him, the ghost has vanished, and with the ghost, love. But this poor child who has emptied herself to fill that ghost with herself, her love, her pity, is now herself left a ghost; and he notices nothing.  He barely smiles at her in gratitude. The remedy has proved effective: the hallucination has vanished: nothing more at present, is that it?
I should not be so distressed, had I not, for all these days, seen myself obliged to bestow my pity, also, to spend myself, to run in all directions, to sit up for several nights in

succession, not from a feeling that was genuinely my own, that is to say one inspired in me by Nuti, as I could have wished; but from a different feeling, one of pity indeed, but of interested pity, so interested that it made and still makes appear false and odious to me the pity which I she-wed and am still shewing for Nuti.

I feel that, as a witness of the sacrifice (without doubt involuntary) which he has made of Signorina Luisetta's heart, I, who seek to obey my true feelings, ought to have withdrawn my pity from him. I did indeed withdraw it inwardly, to pour it all upon that poor, tormented little heart, but I continued to shew pity for him, seeing that I could do no less, compelled by her sacrifice, which was even greater. If she actually subjected herself to that torture _out of pity_ for him, could I, could the rest of us shrink from devotion, fatigue, proofs of Christian charity that were far less? For me to draw back meant my admitting and letting it be seen that she was undergoing this torture not _out of pity only_, but also _for love_ of him, indeed principally _for love_.  And that could not, must not be. I have had to pretend, because she has had to believe that she was bestowing her love upon him for that other woman. And I have pretended, albeit with self-contempt, marvellously. Only in this way have I been able to modify her attitude towards myself; to make her my friend again. And yet, by shewing myself for her sake so compassionate towards Nuti, I have perhaps lost the one way that remained to me of calling her back to herself; that, namely, of proving to her that Duccella, on whose behalf she imagines that she loves him, has no reason whatever to feel any pity for him.  Were I to give Duccella her true shape, her ghost, that loving and pitiful ghost, into which she, Signorina Luisetta, has transformed herself, would have to vanish, and leave her, Signorina Luisetta, with her love _unjustified_ and in no way sought by him: because he has sought it from the other, not from her, and she has given it to him for the other, and not for herself, thus publicly, before us all.

Very good, but if I know that se has really given it to him, beneath this pious fiction of pity, upon which I am now weaving sophistries?
As Aldo Nut  thinks Duccella hard and cruel, so she would think me hard and cruel, were I to tear from her the veil of this pious fiction.  She is a sham Duccella, simply because she is in love; and she knows that the true Duccella has not the slightest reason to be in love; she knows it from the very fact that Aldo Nuti, now that his hallucination has passed, no longer sees any sign of love in her, and sadly just thanks her for her pity.
Perhaps, at the cost of suffering a little more, she might cover herself, but only on condition that Duccella became really pitiful, upon learning the wretched plight to which her former sweetheart had been brought, and appeared in person here, by the bed upon which he lies, to give him her love again and so to save him.  But Duccella will not come. And Signorina Luisetta will continue to pretend to all of us and also to herself, in good faith, that it is for her sake that she is in love with Aldo Nuti.

## 4

What fools all the people are who declare that life is a mystery, wretches who seek to explain by the use of reason what reason is powerless to explain!  To set life before one as an object of study is absurd, because life, when set before one like that, inevitably loses all its real consistency and becomes an abstraction, void of meaning and value. And how after that is it possible to explain it to oneself? You have killed it. The most you can do now is to dissect it.
Life is not explained; it is lived.
Reason exists in life; it cannot e ist apart from it. And life is not to be set before one, but felt within one and lived.
How many of us, emerging from a passion as we emerge from a dream, ask ourselves:

“I? How can I have been like that? How could I do such a thing?”
We are no longer able to account for it; just as we are powerless to explain how other people can give a meaning and a value to certain things which for us have ceased or have not yet begun to have either. The reason, which lies in these things, we seek outside them. Can we find it?  Outside life there is nullity. To observe this nullity, with the reason which abstracts itself from life, is still to live, is still a _nullity_ in our life: a sense of mystery: religion. It may be desperate, if it has no illusions; ft may appease itself by plunging back into life, no longer as of old but there, into that _nullity_, which at once becomes _all_.

How clearly I have learned all this in a few days, since I began really to feel! I mean, since I began to feel _myself also_, for other people I have always felt within me, and have found it easy therefore to explain them to myself and to sympathise with them.
But the feeling that I have of myself, at this moment, is most bitter.
On your account, Signorina Luisetta, for all that you are so compassionate! Indeed, just because you are so compassionate. I cannot say it to you, I cannot make you understand. I would rather not say it to myself, I would rather not understand it myself either. But no, I am no longer _a thing_, and this silence of mine is no longer an _inanimate_ silence. I wished to draw other people’s attention to this silence, but now I _suffer_ from it myself, so keenly.
I go on, nevertheless, welcoming everyone into it.  I feel, however, that everyone hurts me now who comes into it, as into a place of certain hospitality. My silence would like to draw ever more closely round about me.
Here, in the meantime, is Cavalena, who has settled himself in it, poor man, as in his own home. He comes, whenever he can, to talk over with me, always with fresh arguments, or on the most futile pretexts, his own misfortunes.  He tells me that

it is impossible, on account of his wife, to keep Nuti in the house any longer, and that I shall have to find him a lodging elsewhere, as soon as he has recovered. Two dramas, side by side, cannot be kept going. Especially since Nuti's drama is one of passion, of women. … Cavalena requires lodgers with judgment and self-control. He would gladly pay out of his own pocket to have all men serious, dignified, pure and enjoying a spotless reputation for chastity, with which to crush his wife's furious hatred for the whole of the male sex. It falls to him every evening to pay the penalty—the fine, he calls it—for all the misdeeds of men, recorded in the columns of the newspapers, as though he were the author or the necessary accomplice of every seduction, of every adultery.

"You see?" his wife screams at him, her finger pointing to the paragraph in the paper: "You see what you men are capable of?" And in vain does the poor wretch try to make her see that in each case of adultery, for every erring man who betrays his wife, there must be also an erring woman, his accomplice in the betrayal. Cavalena thinks that he has found a triumphant argument, instead of which he sees Signora Nene's mouth form that round O with her finger across it, the familiar expression which means:
"Fool!"
Excellent logic! That we know! And does not Signora Nene hate the whole of the female sex as well?
Drawn on by the unreal, pressing arguments of that terrible reasoning insanity which never comes to a halt at any conclusion, he always finds himself, in the end, lost or bewildered, in a false situation, from which he has no idea how to escape. Why, inevitably! If he is compelled to alter, to complicate the most obvious and natural things, to conceal the simplest and commonest actions; an acquaintance, an introduction, a chance meeting, a look, a smile, a word, in which his wife might suspect who knows what secret understandings and plots; then inevitably, even when he is engaged upon an abstract discussion with her, there must

emerge incidents, contradictions which all of a sudden, unexpectedly, reveal him and represent him, with every appearance of truth, a liar and impostor. Revealed, caught out in his own innocent deception, which however he himself now sees cannot any longer appear innocent in his wife's eyes; exasperated, with his back to the wall, in the face of the evidence, he still persists in denying it, and so, over and over again, for no reason, they come to quarrels, scenes, and Cavalena escapes from the house and stays away for a fortnight or three weeks, until he is once more conscious of being a doctor and the thought recurs to him of his abandoned daughter, "poor, dear, sweet little soul," as he calls her.
It is a great pleasure to me when he begins to talk to me of her; but for that very reason I never do anything to incite him to speak of her: I should feel that I was taking a base advantage of her father's weakness to penetrate, by way of his confidences, into the private life of that poor, dear, sweet little soul. No, no! Often I have even been on the point of forbidding him to continue.
Ages ago, it seems to Cavalena, his Sesè ought to have married, to have had a life of her own away from the hell of this house! Her mother, on the other hand, does nothing but shout at her, day after day:
"Never marry, mind! Don't marry, you fool! Don't do anything so mad!"
"And Sesè? Sesè?" I feel tempted to ask him; but, as usual, I remain silent.
Poor Sesè, perhaps, does not know herself what she would like to do. Perhaps, on some days, like her father, she would wish it to be to-morrow; on other days she will feel the bitterest disgust when she sees some hint of it pass between her parents. For undoubtedly they, with their degrading scenes, must have rent asunder all her illusions, all of them, one after another, shewing her through the rents the most sickening crudities of married life.

They have prevented her, meanwhile, from securing her freedom

in any other way, the means of providing henceforward for herself, of being able to leave this house and live on her own. They will have told her that, thank heaven, there is no need for her to do so: an only child, she will some day have the whole of her mother's fortune for herself. Why degrade herself by becoming a teacher or looking out for some other employment? She can read, study what she pleases, play the piano, do embroidery, a free woman in her own home.

A fine freedom!

The other evening, fairly late, when we had all left the room in which Nuti had already fallen asleep, I saw her sitting on the balcony. We live in the last house in Via Veneto, and have in front of us the open space of the Villa Borghese. Four little balconies on the top floor, on the cornice of the building. Cavalena was sitting on another balcony, and appeared to be lost in contemplation of the stars.

Suddenly, in a voice that seemed to come from a distance, almost from the sky, suffused with infinite pain, I heard him say:

"Sesè, do you see the Pleiads?"

She pretended to look: perhaps her eyes were filled with tears.

And her father:

"There they are… above your head… that little cluster of stars…do you see them?"

She nodded her head; yes, she saw them.

"Fine, aren't they, Sesè? And do you see how bright Capella is?"

The stars… Poor Papa! A fine distraction. … And with one hand he straightened, stroked on his temples the curling locks of his artistic wig, while with the other… what? Why, yes … he was holding on his knee Piccini, his enemy, and was stroking her head…. Poor Papa! This must be one of his most tragic and pathetic moments!

There came from the Villa a long, slow slight rustle of leaves; from the deserted street an occasional sound of footsteps and the rapid clattering sound of a carriage driven

in haste.  The clang of the bell and the long-drawn whine of the trolley running along the electric wire of the tramway seemed to tear the street apart and fling it violently in its wake, with the houses and trees.  Then all was silent, and in the weary calm returned the distant sound of a piano from one of the houses. It was a gentle, almost veiled, melancholy sound, which drew the spirit, fixed it at a definite point, as though to enable it to perceive how heavy was the cloak of sadness suspended over everything.

Ah, yes—Signorina Luisetta was perhaps thinking—marriage…. She was imagining, perhaps, that it was she who was playing, in a strange house, far away, that piano, to lull to sleep the pain of the sad, early memories which have poisoned her life for all time.

Will it be possible for her to illude herself?  Will she be able to prevent from falling, withered, like the petals of flowers, on the
silent air, chill with a want of confidence that is now perhaps insuperable, all the innocent graces that from time to time spring up in her soul?

I observe that she is spoiling herself, deliberately; she makes herself, every now and then, hard, bristling, so as not to appear tender and credulous. Perhaps she would like to be gay, frolicsome, as in more than one light moment of oblivion, when she has just risen from her bed, her eyes have suggested to her, from her mirror: those eyes of hers, which would so gladly laugh, keen and brilliant, and which she instead condemns to appear absent, or shy and sullen. Poor, lovely eyes! How often under her knitted brows does she not fix them on the empty air, while through her nostrils she breathes a long sigh in silence, as though she did not wish it to reach even her own ears! And how they cloud over and change colour, whenever she breathes one
of those silent sighs.

Certainly she must have learned long ago to distrust her own impressions, perhaps in the fear lest she be gradually seized

by the same malady as her mother. This is clearly shewn by her abrupt changes of expression, a sudden pallor following a sudden crimson flushing of her whole face, a smiling return to serenity after a fleeting cloud. Who knows how often, as she walks the streets with her father and mother, she must feel herself stabbed by every sound of laughter, and how often she must have the strange feeling that even that little blue frock, of Swiss silk, light as a feather, is weighing upon her like the habit of a cloistered nun and that the straw hat is crushing her head; and be tempted to tear off the blue silk, to wrench the straw from her head and tear it in pieces furiously with both hands and fling it… in her mother's face? No… in her father's, then?  No… on the ground, on the ground, trampling it underfoot. Because it must seem to her a masquerade, an idiotic farce, to go about dressed like that, like a respectable person, like a young lady who is under the illusion that she is cutting a figure, or rather who lets it be seen that she has some beautiful dream in her mind, when presently at home, and even now in the street, everything that is most ugly, most brutal, most savage in life must be disclosed, must spring to light in those almost daily scenes between her parents, to smother her in misery and shame and disgrace.

And this reflexion more than any other seems to me to have profoundly penetrated her soul: that in the world, as her parents create it for themselves and round about her with their comic appearance, with the grotesque absurdity of that furious jealousy, with the disorder of their existence, there can be no room, air nor light for her charm. How can charm shew itself, breathe, refresh itself in a delicate, light and airy hue, in the midst of that ridicule which holds it down and stifles and obscures it?
She is like a butterfly cruelly fastened down with a pin, while still alive. She dares not beat her wings, not only because she has no hope of freeing herself, but also and even more because she might attract attention.

## 5

I have landed in a regular volcanic region.  Eruptions and earthquakes without end. A big volcano, apparently snow-clad but inwardly in perpetual ebullition, Signora Nene. That one knew.  But now there has come to light, unexpectedly, and has given its first eruption a little volcano, in whose bowels the fire has been lurking, hidden and threatening, albeit kindled but a few days ago.

The cataclysm was brought about by a visit from Polacco, this morning. Having come to persist in his task of persuading Nuti that he ought to leave Rome and return to Naples, to complete his convalescence, and after that should resume his travels, to distract his mind and be cured altogether, he had the painful surprise of finding Nuti up, as pale as death, with his moustache shaved clean to shew his firm intention of beginning at once, this very day, his career as an actor with the Kosmograph.

He shaved his moustache himself, as soon as he left his bed. It came as a surprise to all of us as well, because only last night the Doctor ordered him to keep absolutely quiet, to rest and not to leave his bed, except for an hour or so before noon; and last night he promised to obey these instructions. We stood open-mouthed when we saw him appear shaved like that, completely altered, with that face of death, still not very steady on his legs, exquisitely attired.

He had cut himself slightly in shaving, at the left corner of his mouth; and the dried blood, blackening the cut, stood out against the chalky pallor of his face. His eyes, which now seemed enormous, with their lower lids stretched, as it were, by his loss of flesh, so as to shew the white of the eyeball beneath the line of the cornea, wore in confronting our pained stupefaction a terrible, almost a wicked expression of dark contempt and hatred.

“What in the world…” exclaimed Polacco.

He screwed up his face, almost baring his teeth, and raised his hands, with a nervous tremor in all his fingers; then, in the lowest of tones, indeed almost without speaking, he said:
“Leave me, leave me alone!”
“But you aren’t fit to stand!” Polacco shouted at him.
He turned and looked at him suspiciously:
“I can stand. Don’t worry me. I have… I have to go out… for a breath of air.”
“Perhaps it is a little soon, you know,” Cavalena tried to intervene, “if you will allow me….”
“But I tell you, I want to go out!” Nuti cut him short, barely tempering with a wry smile the irritation that was apparent in his
voice.
This irritation springs from his desire to tear himself away from the attentions which we have been paying him recently, and which may have given us (though not me, I assure you) the illusion that he in a sense belongs to us from now onwards, is one of ourselves. He feels that this desire is held in check by his respect for the debt of gratitude which he owes to us, and sees no other way of breaking that bond of respect than by shewing indifference and contempt for his own health and welfare, so that we may begin to feel a resentment for the attentions we have paid him, and this resentment, at once creating a breach between him and ourselves, may absolve him from that debt of gratitude. A man in that state of mind dares not look people in the face And for that matter he, this morning, was not able to look any of us straight in the face.

Polacco, confronted by so definite a resolution, could see no other way out of the difficulty than to post round about him to watch, and, if need be, to defend him, as many of us as possible, and principally one who more than any of us has shewn pity for him and to whom he therefore owes a greater consideration; and, before going off with him, begged Cavalena emphatically to follow them at once to the Kosmograph, with Signorina Luisetta and myself. He said that Signorina Luisetta

could not leave the film half-finished in which by accident she had been called upon to play a part, and that such a desertion would moreover be a real pity, because everyone was agreed that, in that short but by no means easy part, she had shewn a marvellous aptitude, which might lead, by his intervention, to a contract with the Kosmograph, an easy, safe and thoroughly respectable source of income, under her father's protection.

Seeing Cavalena agree enthusiastically to this proposal, I was more than once on the point of going up to him to pluck him gently by the sleeve.

What I feared did, as a matter of fact, occur.

Signora Nene assumed that it was all a plot j engineered by her husband—Polacco's morning call, Nuti's sudden decision, the offer of a contract to her daughter—to enable him to go and flirt with the young actresses at the Kosmograph. And no sooner had Polacco left the house with Nuti than the volcano broke out in a tremendous eruption.

Cavalena at first tried to stand up to her, putting forward the anxiety for Nuti which obviously—as how in the world could anyone fail to see—had suggested this idea of a contract to Polacco. What? She didn't care two pins about Nuti? Well, neither did he! Let Nuti go and hang himself a hundred times over, if once wasn't enough! It was a question of seizing this golden opportunity of a contract for Luisetta! It would compromise her? How in the world could she be compromised, under the eyes of her father?

But presently, on Signora Nene's part, argument ended, giving way to insults, vituperation, with such violence that finally Cavalena, indignant, exasperated, furious, rushed out of the house.

I ran after him down the stairs, along the street, doing everything in my power to stop him, repeating I don't know how many times:

"But you are a Doctor! You are a Doctor!"

A Doctor, indeed! For the moment he was a wild beast in furious flight. And I had to let him escape, so that he should

not go on
shouting in the street.
He will come back when he is tired of running about, when once again the phantom of his tragicomic destiny, or rather of his conscience, appears before him, unrolling the dusty parchment certificate of his medical degree.

In the meantime, he will find a little breathing-space outside.
Returning to the house, I found, to my great and painful surprise, an eruption of the little volcano; an eruption so violent that the big volcano was almost overwhelmed by it.
She no longer seemed herself, Signorina Luisetta! All the disgust accumulated in all these years, from a childhood that had passed without ever a smile amid quarrels and scandal; all the disgraceful scenes which they had made her witness, she hurled in her mother's face and at the back of her retreating father. Ah, so her mother was thinking now of her being compromised? When for all these years, with her idiotic, shameful insanity, she had destroyed her daughter's existence, irreparably! Submerged in the sickening shame of a family which no one could approach without a feeling of revulsion!
It was
not compromising her, then, to keep her tied to that shame? Did her mother not hear how everyone laughed at her and at such a father? She had had enough, enough, enough! She had no wish to be tormented any longer by that laughter; she wished to free herself from the disgrace, and to make her escape by the way that was opening now before her, unsought, along which nothing worse could conceivably befall her! Away! Away! Away!
She turned to me, heated and trembling.
"You come with me, Signor Gubbio! I am going to my room to put on my hat, and then let us start at once!"
She ran off to her room. I turned to look at her mother.
Left speechless before her daughter who had at last risen to crush her with a condemnation which she at once felt to be all the more deserved inasmuch as she knew that the thought of her

daughter's being compromised was nothing more, really, than an excuse brought forward to prevent her husband from accompanying the girl to the Kosmograph; now, left face to face with me, with drooping head, her hands pressed to her bosom, she was endeavouring in a hoarse groan to liberate the cry of grief from her wrung, contracted bowels.
It pained me to see her.
All of a sudden, before her daughter returned, she raised her hands from her bosom and joined them in supplication, still powerless to speak, her whole face contracted in expectation of the tears which she had not yet succeeded in drawing up from their fount. In this attitude, she said to me with her hands what certainly she would never have said to me with her lips. Then she buried her face in them and turned away, as her daughter entered the room.
I drew the latter's attention, pityingly, to her mother as she went off sobbing to her own room.
"Would you like me to go by myself?" Signorina Luisetta said menacingly.
"I should like you," I answered sadly, "at least to calm yourself a little first."
"I shall calm myself on the way," she said, "Come along, let us be off."
And a little later, when we had got into a carriage at the end of Via Veneto, she added:
"Anyhow, you'll see, we are certain to find Papa at the Kosmograph."
What made her add this reflexion? Was it to free me from the thought of the responsibility she was making me assume, in obliging me to accompany her?  Then she is not really sure of her freedom to act as she chooses. In fact, she at once went on:
"Does it seem to you a possible life?"
"But if it is madness!" I reminded her. "If, as your father says, it is a typical form of paranoia?"

"Quite so, but for that very reason! Is it possible to go on

living like that? When people have trouble of that sort, they can't have a home any more; nor a family; nor anything. It is an endless struggle, and a desperate one, believe me! It can't go on! What is to be done? What is to stop it? One flies off one way, another another. Everyone sees us, everyone knows. Our house stands open to the world. There is nothing left to keep secret! We might be living in the street. It is a disgrace! A disgrace!! Besides, you never know, perhaps this meeting violence with violence will make her shake off this madness which is driving us all mad! At least, I shall be doing something… I shall see things, I shall move about… I shall shake off this degradation, this desperation!"
"But if for all these years you have put up with this desperation, how in the world can you now, all of a sudden," I found myself asking her, "rebel so fiercely?"

If, immediately after that little part which she had played in the Bosco Sacro, Polacco had suggested engaging her at the Kosmograph, would she not have recoiled from the suggestion, almost with horror? Why, of course! And yet the conditions at home were just the same then.
Whereas now here she is racing off with me to the Kosmograph! In desperation? Yes, but not on account of that mother of hers who gives her no peace.
How pale she turned, how ready she seemed to faint, as soon as her father, poor Cavalena, appeared with a face of terror in the doorway of the Kosmograph to inform us that "he," Aldo Nuti, was not there, and that Polacco had telephoned to the management to say that he would not be coming there that day, so that there was nothing for it but to turn back.

"I can't myself," I said to Cavalena. "I have to remain here. I am very late as it is. You must take the Signorina home."
"No, no, no, no!" shouted Cavalena. "I shall keep her with me all day; but afterwards I shall bring her back here, and you will oblige me, Signor Gubbio, by seeing her home, or she shall go alone. I, no; I decline to set foot in the house

again!  That will do, now! That will do!”
And off he went, accompanying his protests with an expressive gesture of his head and hands.  Signorina Luisetta followed her father, shewing clearly in her eyes that she no longer saw any reason for what she had done. How cold the little hand was that she held out to me, and how absent her glance and hollow her voice, when she turned to take leave of me and to say to me:
“Till this evening.”

**1915/1925 – Shoot!**
**(The Notebooks of Serafino Gubbio, Cinematograph Operator)**
**Introduction**
**Book I – Book II – Book III – Book IV**
**Book V – Book VI – Book VII**

**In Italiano – Quaderni di Serafino Gubbio, operatore**

**«««  Pirandello in English**

Se vuoi contribuire, invia il tuo materiale, specificando se e come vuoi essere citato a
**collabora@pirandelloweb.com**

*ShakespeareItalia*