

## Canterbury Tale The Traveler

He was a solitary figure, walking along a road winding through miles of sunflower and wheat fields, glowing golden in the late afternoon sunlight. Neatly stacked rolls of hay cast long shadows waiting to be harvested. The Italian landscape appeared quiet and peaceful, without any trace of the ravaging war that had ended only five years earlier. Much of Europe was in ruins. The traveler was young, perhaps twenty-five years, and he looked expectant and eager for excitement. His gait was unhurried and relaxed. He often paused for a long moment to take a picture with the well-worn 35-millimeter camera that was swung around his neck. This undisturbed, idyllic Tuscan countryside inspired him to take pictures that were breathtaking. Recently he had been making a living by selling them to tourists in city markets.

That afternoon he was hitch hiking to Florence, but no cars had passed on the remote country road. This didn't worry him because the sturdy bag on his shoulder contained enough bread, cheese, and water for a several daylong journey. He would be content walking the entire fifty miles to the city, and would use the opportunity to take extra photographs if shoppers were especially generous that week. And the extra money wouldn't hurt: he was beginning, again, to feel restless and ready to move on to a new location. New York was enticing, and that city's fast-paced atmosphere would offer an extreme change to his current laid-back lifestyle. But for the time being he loved selling his photographs in Italy.

As the man ambled on, the light slowly disappeared and day waned into dusk. He didn't want to risk getting lost in the maze of rural roads by traveling in the dark, and decided to ask to spend the night at a nearby farmhouse. He approached the only house within miles, and boldly knocked on the door. An elderly woman answered, wrapped in a threadbare floral nightgown. Her long hair, once thick and chocolate colored but now wispy gray, was coiled loosely in a bun at the nape of her neck. She opened the door just a crack and peered around cautiously, but opened it widely after determining that the young man appeared harmless. He explained his situation to her sympathetic ear, and she welcomed him to spend the night.

"You're welcome to stay with us tonight. We so rarely have visitors, it will be nice to have another person in the house."

"*Grazie*," He replied, "I'll try not to be much trouble, and I can leave as soon as it's light in the morning."

The old woman introduced herself as Senora Anita Lorenzo, and explained that her husband, Mario, was sleeping. He had to work in the fields the next day. The couple had been married for fifty-two years, and lived in the villa and farmed its land their entire married life. The property belonged to Mario's father, and his grandfather before him. Anita and Mario had one son, Antonio, who died fighting in World War II. He had rebelled against the fascists that were attempting to gain control of his country, and joined the allied forces. He and his family were scorned by other Italians, who saw them as traitors, but they were quietly steadfast in their beliefs. Senora Lorenzo said that she and her husband were often lonely. Their house seemed empty without Antonio. Talking late into the night, the traveler and Senora Lorenzo went to sleep exhausted.

When the young man awoke, it was late-morning. He didn't immediately recognize the unfamiliar, plain, clean bedroom. He went downstairs and Anita insisted that he stay for breakfast. When he argued that he was intruding upon the couple's hospitality, she suggested that he stay for the day to help her in the garden. He hesitantly agreed, hoping that he had to return the kindness they showed him.

Anita made bruschetta from tomatoes, basil, and garlic freshly grown in the garden outside the kitchen window. She served it on a freshly baked baguette. The traveler felt content and experienced a domesticity for the first time since his childhood. That evening, he was introduced to Mario. Senor Lorenzo enjoyed talking to the vibrant young man, who reminded him of his beloved son. Upon Mario's request, the traveler stayed another day at the villa. He helped the old man pick olives from ancient, gnarled trees, and spoke to him about the world outside the Italian countryside, which the couple had never seen. When the wanderer departed early the next morning, the old couple wistfully said goodbye to a young man with an entire life ahead of him. He looked back at two people who, although they never left their country, had lived happy and content lives.