

AI-Generated Graded Readers

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About This Edition

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.

The text was generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

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Ouida, *A Dog of Flanders* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified by ChatGPT)

Part 1

Nello and Patrasche were alone in the world. They were friends closer than brothers. Nello was a small boy, and Patrasche was a large dog. They were almost the same age, yet the boy was still young while the dog already carried the weight of many hard years. They lived together in a tiny village in Flanders, not far from the great city of Antwerp. Around their home lay wide green fields, long rows of tall trees, and a slow canal that moved like a quiet silver line across the land. The village was small, with only a few houses painted white, their shutters bright blue or green. In the middle stood an old windmill, turning slowly in the wind, and near it rose a gray church whose bell rang morning, noon, and night with a soft and lonely sound.

Their home was a poor little hut at the edge of the village. It belonged to an old man named Jehan Daas. Long ago he had been a soldier, but war had left him weak and crippled. When he became very old, his daughter died and left him her small child. That child was Nello. Though Jehan was poor and tired, he took the boy into his arms and raised him with gentle care. The hut was made of mud and wood, very small and simple, but it was clean and white, and beside it grew beans and herbs in a narrow garden.

They were terribly poor. Many days they had little food, and sometimes none at all. Yet the old man was kind, and the boy was loving and honest. They shared what little they had and lived quietly together. Their happiness depended on one being above all others—Patrasche. Without the dog, they could not have lived. He pulled their cart, earned their bread, and gave them comfort. He was their strength and their hope.

Patrasche was a great Flemish cart dog, yellow-brown in color, strong and heavy, with wide feet shaped by generations of hard labor. Dogs like him were born to pull heavy loads across rough roads. They worked from morning until

night and often died from exhaustion. Patrasche had known such suffering since he was young. His early life had been full of hunger, blows, and cruel commands.

A harsh man once owned him, a traveling dealer who filled a heavy cart with metal pots and tools and forced the dog to pull it across long roads. The man drank often and cared nothing for the animal's pain. Under burning sun or freezing rain, Patrasche dragged the load while the man walked beside him smoking and shouting. If the dog slowed, the whip struck his body. Food was scarce, water rarer still.

One summer day, after long hunger and terrible thirst, Patrasche could go no farther. The road burned beneath his feet, and dust filled his eyes and mouth. At last he staggered and fell in the middle of the white road. He could not rise again. His master beat him with a stick and cursed him loudly, but the dog did not move. Thinking him useless and dying, the man cut him free from the cart, kicked him into the grass, and left him there alone.

Travelers passed by on their way to a festival. Some saw the dog, most did not. None stopped. A dying dog meant nothing to them. Patrasche lay still in the ditch beneath the hot sky, close to death.

After a long time an old man came walking slowly along the road. He was bent and weak, and beside him walked a small child with bright eyes. The old man noticed the dog and stopped. With pity in his face, he knelt beside the motionless body. The child stood quietly, watching with serious concern.

Thus Nello and Patrasche first met.

With great effort, Jehan Daas dragged the heavy dog home to the hut. There he and the boy cared for him patiently. They gave him water, shade, and rest. For many days the dog lay sick, barely breathing. Yet he heard no angry voice and felt no blow—only gentle hands and soft words. Slowly his strength returned. One morning he lifted his head; another day he stood on trembling legs. When at last he barked again, the old man and the child laughed with joy, and Nello placed flowers around his neck and kissed him warmly.

From that moment Patrasche loved them with all his heart. He watched their movements quietly, his wise eyes following them everywhere. He understood that

these two had saved his life.

Jehan earned a living by carrying milk into Antwerp with a small cart. The work was hard for a man so old and lame. One morning, after he prepared the cart, Patrasche walked forward and stood between the handles as if asking to pull it. The old man refused at first, believing it wrong to force a dog to labor. But Patrasche insisted, pulling gently with his teeth until Jehan finally agreed. He made a harness that fit kindly, and from that day onward the dog drew the cart each morning.

For Patrasche this work felt like happiness. The cart was light, the road peaceful, and his master spoke kindly and touched him with affection. After years of cruelty, even labor became joy when given with love. His work ended early each day, leaving long hours to rest in the sun, wander the fields, or play with Nello. At last he knew peace.

In time the cruel man who had owned him died, and no one came to claim the dog again. The little family lived quietly together. Years passed gently. When Jehan grew too weak to travel, young Nello began to walk beside the cart and sell the milk in town. People admired the boy's serious face and gentle manners. Many artists even stopped to sketch the child and the great dog moving together along the roads.

Their life was simple but happy. Each evening they returned home together. Patrasche shook free from his harness with joy while Nello told stories of the day. Then they ate their humble meal and watched the evening sky grow dark beyond the fields. The old man prayed softly, and all three slept peacefully beneath the small roof.

In spring and summer the fields were green and wide, and boy and dog lay beside the canal watching boats pass slowly by. Even winter could not break their spirits, though the cold bit hard and food was scarce. Sometimes kind strangers gave them soup or bread, and they ran home through the snow laughing with gratitude.

Patrasche felt content. Though he still worked hard and often went hungry, he was loved. The eyes he trusted smiled upon him, and that was enough.

Yet there was one thing that troubled him. In Antwerp stood great old churches made of dark stone. Many times Nello entered them and disappeared inside, leaving the dog waiting outside on the cold pavement. Whenever the boy returned, his face looked strange—sometimes pale, sometimes shining with emotion. He spoke little afterward and sat dreaming quietly.

Patrasche did not understand what called his young master into those silent places, but he sensed that something deep and powerful lived there, something that filled the boy's heart with longing.

And often, as they walked home together, Nello would whisper softly, "If only I could see them... if only I could see them."

Part 2

The great churches of Antwerp stood old and silent among the busy streets. Their towers rose above crowded houses, and their bells sent deep sounds across the city air. Inside them were wonders of art that travelers came from far lands to see. The name of the great painter Rubens lived everywhere in Antwerp, and even the poorest streets seemed touched by his glory. Nello felt this deeply, though he could not explain why. Whenever he entered the cathedral, his heart beat faster, and the world outside seemed to fall away.

Patrasche waited outside patiently on the stones near the iron gate. Once or twice he tried to follow the boy inside, but a tall keeper drove him away each time. After that he stayed quietly outside, unwilling to cause trouble for Nello. Still, he watched the doors anxiously and wondered why the boy always returned changed, his eyes bright with tears or filled with distant dreams.

One day, when the doors were left partly open, Patrasche slipped inside for a moment. He saw Nello kneeling before a great painting above the altar. The boy's face shone with deep feeling, and tears ran down his cheeks. When Nello noticed the dog, he gently led him back outside and spoke softly.

"It is cruel, Patrasche," he said. "They hide the most beautiful pictures behind curtains unless people pay money. I know the painter never wished that only the

rich should see them. If I could see those paintings just once, I would be happy even if I died afterward.”

The pictures he longed for were two famous works by Rubens. To see them required a small silver coin, yet even that was far beyond the reach of the boy and the dog. They never had money to spare. Food and fuel took everything they earned. Still, the dream lived strongly in Nello’s heart.

The love of art filled his whole being. While he walked through the cold streets delivering milk, he imagined colors, shapes, and faces more beautiful than anything around him. Though he was hungry and poorly dressed, his mind lived in a world of light and beauty. No one knew this secret—not even Nello himself fully understood it. Only Patrasche saw how the boy drew pictures everywhere with bits of charcoal, copying trees, people, and animals with careful attention.

Old Jehan Daas often spoke of a simple future for the child. “If one day you own this hut and a small piece of land,” he would say, “and your neighbors call you master, that will be enough happiness for any man.” The old soldier believed that quiet labor and a steady home were the greatest blessings life could give.

Nello listened respectfully but said nothing. In his heart he dreamed of another future. When he looked toward the distant cathedral tower glowing in the evening sky, he felt called toward something greater, though he could not name it.

Only one other person shared his secret thoughts—a little girl named Alois. She lived at the red mill on a grassy hill near the village. Her father, Baas Coge, was the richest farmer in the area. Alois was cheerful and kind, with dark shining eyes and soft fair hair. Though she lived in comfort, she loved playing with Nello and Patrasche more than anything else.

They ran together through fields, gathered flowers, and sat by the fire in the mill house. Alois often brought food for the dog, and her laughter filled Nello with happiness. She cared nothing for wealth or rank; to her, Nello was simply her dear friend.

One afternoon Baas Coge discovered them in a meadow after the hay had been cut. Alois sat among flowers with Patrasche resting his large head upon her lap. Nearby Nello drew their likeness carefully on a smooth piece of wood using

charcoal.

The miller watched silently. The picture looked wonderfully true, and love for his daughter filled his eyes with tears. Yet he soon grew stern. He scolded Alois for idling and sent her home. Then he turned to Nello.

“Do you spend much time on such foolish work?” he asked.

Nello lowered his head. “I draw what I see,” he answered quietly.

After a moment the miller offered him a silver coin. “It is foolish,” he said, “but it looks like my child. Take this money and leave the picture with me.”

Nello’s face grew pale. He placed his hands behind his back. “Keep both the money and the picture,” he said gently. “You have already been kind to me.” Then he called Patrasche and walked away.

As they crossed the field he whispered, “I could have used that coin to see the paintings, Patrasche. But I could not sell her picture—not even for that.”

That evening the miller spoke firmly to his wife. “The boy must not spend so much time with Alois,” he said. “He is poor, and he dreams too much. Trouble could come of it.”

Though his wife protested softly, he insisted. From then on Alois was kept away from Nello. Invitations stopped. Doors remained closed. The change hurt the boy deeply, though he did not understand why it had happened.

When Alois ran toward him in secret, he smiled sadly and said, “Do not anger your father. He loves you. We must obey him.” Yet each time he passed the mill without stopping, pain pressed heavily on his heart.

The portrait remained hanging above the mill hearth, admired every day, while the boy who made it was no longer welcome. Nello did not complain. He remembered his grandfather’s words: the poor must accept what life sends.

Still, hope lived within him. One evening, when Alois met him secretly near the canal and cried because he would not attend her feast day for the first time, he comforted her gently.

“One day things will be different,” he said. “That little picture your father keeps will be worth more than silver. Then he will open his door to me. Only love me always, Alois, and I will become great.”

The girl asked playfully, "And if I do not love you?"

Nello looked toward the cathedral tower glowing red in the sunset. A strange calm smile touched his face. "I will still become great," he said softly. "Or I will die trying."

That night he returned home with Patrasche while music and laughter came from the mill. Sitting in the doorway of the hut, he held the dog close.

"Never mind," he whispered. "Everything will change one day."

Part 3

Nello truly believed in that future. Though he was still only a boy, hope lived strongly within him, bright enough to warm even the coldest evening. Yet Patrasche, older and wiser in the ways of hardship, felt less certain. The dog cared little for dreams of tomorrow; he only knew that his young master had lost a place where laughter and kindness once lived. Whenever they passed the red mill, Patrasche looked toward its closed door and gave a low unhappy sound.

That night old Jehan Daas spoke from his bed. His voice was weak, but his memory was clear. "Is this not Alois's feast day?" he asked.

Nello nodded quietly, hoping the old man would not ask more.

"And why art thou not there, child? Thou hast gone every year before."

The boy bent over him gently. "You are not well enough to be left alone," he answered.

The old man shook his head slowly. "Neighbor Nulette would have come to sit with me. Tell me the truth, Nello. Hast thou quarreled with the child?"

"No, grandfather—never," Nello replied quickly. "Baas Coge simply did not invite me this year. I think I displeased him when I drew Alois's portrait."

The old man grew silent. Though poor and bedridden, he understood the world better than the boy. He drew Nello close and stroked his hair.

"Thou art very poor, my child," he said softly. "That is a hard burden."

Nello smiled faintly. "I am rich," he murmured, thinking of the dreams that filled his heart. He stepped outside and looked at the stars shining over the quiet

fields. Music drifted faintly from the mill, and tears fell down his cheeks, though he tried to smile. "In the future," he whispered to himself.

Unknown to anyone except Patrasche, Nello held a secret hope. Beside the hut stood a small shed that no one entered but him. Light from the north fell clearly through a narrow window. There he had built a rough easel from scraps of wood. On a wide sheet of paper he worked every evening after his daily labor.

He owned no colors and could barely afford charcoal. Many times he had gone hungry to save coins for paper. Yet patiently he drew, guided only by what he saw and felt. The picture showed an old woodman sitting on a fallen tree at dusk. Nello had often watched the real man resting after work, his face tired yet peaceful. Without training or teaching, the boy captured the quiet sorrow and dignity of age. The figure seemed alive, filled with thought and feeling.

Patrasche often lay nearby watching him work, understanding that this drawing meant everything to the boy. Nello hoped to send it to a competition in Antwerp. A prize of two hundred francs a year would be given to the best drawing made by a young person under eighteen. Three famous artists would judge the works.

Winning would change his life. It could bring learning, independence, and perhaps a path toward art. Nello told no one but the dog.

"Rubens would help me if he knew," he whispered once, resting his hand on Patrasche's head.

The dog believed it, for anyone who painted dogs so lovingly must surely have a kind heart.

Through spring, summer, and autumn Nello worked on the drawing whenever he could. At last winter came, and the day arrived when the pictures must be delivered. With trembling hands he placed the large sheet carefully upon the little green milk cart. Together he and Patrasche walked into Antwerp through cold evening air and left the drawing at the appointed building.

As he walked home past the cathedral, doubt filled him. "Perhaps it is worthless," he thought. "How could I know?" He felt foolish for believing that a poor boy who barely knew how to read could create anything worthy of real artists. Yet in his imagination the great figure of Rubens seemed to rise before him,

encouraging him not to lose courage. Comforted, he returned home through the dark.

Winter soon grew harsh. Snow fell heavily and covered the fields until paths disappeared. Streams froze, and bitter winds swept across the plains. Each morning before dawn Nello and Patrasche still carried milk to Antwerp. The work became harder each day. Age weighed upon the dog. His joints stiffened, and rising from sleep caused pain, though he never complained.

“Stay home and rest,” Nello begged many times. “I can push the cart myself.”

But Patrasche would not allow it. Proud of his work, he placed himself in the harness each morning like a loyal soldier answering a call. Though frost hurt his feet and cold air burned his lungs, he walked steadily forward beside the boy he loved.

Old Jehan watched them with sadness. One day he stroked Patrasche gently and said, “Soon we shall both rest, old friend.” The old man and the old dog shared the same quiet fear—what would become of Nello when they were gone?

One snowy afternoon, while returning from Antwerp, Patrasche found a small toy lying in the road—a bright little figure dressed in red and gold. Nello searched for its owner but could find none. He decided to give it secretly to Alois, thinking it might bring her joy.

That evening he climbed onto a shed below her window and tapped softly. The girl opened it, surprised and happy. Nello placed the toy in her hands.

“I found this in the snow,” he whispered. “It is for you. God bless you, dear.”

Before she could answer, he slipped away into the darkness.

That same night disaster struck. A fire broke out at the mill. Flames rose high, and villagers rushed to help. Though the main building survived, barns and grain were destroyed. The whole village gathered in fear and confusion.

Nello ran to help, but Baas Cogez pushed him aside angrily. “You were here after dark,” the miller said harshly. “I believe you know something of this fire.”

The words stunned the boy. He could not believe anyone spoke seriously. Yet the miller repeated the accusation to others the next day. Though no proof existed, suspicion spread through the village. People grew cold toward Nello, eager to

agree with the wealthiest man among them.

Doors once open to him now closed. Friendly greetings vanished. Though few truly believed him guilty, none wished to oppose Baas Coge. The little world that had once welcomed Nello turned away from him.

He endured the injustice quietly. Only when alone with Patrasche did his sorrow show. Still he whispered to himself, "If I win the prize, they will understand."

Winter deepened. Work became scarce as another milk seller replaced him for many customers. Coins grew fewer. Hunger became common. The dog stopped at familiar houses where doors now stayed shut, looking upward with gentle appeal. Neighbors felt shame but turned away to please the miller.

Christmas approached, yet joy did not reach the little hut. One night, only days before the holiday, old Jehan Daas died peacefully in his sleep. Nello and Patrasche were left entirely alone in the world.

They followed the simple coffin through falling snow to the graveyard beside the gray church. No one else mourned with them. Returning home, they felt a terrible emptiness. Worse still, they soon learned they could not even remain in the hut. Rent was unpaid, and the owner demanded payment. Having nothing left, Nello lost the home as well.

All night the boy and the dog sat together beside the cold hearth. When morning came—Christmas Eve—they left the hut forever.

Walking toward Antwerp through the snow, Nello begged once for a crust of bread for Patrasche. The door closed quickly in his face. They continued silently, hungry and tired, until they reached the city near noon.

That day the winner of the drawing competition would be announced. With a weak heart, Nello entered the crowded building, holding Patrasche close beside him. Bells rang loudly as the chosen drawing was raised before the crowd.

It was not his.

A voice proclaimed another boy the victor. The world seemed to fade. When Nello awoke, he lay outside on cold stones while Patrasche tried desperately to revive him.

"It is finished," Nello whispered, embracing the dog. "All finished."

Together they began the long walk back through falling snow.

Part 4

Snow fell thicker as Nello and Patrasche walked slowly back toward the village. A sharp wind swept across the empty fields, cutting through the boy's thin clothes and stinging the dog's tired eyes. Neither spoke, yet each felt the sorrow of the other. Hunger, cold, and disappointment pressed upon them, but they continued forward step by step, bound together by quiet loyalty.

The light was already fading when they neared the hamlet. The sky hung low and gray, and the snow lay deep and smooth over the land. Suddenly Patrasche stopped. His nose moved quickly along the ground, and he scratched at the snow with sudden energy. From beneath the white surface he pulled out a small leather case.

He carried it proudly to Nello.

The boy turned it toward the faint glow of a small lamp burning beside a roadside cross. On the leather was written the name Baas Cogeze. Inside lay many banknotes—more money than Nello had ever seen in his life.

For a moment he stood still, hardly understanding. Then awareness returned. Without hesitation he placed the case safely inside his shirt.

“We must take it back,” he said softly. Patrasche watched him closely, as if already knowing his choice.

They turned toward the mill-house at once. When Nello knocked, the miller's wife opened the door. Her face was pale from worry, and little Alois clung to her dress.

“Is it you, poor child?” she cried gently. “Go quickly before my husband sees you. We are in great trouble tonight. He has lost a large sum of money in the snow. Without it we may be ruined. It must be God's punishment for the wrong done to you.”

Nello placed the leather case in her hands.

“Patrasche found it,” he said simply. “Please tell Baas Cogeze so. I hope he will

give the dog shelter and food now that he is old. Keep him from following me. Be kind to him.”

Before she understood his meaning, Nello bent and kissed Patrasche warmly. Then he stepped back, closed the door quickly, and vanished into the dark night.

Inside, the woman and child stood frozen in surprise. Patrasche threw himself against the door, scratching and whining desperately, trying to follow his master. They tried to comfort him, bringing food and calling softly, but he refused everything. He lay before the door, crying in low, broken sounds.

Meanwhile Nello walked alone into the storm.

The night of Christmas Eve deepened. Snow covered the roads and rooftops, and the bells of Antwerp began to ring for the midnight mass. Light shone warmly from windows where families gathered together in joy. But the boy wandered without shelter, weak from hunger and grief.

He did not know where he meant to go. His feet carried him toward the city almost without thought. The cold grew more terrible with each hour. Snow gathered on his hair and shoulders, and his steps slowed.

At last he reached the great cathedral. Its doors stood partly open, welcoming worshippers arriving for the holy night. Music floated outward—soft voices and the sound of the organ rising like light into the dark sky.

Drawn by longing stronger than exhaustion, Nello entered quietly.

Inside, warmth surrounded him. Candles burned brightly, filling the vast space with golden light. People knelt in prayer, their voices blending in gentle song. Nello moved slowly forward, unnoticed among the crowd, until he stood before the great paintings he had dreamed of seeing.

For the first time, the curtains were open.

Before him shone the works of Rubens—the Elevation of the Cross and the Descent from the Cross. The colors glowed with life; the figures seemed to move and breathe. Light and shadow flowed together like music. Nello forgot hunger, cold, and sorrow. Tears filled his eyes as he gazed upward in wonder.

“I can see them... at last,” he whispered.

He sank to his knees, unable to look away. All the beauty he had imagined

seemed alive before him. In that moment every hardship of his life faded. He felt peace greater than any he had ever known.

Outside, Patrasche had finally escaped. When Baas Cogeze returned and learned the truth—that Nello had found and returned the money—shame filled his heart. He hurried to seek the boy and ordered the door opened. Patrasche ran into the storm, following the faint scent through snow and wind.

The dog searched tirelessly through the streets of Antwerp. At last he reached the cathedral steps and slipped inside.

There he found Nello lying still before the great paintings, his small body resting upon the cold stone floor. Snow clung to his clothes, and his face was calm and pale. Patrasche rushed forward, licking his hands and pressing close to him.

The boy stirred slightly and opened his eyes.

“You came, Patrasche,” he murmured weakly. “I knew you would.”

The dog lay beside him, sharing his warmth as best he could. Outside, the bells rang louder, celebrating Christmas morning. Inside the cathedral, the candles burned steadily, casting soft light over the two faithful friends.

Nello looked once more toward the paintings above him.

“They are beautiful,” he whispered. “Now I am happy.”

He wrapped his arms around Patrasche’s neck. The dog remained perfectly still, watching him with deep, loving eyes. Slowly the boy’s breath grew softer, then faded like a quiet sigh.

Patrasche did not move. He stayed beside Nello, guarding him as he always had, until his own strength failed. When morning light entered the cathedral, the two lay together peacefully beneath the paintings the boy had longed to see.

The people who entered for prayer found them there—boy and dog resting side by side, beyond hunger, beyond cold, beyond sorrow.

Later the story spread through Antwerp and the village. Baas Cogeze wept openly when he learned the truth and remembered the kindness returned for his injustice. The villagers felt shame for their coldness. Too late they understood the goodness of the boy they had cast aside.

Nello and Patrasche were buried together, and many came to mourn them. The

poor child who had loved beauty and the faithful dog who had loved him more than life itself were no longer alone.

Their suffering ended where beauty and love met at last, beneath the silent gaze of the great master whose work had filled a young heart with dreams.