

The
flower
perishes...

ANGLE
76

but
the
seed
remains

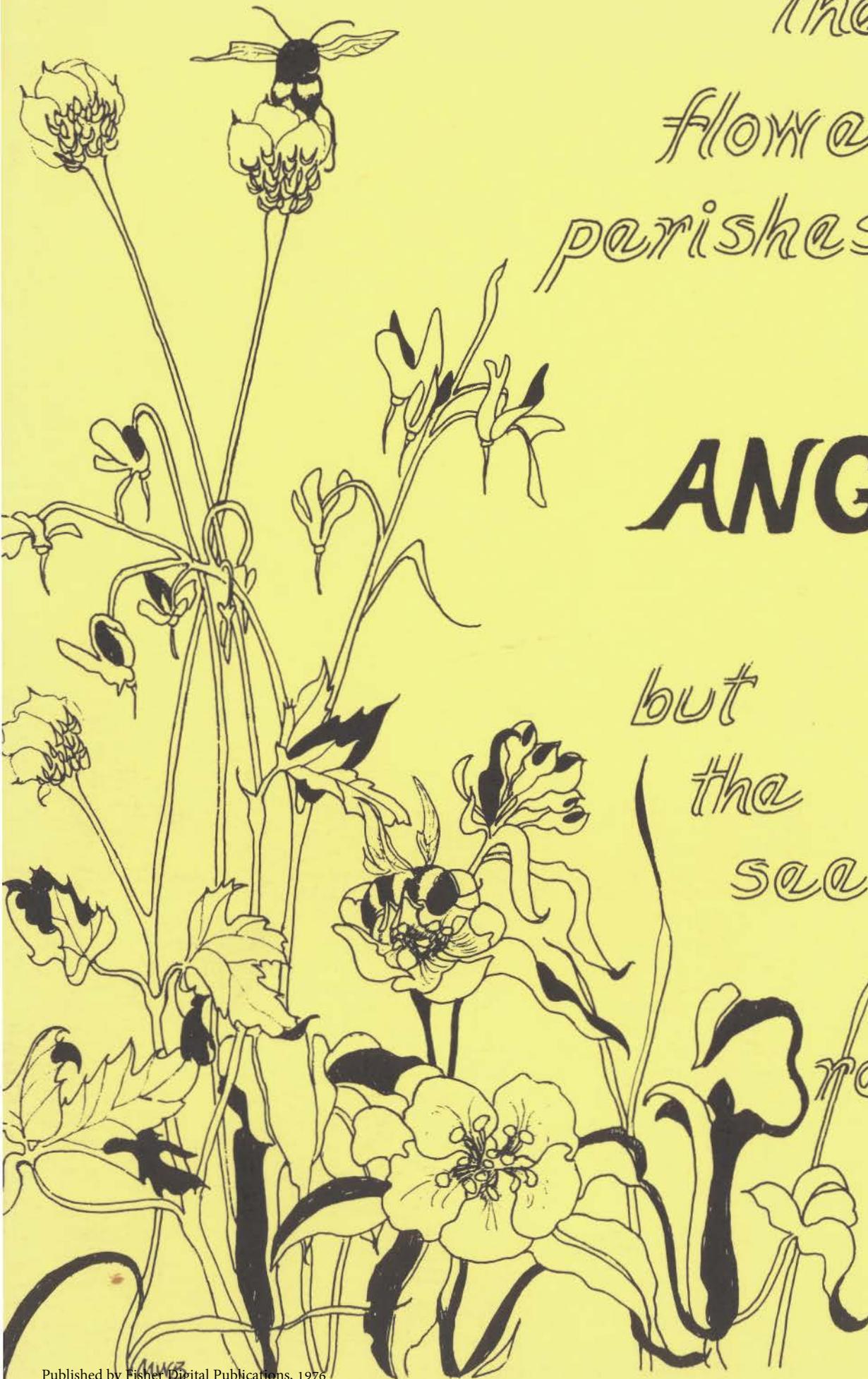




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From Father to Son

By John Monaco

Amadeo's father sat at the table downstairs and viewed the matter in a different light. Together with his wife he shook in a fit of uncontrollable laughter as he described how the boy's face had reddened. And furthermore, when asked why he was not in school as he should have been, how quick Amadeo had been to invent an excuse. And such a fine excuse! He'd gone to school. He'd not felt well; he'd been excused; and he'd been on his way home.

His father might even have believed him, in spite of the blush he felt darken his cheeks, in spite of the way his voice had quivered while explaining himself. Yes, his father might almost have believed him, and the reason he did not was very simple. Even to the most foolish of men, it is unbelievable that an early dismissal from school due to sickness should end in the village square with an ice cream bar as a cure!

There was more, he was not even alone. Several of his friends, each with an ice cream bar in hand, were with him. His father had stared at him, his eyes smaller but the intensity of his gaze greater, and, then asked whether his friends had also fallen ill, all together, and was there, perhaps, some magical curative property in ice cream of which he had not been aware?

He made no further attempt to

answer; it would be fruitless. His father would not be fooled that day, and if he persisted with his transparent excuse, he would only succeed in enraging him. Amadeo surrendered.

Amadeo's mother listened with a smile on her lips as her husband told how he had taken hold of the tip of the boy's right ear, and led him all the way home. "What a handsome boy we have!" he told his wife, his voice lowered. "What a handsome boy we have!" The thought of those red cheeks, blooming with health, like so many roses never ceased to give him pleasure. He leaned towards his wife, reached over and pinched her thighs, laughing when, playfully she slapped his hand away. He could not stop speaking of the boy to his mother. What a clever boy! What a marvelous boy! Such high spirits and so *simpatico*. Such a boy could not fail to make his parents proud of him some day. He was still young, still rash and impulsive, but if kept on the right path, some day Amadeo would be reknown.

The mother said she was sure he was right. She felt the same way he did, but it was her hope that he would not be so rough with the boy. It was not good always to be so harsh with him.

Pietro smiled at his wife's anxiety, and promised he would be a little easier on the boy. He was quite sincere, yet he knew it would be difficult. He thought how the coarseness of his life had ended

his own chances for some success. I am a simple peasant, like millions of other simple peasants. Perhaps more simple than most, he thought. Because he had failed, he would provide his son with an opportunity. The path to success, he knew, was education; the educated man enjoys the respect of all, and once respected, will have friends in any worthy tasks he undertakes. For him there was no longer hope for such respect other than from his wife, whom he loved, and from his son, whom he loved. Yes, dear papa, you have made me what I am, Amadeo would say.

That evening, Amadeo had lain upon his bed listening to his father downstairs, heard him laugh, had hated him. Though he could not hear what was being said, he imagined they were laughing at how he'd been embarrassed in front of all his friends. How they must have laughed as his father dragged him away! He saw the boys sitting on the stone bench, their chins painted with chocolate, laughing with their hands on their stomachs. How could he show his face among them again? His father had condemned him to be an outcast! Never before had his father seemed so primitive. To be kept in subjugation by such a tyrant made it better to die than to live. The beast himself might be killed! When would it all end? With his death? With his father's?

In the mornings, Amadeo's father would rise before dawn to go to a

nearby farm where he would do the work assigned to him. His work was often heavy. After a heavy snowfall, he would struggle to clear a path to the farmhouse door, and he would sink under the armloads of wood he carried to the house from the shed. But while he worked, he was warmed by his hope for his son. He labored for Amadeo! In return for his work, he was given fresh eggs and milk, sometimes cheese, nuts and fruit. On rare occasions, the farmer even gave him money, and would pour cognac into a tiny glass for him. Pietro would drink it slowly, and immediately feel stronger and warmer. His eyes would moisten at these people's goodness, not rich but with good hearts. They did not need to pay him to do these chores; they could manage well enough themselves. The farmer had three fine, strong sons. The chores he did every morning would have been easy for them if divided among them. They are charitable without making me feel like I was accepting charity; they let me keep my self-respect. He would give his thanks for their courtesy with his eyes averted, then leave to be home again before Amadeo was out of bed. He would have his wife prepare the foods he had brought from the farm, so that Amadeo would have energy to meet the rigors of a day well-spent in school. Then he would till the small plot his own father had long since left to him

a good distance from town. Many other men would be content that they had fulfilled their responsibilities as fathers by handing such a piece of ground over to their sons, but to Amadeo's father this land was useful only to keep food on the table and pay for his son's schooling.

By the time his father had walked the more than three miles from his home to his birthright in a pair of boots he had worn for he did not remember how long, Amadeo would have risen, and made his way to the kitchen where flames would be roaring in the fireplace. While he waited for breakfast he would feel their warmth on his cheeks, and occasionally stir the wood.

The mornings in Capracotta were always cold, both in summer and winter. Amadeo was fortunate because one day his father had made the ten-mile trek to and from Campobasso, where, with several months savings from his pre-dawn labors, he had bought his son a lovely leather coat lined with warm fur. He had hoped for something inexpensive for himself also, to keep him warm on his long, morning walks, but the coat for his son had cost him all he had. No matter. It was important that Amadeo be protected against the cold, unhealthy air.

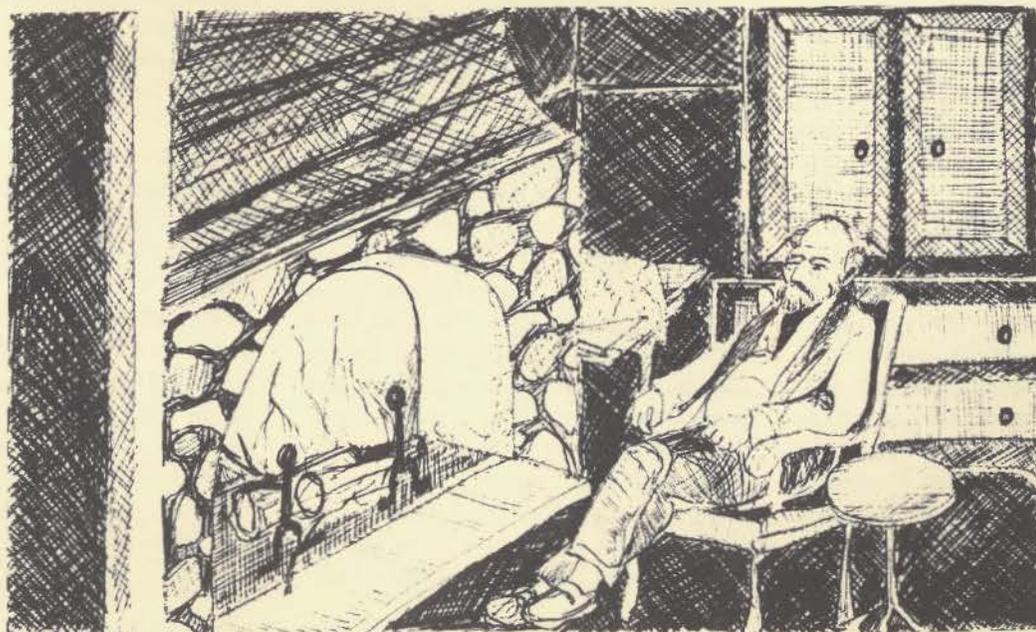
In the mornings, Amadeo sat at the kitchen table and along with bread and

cheese, his mother set before him the fresh milk his father had brought. He enjoyed this breakfast, but was often left less than satisfied with the simplicity of this fare.

After breakfast, he would gather his schoolbooks, ready to leave in his warm coat and the new shoes his father had bought for him when school began that year. At the door, he hung his books over his shoulder with a strap, and his mother would hand him the two eggs she had just boiled. These he held, one in each hand, to keep his fingers warm until he reached school. There, he would sit at his table, poke a hole in each egg, and suck it warm from its shell as the last course to his breakfast.

The teacher would appear and the day begin. How he liked to be taught! Anything and everything! What joy, what rapture! How beautiful the sonnets of Shakespeare! The Peter Camenzind of Hesse brought the tears to his eyes, made them flow rapidly and profusely, until he had to cover his face with his hands for fear the other children would see him and laugh. The teacher was pleased with the effect the literature had on him. Something will come of him, she told the rector. We must keep our eye on him.

The years did pass, Amadeo did study and learn, but it seemed to him that all his successes in school were despite his father's proddings rather



than because of them. Amadeo did not feel towards his father as he thought a son should feel. Some evenings he would watch his father sitting by the fireplace, the side of his face orange, his dark hair increasingly spotted with the white. His limbs were thinning and he was bent. Night after night, his father aged by the fireplace and as the years advanced so, it seemed to Amadeo, did his father's ignorance. Yet Amadeo knew how much his father did for him. His father would walk into a grave for his son and this made Amadeo angry. He still hated his father as much as he had that evening years before. Not with the same passion; the blazing fire had calmed, but the heat was still there. More, he was angry that his father should grow old on his account, making him a martyr to his father's love. He decided to reject that love; he could not be a prisoner to his father's dreams!

Amadeo was eighteen-years-old when he received the letter from the bishop of his district. The message informed him that his career had long been a matter of interest to certain people in certain places. Now it seemed that he was deserving of a scholarship to continue his studies in Rome. Would it be possible for him to declare soon whether or not he wished to accept the prize? The happy youth considered his triumph for some time before dispatching his reply. He was, he wrote, most honored that he had been so highly regarded by those much superior to himself. Of course he would be most willing and grateful to accept the prize. Would they be kind enough to let him know when he was expected? He would be ready to leave for the capitol at any time.

He mentioned nothing of the news to his parents. He would like to have told his mother, but she would run to tell his father immediately, and Amadeo wanted his father to be the last to know. He wanted his father denied the pleasure of boasting to everyone about his son, shaped, so his father thought, by his own enlightened method. Most of all he wanted his father to feel the same humiliation he had felt that day in the square!

The school rector was the first man Amadeo confided in. In Amadeo's eyes Father Cattini was most responsible for his education, the man Amadeo wished were his father, the man he wanted to please. The diminutive cleric was overjoyed at the prospect of his star pupil going to the university. There, he felt sure, Amadeo would excel and bring reknown both to himself and to Capracotta. His eyes sparkled as he clamorously applauded the youth, opening a bottle of red wine from Pescara, said by many in Italy, to be the best in the world, adding that he served that wine only to his best friends and only on the most special occasions. Those same tears Amadeo had struggled against so often before threatened to become troublesome again. Silently, he repeated those precious words: Only on the most special occasions! Only to his best friends! What honor, what happiness he felt that Father Cattini should speak such words of him.

Amadeo scrutinized every corner of the room. The furnishings were large and dark, warm and comfortable. The walls were covered with shelf after shelf of colorful, calkskin volumes of all sorts. Among the many volumes were tiny framed pictures, sculpture, and mementos of all kinds. How much more appealing than the bare, cold stone walls at home. Had this been his home, how happy he could have been!

Father Cattini poured the Pescara wine into glasses of finest Viennese crystal. Amadeo's hand trembled as he accepted his glass. The priest sat Amadeo down in his own Victorian chair, pulling up a wooden one for himself. Crouching forward, placing his hands on the youth's knees, he was ready to speak of something much more serious. His voice changed into a lower and graver tone. His eyes fixed Amadeo's as he began to speak. Father Cattini spoke of a war still fresh and tormenting in the minds of many, dissatisfaction rampant in the nation, people depressed and hungry. There were those who grasped the opportunity which always presents itself when the line between chaos and stability is faint.

They were dangerous men. Amadeo would be wise to avoid them, must be an enemy of their Godless call, their song of hate!

Amadeo stared openmouthed. How different Father Cattini seemed from only moments ago. Amadeo promised the priest that he would be careful. He need not worry on his account.

Father Cattini smiled at him, but continued speaking somberly. Amadeo must keep level headed, he must not forget who he is and what his origins are, lest he lose sight of what is real and right; if such should happen, education means nothing, only a decoration on a stale cake.

Amadeo remained silent. He grasped the import of the lecture, but he did not know what to do with it. The priest drank some wine, then continued. There was really nothing more a poor country priest could do for such a promising young man other than to wish him the best of luck, and to assure him of his help and friendship at all times. Also, he offered him the use of his own library; the handsome leather-bound volumes were Amadeo's as well as his own. He must use them whenever he could.

In his mind Amadeo suffered the contrast of this quiet, intelligent priest and his awkward, ignorant, and crude father.

Father Cattini asked whether he and his parents would join him for supper that evening, or the next, and Amadeo's heart sank. His father? Bring his uncouth father to dine with such a man as Father Cattini? He could not and would not!

For Amadeo's father, the invitation would have been a momentous occasion, a poor peasant being asked to dine with perhaps the only truly cultured man in Capracotta. That would be worth telling to relatives and friends. That would be something! How happy he would have been had Amadeo come home that evening to tell him of the cleric's desire to dine with them, but instead Amadeo quickly told the priest that his father would surely not accept the invitation. His father would feel uncomfortable outside of his own



home. Besides, it had been some time since his father had last attended Mass so it would be embarrassing for him to see the priest. Father Cattini said he was sorry such was the situation and added that, just the same, he would like Amadeo to join him the next evening. This invitation the boy accepted willingly.

That evening Amadeo returned home to find his father eating his supper with much gusto. When he saw his son, he drew the boy to a nearby chair, poured him a glass of wine, and made him drink. That would keep him healthy, he said. Amadeo was growing too thin, and were he suddenly to fall ill, all his study would be to no avail.

Amadeo said nothing of the scholarship.

The next morning was a gray Sunday. The cold mountain winds pushed against the whitewashed houses, blew through threshold gaps and faulty window sills. From the pulpit, the priest announced the news of Amadeo's triumph. At the end of the Mass, the townsfolk slowly made their way to Amadeo's household, where, with the best of intentions, they heaped congratulations upon Amadeo's father, who was completely taken aback. What was it all about, he wanted to know. The well-wishers were stunned. Did he not know that his own son was to study in Rome, had won the prized scholarship? He must know. Everyone else did! But no. He did not know. He was angry

that they did and they quickly felt his anger. Something was not right in the house. They left soon after coming.

Amadeo straggled in somewhat later, knowing that the procession of people had been to his house. His father sat before the fireplace gazing silently into the flames. Amadeo told him the news he had already heard from the lips of everyone but his son. Pietro did not answer. He remained motionless. What was wrong, Amadeo asked, pretending concern. Still no answer. Though Amadeo tried hard to look hurt and confused, he knew full well why his father acted as he did. He had intended that his actions have such an effect; he had waited for this. I have brought him down to size, Amadeo thought. I have brought him down to size!

Father and son did not speak to each other that day. Nor the next. Preparations for Amadeo's departure were made and the two regarded one another with feigned indifference.

On the day Amadeo left for Rome, father and son played the game of affectionate farewell. Father embraced son. Son embraced father. But neither was deceived. Father wished the son luck. Son promised the father hard work. Neither cared. Amadeo's mother, who did care, shed tears of reconciled sorrow; she cried all the more after her son in moments receded from a living figure waving from a train to a distant memory.

That evening she laid the supper table

and watched her husband sit in front of the fire. This habit he began in the days before Amadeo left, he kept faithfully day after day. She set the table. He sat. One day she saw him pick up one of Amadeo's books. His long calloused fingers caressed the binding, the cover, the paper. He turned the pages, stared at them, attempted to derive some understanding from them, but he was unable. He set the volume down and averted his eyes from his wife. In the mornings, when her husband left for work she cried for her son and, in the evenings, Pietro stared into the flames, seldom speaking. Neither could unburden himself to the other.

So time passed until Amadeo's first letter arrived. He was well, studying hard and sent his love to both. That was all. This first letter was like the few to follow.

When Amadeo stepped off the station platform in Rome, he sensed the beginning of a new life, free from his tyrannical father. Here he would keep his own hours, his own company. He visualized himself in the role of the university intellectual, of the Roman socialite, of the culture critic, of the athlete, and as a recent link in that chain of Roman contribution to Western civilization. How the city enchanted him! So different from the place he had spent his whole life. The fountains stole his breath. The art enslaved his soul. He walked fascinated down the main thoroughfares.

For Amadeo the Via Veneto was the greatest jewel of all. Here there seemed to be the most tables, the most people, businessmen in dark suits and white shoes sipping Chivas Regal, awnings of all colors over the broad sidewalks protecting the people from the sun. Day and night, the tables were always full, the espressos hot, the laughter ringing. This street in the heart of Rome seemed a city in itself, a city which never went to sleep.

Churches, squares, museums, art galleries, all were equally astounding. One warm, sunny afternoon soon after his arrival he stood in the main foyer of the Villa Borghese museum staring up at the ceiling frescoes. An older woman with small children passed and nudging them, pointed to Amadeo's gaping, told them he was waiting to catch flies. Their laughter distracted Amadeo, but he looked up again, this time with his mouth closed. The figures seemed to jump out from the ceiling. He doubted that they were painted figures at all. He wanted those outstretched hands to reach down to him, to pull him upward to knowledge and understanding.

Amadeo's first few years in Rome passed quickly and uneventfully. At first very shy and unassuming - he remembered what Father Cattini had said about remembering his origins — he gradually began to accustom himself to life in the big city. He studied hard so that by his third year in the university, he was regarded by many of the professors as one of the top handful of students. He began to take an interest in writing of all types, especially poetry, and soon acquired remarkable skill in this art and, within the university community, a reputation.

After four years he took his first degree and soon afterwards published a small collection of his poetry. While continuing his studies towards an advanced degree, he was encouraged by friends and professors to continue his writing and it was not long before he published a second, then a third collection of poems. He wrote a collection of essays on various subjects, but would have been himself unable to meet the expenses of such a private printing. However, he had chosen his friends well and they saw to it that money would not be among his concerns. What Amadeo published yet another booklet, a brilliant discussion of Utopian vision, the

Roman academic community was stunned into silence, yet reports soon began to circulate that Amadeo's latest work was a masterpiece of original thought, a demonstration of pure genius. At first, Amadeo's works had circulated within the Italian academic community, but slowly his readership began to increase abroad. One of his professors, an expert linguist, took it upon himself to translate Amadeo's works into English. Of course, he never attained the popularity of a Hemingway, a D'Annunzio, or a Conrad; still, his reputation among the upper classes of several societies was made. After a decade in Rome, he had become, as his father had so fervently hoped, respected. During all this time he had neglected his parents. He wrote an occasional letter but never did visit them, or send them word to visit him.

His father had aged perceptibly. Pietro's hair had long since turned white. He still worked his land because he had no other means of support, no other choice. The long years of sacrificial labor too had taken their toll. When Pietro came home in the evenings he was on the verge of exhaustion. Panting heavily, his hands trembling, he would go directly to his chair by the fireplace. He seldom thought of his son and on the rare occasion when he did, it was as if Amadeo had been as much a fantasy as a real human being. Often, he forgot that he had a son altogether.

Miraculously, the Second World War left Amadeo and his select group untouched, perhaps because they were among the first to join in the war chants, to help the government through their writings to raise the war cry to a fever pitch. During this time, Amadeo wrote his favorable analysis of *Mein Kampf*. With the return of peace, Amadeo was among the first to welcome the victors and what they represented. He let it be known that his wartime writings had been misinterpreted. Of course he had never been a Fascist! He had only hoped through his writings to sustain the Italian people through their most difficult time. Now that the war was over, cooler heads had prevailed, his among them.

In that first year following the close of the war a famous man of letters visiting in Rome became acquainted with, and took an interest in, Amadeo's pre-war writings. He had not been able to meet

with Amadeo personally, but returning to his home in the cool mountains of the north, he immediately invited Amadeo to visit him for a few days. After that, he would be leaving on a tour of the American West and it would be some time before he returned. All Amadeo's successes had been as nothing compared to this invitation from a man admired as a genius throughout the Western world. Even his most distinguished professors had received no such honor. His friends, though wealthy, could not hope to be so honored. At thirty-two, he saw himself as a success. He now had money, friends, a reputation!

The day before Amadeo was to leave for the north, he received a telegram from his mother. His hands trembled uncontrollably as he read. His father was dead. He was asked to come as soon as possible. His mother needed his help with the arrangements to be made. He was expected at the funeral the day after next.

Angry tears of hatred came to his eyes. Once more his father had ruined him. He had died at the best time to make difficulties for his son. He had ruined all Amadeo's plans, scattering them with his large, awkward hands. The last victory had been his. Amadeo dispatched a telegram explaining the situation to his expectant host. Again and again he cursed his father.

When he first saw his mother, he was moved by how she had aged during the years that had passed. Her body was stooped and when she kissed his cheeks, her lips were dry and rough, more dead than alive. He imagined that his father had reduced her to such a state. That she was unhappy he could tell, and who but his father could have been the cause of the weariness in her eyes?

Amadeo went alone to see his father's body. The sight of the corpse only filled him with anger. Overpowered by a sense of disgust, he stood there leaning over the open casket and the empty shell which lay inside. The body was motionless and, thought Amadeo, bloated and content with its final victory. The corners of the lips had been slightly pointed upwards, as in a grin, and Amadeo was tormented by the thought that his father's corpse would sit up and laugh at his son. Once again Amadeo would feel the same humiliation he had felt that day many years ago,

when he had listened to his father's laughter from below. He turned away from the corpse and rushed out of the room.

At the funeral procession Amadeo was one of the bearers of the simple casket. It carried through the town from the church to the cemetery. As was customary, the town's population fell into the procession behind the casket, the widow and the old ladies up front, shrieking and pulling their hair. Amadeo was disgusted. During the journey, he was troubled by the thought that the coffin lid might fly open, his father pop out, pointing at him, laughing so loudly

that he would infect the people around him, all of whom would also point at Amadeo and laugh. Amadeo shook his head and the vision dimmed.

The actual burial was a great relief to Amadeo. He was anxious to return to Rome as soon as he could. During the ceremony he noticed a stranger watching him. As Amadeo and his mother were leaving the gates of the cemetery, the stranger followed them, then walked beside them. Small, with a black beard, and a dark frock coat which covered nearly his entire body, the stranger introduced himself as the man of letters who had invited Amadeo to his home in the north.

Amadeo stood staring at the man unbelievably. Why, he asked the stranger, had he inconvenienced himself so?

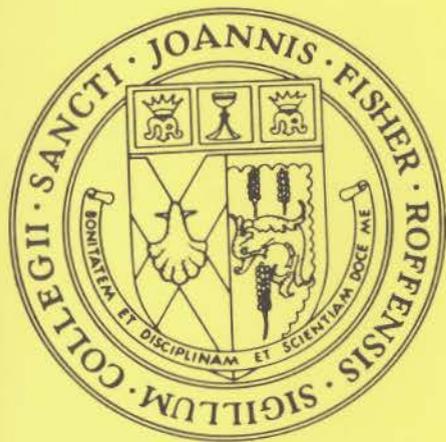
The man smiled and put his arm around Amadeo's shoulders. He had heard of Amadeo's great loss. Though scheduled to leave Europe, he had cancelled all his plans and decided to stay with Amadeo during this difficult period. He knew how emotionally upset Amadeo must be. After all, a father is always a father, and a son's first education. Such a loss cannot be taken lightly!

Yes, answered Amadeo, that is certainly true.

Class Reunion

By David J. Crerand

Eight years of separation caused my classmates
 To look uglier than I had ever remembered.
 Laughter and hugging could not disguise
 What once again had drawn us together.
 We spoke kindly of those who had died
 Though each of us knew that during their lifetimes
 Few of us had even liked them.
 The girl I had once worshipped from afar
 Was made up not unlike a whore,
 And the class president had been left behind.
 The teachers whom we had hated
 Because we were expected to
 Remained targets, when their backs were turned.
 We exchanged our expectations, our dreams,
 Smiling all the while.
 We looked at all the losers and hoped
 We would never have to face them again.



*Teach me goodness,
discipline and
knowledge*



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