

I did was done in the hope of seeing her again and rendering her happy.

My master treated me well, and sent me to school. I learnt to read, write, and cipher. I attended the catechising of the parish, and received my first communion. Having asked the Curé to write to the priest of the village where my sister was, requesting her to do the same, I soon learned that she had fulfilled that duty, and that the first communion of both had taken place the same day. This gave me untold delight. It seemed to be another link binding me to that child.

One day, as I was grooming my horses, I was surprised by having a letter placed in my hand. All sorts of ideas flashed through my brain. Was the letter from my father, or Pietrina? But who could have given my address? Was it from the miller? Was Pallidina ill?

I opened it trembling, and read as follows:—

“MY DEAR MOMO,—You will indeed be surprised, for this is my writing. I wanted to surprise you, and so never told you that M. the Curé and the schoolmaster have taken a fancy to me, and have taught me everything almost they know. This is delightful, for it makes me more useful to my good mistress, who is good as good bread. But, indeed, to say the truth, everybody here is fond of me, even the cow, and the hens, and the pigeons who fly about me and eat out of my hand. All the children are very nice, and they are company for me. It is so pretty here of a morning when the sun rises, and the mill-wheel keeps beating the water, and the cock crows, and it is so fresh beneath the great trees. I go out with my piece of *castagnaccio*,¹ and lead the cow to where the grass grows thickest in the fields; then I run back through the olive-trees, and I think of you in the sunshine, in the shade, by the brook, while feeding the poultry, while making the polenta or the maize bread. I think of thee, too, at evening, when the fire of thorns crackles, and by the moonlight. And I recall the times when we both slept out in the streets, and say to myself: ‘I was with my brother; I was very happy;’ because you see, Momo, heat and chestnut flour bread, cold, rain, and hunger, all get forgotten; and the only part of our poor childhood which survives in my heart is the happiness of having been with thee. Come and see me as soon as you can. This letter is very long: I have taken three evenings to write it. My mistress wonders what in the world I can find to say to thee; but I think, Momo, that I could write to thee from

¹ Chestnut bread.

morning to night, and never tire. I should always have all that I think about to tell thee of. Good-bye, brother.

“Never forget to say your prayers for the love of the good God, and for thy sister who embraces as she loves thee.—PALLIDINA.”

My delight on reading such a letter may easily be imagined. It was really a blessing to have found such a mistress for my sister as the miller’s wife; and reflecting on the greatness of God, and how we had been protected and preserved by Him, my thanksgivings went up from a fervent heart.

Time passed away. I was now seventeen, and Pallidina was about a year younger. She was still in the same place, and her mistress treated her like a daughter. As for me, I had been promoted from a stable-boy to a driver, and was so busy I could not get away. More than a year had elapsed since I had seen my sister.

Having put by a little money, the idea of taking it to her became so absorbing, that I was obliged to ask for a holiday, which my master at once gave me.

Well dressed, prosperous, a silver watch in my fob, and fifty francs in my pocket, I reached the mill. Pallidina’s joy was extreme, and her master and mistress seemed thoroughly glad to see me. I told them all that had befallen me, and how much my position had been bettered, and in their presence made over my money to my sister.

“Thank God, I want for nothing!” said she; “you can keep it.”

“Nay,” I replied; “it is for thee that I work.”

“Well, my children,” interposed the miller’s wife; “give the money to my husband, and he will put it into the savings’ bank for you. If you go on placing all you can spare there, it will bring you in a little by and by.”

I spent three or four days at the mill. The miller had parted with his head boy, and said to me:

“You should stay with us, Giacomo. Our business prospers; I shall be able to afford you better wages than you get at Lucca, and you are sure to be happy with your sister.”

As I could not leave my master the hackney-coach proprietor without due notice, I asked for some delay; and two months passed before I came to settle at the mill.

I was very tall and strong for my age, and looked more like twenty-five than seventeen. The country air, however, made me still more robust, and I became really a good workman. Nothing tired me; accordingly, by the time I had been with him a year, my master seemed to set great store by me.

In spring-time it is good to be out of