

Quite exhausted by his mad flight, he flung himself upon the ground and sobbed out his misery.

With calmer thoughts a plan took form in his mind.

'Marta asks for me. I will go to her,' he said, springing to his feet.

The sun had now set. He returned to his home in the valley. No one was there; on a balmy evening who with Latin blood remains indoors? Going to a corner where he kept his belongings, he tied up a change of clothing in a kerchief of generous dimensions, hid a leather money-belt, unfortunately light of weight, in his bright-colored girdle, and took his coat. Then, after forcing himself to eat a little of the supper of fruit and bread set ready for him on the table, he took a loaf under his arm, picked up his packet, and, going out, trudged through the dust of the road in the moonlight toward the pass of the hills.

It was very early on a June morning, but the air was chill and a fog lay over the great city of New York, shutting out from view the smokestacks of the ocean steamers lying at the piers in the North River, the cruisers for the time at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, the Statue of Liberty, and the shipping down the bay. At the entrance to one of the bridges, those bonds of steel that bind Greater New York to old Manhattan, a party of boys had built a bonfire some hours earlier, and a few bright embers still glowed in its heart. Here, close to the place where the fire had been, the roundsman of the beat now found a man lying on the ground asleep.

'You drunken tramp, wake up and move on,' he called roughly, giving the prostrate vagabond a thrust with his foot.

The sleeper stirred, but did not awaken.

'Up with you, I say!' repeated the trusty guardian of the law. And stooping, he caught the vagrant by the coat and shook him vigorously. The man staggered upright and wrenched himself free.

He was a young fellow; his beardless face was not the countenance of a hobo, and the dark eyes that looked out from his were keen and clear, not dimmed by dissipation.

These characteristics in his favor were lost, however, on the police officer, who, newly appointed to the force, prided himself on his efficiency.

'What are you doin' here, you dago?' he continued, flourishing his club significantly. 'I arrest you for sleepin' in the streets. Come along with me without trouble; it'll be better for you.'

Business in the E— Police Court was rushing later that morning, and the sharp-featured little magistrate was meting out sentences to disorderlies and petty offenders at the rate of one every three minutes.

Impatience quite overruled the judicial calm when the young Italian found asleep by the bonfire stood before him.

'Humph! That such an able-bodied fellow should be arrested for vagrancy,' he snapped out. 'Are you not ashamed of yourself, young man?'

The prisoner steadily met the stern eyes fixed upon him.

'No, Excellence, I am not ashamed,' he said.

The judge stared. His words had been but the beginning of a homily, such as he sometimes addressed to hardened cases. He expected no reply, yet that gently spoken 'Excellence,' even more than the sturdy denial, disarmed him.

'Then how is it you are reduced to this? There is employment to be found by those who seek it,' he proceeded, with a frown.

'I work in California,' explained the young man, with a soft Italian accent. 'One day a letter from Italy brought bad news. "Marta, the betrothed of Gaetano, is dying," it said; "she begs to see him." I am Gaetano, Excellence, Gaetano Decardo. That evening I set out to return to my own country and to Marta. I had little money. Sometimes I rode under the freight cars, sometimes I walked for days. To-day I find a ship. You will let me go free, Excellence?'

The judge softened. He was human after all.

'Decardo, are you hungry now?' he asked, leaning over his desk.

A red glow mounted to the brow of the prisoner. For a moment he did not reply. At last he admitted shamefacedly:

'Excellence, I have not tasted food for two days.'

'Very well. The best sentence for you is a dinner, boy,' declared the Judge, with whimsical severity.

Two days later, Gaetano was on his voyage across the sea.

Somewhere in mid-ocean, unseen, unknown, his ship passed another, westward bound.

One afternoon soon afterwards, with a party of Italian immigrants just landed at Ellis Island, stood a fragile young girl.

'She is too pale; she will not be permitted to stay in the country,' her compatriots whispered among themselves.

'She has been ill, but she will soon be strong again,' said the mother of the family in whose care she has made the journey.

'I am Marta Franconi,' declared the girl to the interpreter. 'I am come out to marry my betrothed, who should be here to meet me. He lives just over in California; surely if he is not here to-day he will come to-morrow.'

When Marta remained day after day in the lodging of the detained women immigrants, and yet he did not come, with unflinching trust she still had recourse to the sweet confidante of her maiden heart, the blessed Madonna.

Finally word came from the tranquil orange valley in the distant West: 'My son Gaetano disappeared the day we got word that his betrothed was dying,' Giordano wrote to the commissioner. 'We know not whether he is living or dead.'

By her handiwork Marta had shown that she could earn her bread. She was released accordingly, but only to find that the family with whom she came over had migrated to some other place. One evening on her way home from work, Marta stopped at a little church in the crowded Italian quarter. Here she always found comfort. Here the sweet face of the Madonna looked down at her from the gilded frame of a beautiful picture as through a window of heaven. Marta had been very lonely to-night, but this pause where the light of the chancel lamp led like a star to the Door of Peace made her brave again.

Just as she was about to go out a man came in quietly and knelt at the back of the church.

Marta rose from her knees and turned to go out into the world, taking up the burden of life once more.

As she drew near the man kneeling at the last bench, her attention was in some way attracted to him.

'He is a sailor, or just from a voyage,' she said idly to herself.

He raised his eyes.

Marta caught at the back of a bench to keep from falling.

Was this an apparition?

'Gaetano!' she gasped. 'Gaetano!'

He had stared at her like one in a dream, but now he started up.

'Yes, Gaetano!' he cried. 'Ah, carissima mia, from across the mountains and over the seas I have sought you long.'

'I waited, mio caro, but when I grew better of the fever and my uncle wanted to carry me to Guido, the vine-dresser, my mother let me come to join you as we planned,' stammered Marta in an ecstasy of happiness.

'Giorgia mia, when landing in Italy and walking many a mile, I reached your village,' he said, 'they told me you had come to America with the de Sorios. As soon as might be, I got work on a ship again to return to the United States and seek you. But I was too eager to be cautious. After we sailed I discovered we were bound for Argentina. Only now have I got back to New York. To-day I searched through this quarter for the de Sorios, but they have disappeared. Those who remembered them declared that no young girl was with them. When I spoke your name, Marta, no one knew or had heard of you. A few moments since, passing along the street, I came to this open door. "I will go into the church," I thought, "and at least give thanks that our ship was not lost in the storm we encountered when coming up the coast." And so, beloved, as by chance—but no, surely it was a providence—I have found you. Ah, truly, God is good.'

'Yes. Though so near, how easily we might have been again lost to each other,' said Marta, trembling at the very mention of the danger escaped.

Next day Gaetano and his betrothed were married in the little church.

The publication of an advertisement in a Catholic paper shows that the advertiser not only desires the patronage of Catholics, but pays them the compliment of seeking it through the medium of their own religious journal. So says an esteemed and wide-awake American contemporary. A word to the wise is sufficient....