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*A brawling novel of  
tenement life and love*

# TAKE A NUMBER

*Armando Perretta*



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## MARITAL MIX-UP

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Cop-hater and woman-fancier . . . adviser of husbands and consoler of wives, the Don's specialty was marital mix-ups. He arranged weddings (when they were absolutely necessary), love trysts (for husbands with stubborn wives) and even separations (for those in quest of livelier partners).

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*"The picaresque story of a colorful rogue . . . whose adventures and indiscretions are all presented as warmly and exuberantly comic . . . A most worthy piece of writing."*

NEW YORK TIMES

.....

**A NOTE ABOUT THE AUTHOR** Armando Perretta admits that this is a strongly autobiographical tale for this is the way it was when he grew up in Hartford—shining shoes, selling newspapers and helping his father with the lottery.

The novel was written in secret and only after it appeared in print did his friends and associates learn of its existence. In addition to his free lance writing, Mr. Perretta is presently one of the hosts at the Hearthstone Restaurant in Hartford, Connecticut.

## FROM THE REVIEWS

*"An extremely well-written book by a young man who never had any basic training in the art of writing . . . Don Peppino, and Tony, and Zia Maria and all the others who go to make up this novel come alive under Perretta's fluent pen . . . Perretta is now a full-fledged novelist and we will be looking forward now to his next one."*

Hartford COURANT

*"Reading this novel is like taking an excursion to a strange neighborhood . . . and having the window shades raised unexpectedly so all the homely and intimate details of the teeming life within can be witnessed . . . one cannot but respond to the warmth and exuberance demonstrated by these Italian immigrants. The author portrays skillfully the foibles, the joys and sorrows of his subjects . . . One enjoys the honest appraisal, the frankness that pulls no punches, the faint nostalgia and the progressive spirit that looks back on the old Eastside as a precious childhood memory but with no regrets at its passing. As savory as pizza pie."*

Cincinnati ENQUIRER

*"Spirit and humorous sympathy . . . He really does make his scenes and people live . . . earthy, affectionate humor . . . infuses his story . . . an exceedingly good picture of a colorful segment of life."*

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*"Rich . . . remembrance and vitality . . . a picaresque novel, exuberant, with the highlight and shadow of lives lived in the sun."*

Newark NEWS



*A NOVEL*

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ARMANDO PERRETTA

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**For Lois, Jimmy, Charlotte and Little Mike**

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# 1

In 1923, Hartford's Eastside, an area four blocks long and inhabited predominantly by Italians, was bounded on the north by the Morgan Street Freight Yards, on the south by Sheldon Street, on the east by the Connecticut River, and on the west by the police station, a dirty, graying building which squatted there as a sort of grim, but jovially ignored, chaperone to its temperamental charges.

The Eastside was a city within a city, and inside its clearly defined boundaries could be obtained anything to sustain life, to say nothing of the many commodities, both legal and illegal and, depending upon who was doing the interpreting, both moral and immoral, to make it endurable. Almost every door screened a speak-easy, and every home exuded a warmhearted hospitality that had no peer in the world. Wine flowed more freely than water, and the air was constantly filled with music and singing—unless there happened to be a brawl which commanded everyone's undivided attention. Its people, born sentimentalists, savored to the full both joy and heartache, and even the most trivial incident was ballooned up into a production comparable to the spectacles staged at the La Scala Milan.

Front Street, running north and south and bisecting the Eastside neatly, was its heart; action was its blood, and it throbbed strongly through the back yards and alleys which were its arteries. When police whistles or clanging fire trucks or near riots wrenched Tony Fazzone out of a deep sleep and sent him, wild-eyed with excitement, scrambling to his bedroom window, the entertainment was rarely out of his vision, for he could see on Front Street for two blocks in either direction. There followed the usual tussle with his brother Nicky for vantage points at the window, with Nicky always getting the better side, forcing Tony to peer over his shoulders or lean out past them. But Tony was only ten years old and Nicky twelve, which, in their father's scheme of things,

deprived him of equal rights. Fortunately there was never any need for them to make room for Francesca, a younger sister who shared the room with them, for things that happened during the night frightened her, and she had but to hear the wild cries, "Look out the window! Look out the window!" being screamed through the tenements and alleys, to cover her head under the pillow and pull the blankets on her little day cot over her head.

For it was during the wee hours of the morning that the most thrilling things took place on Front Street, when speak-easies spewed drunks and the trouble and fist fights that went with them; it was during these hours that all the insurance arson was committed, and almost every night saw firemen perched precariously on high ladders swaying dangerously only feet away from Tony's widely opened eyes, while people in the windows of the burning building intensified the drama for him with their screams of terror. And it was a rare night when the patrol wagon didn't make at least a dozen trips to pick up resisting culprits imprisoned at the call box on a corner not far from Tony's window.

This latter operation gave birth to the snide remarks of a newspaper with who, commenting editorially or the fortuitous selection of the police station site, pointed out that since the paddy wagon made most of its trips to the nearby area, the saving to the city on gasoline was inculcable.

This statement gave people in the sterile parts of the city a faulty picture of the Eastside.

It was certainly not the way Tony's father saw it. And the way Tony's father saw it was important, because he was one of the Eastside's most influential citizens and its most eloquent spokesman. He was, to give him his full dress title, Don Peppino Fazzone, *Capo Collettore Del Gioco Del Lotto*. When the revered Head Collector of the Italian Lottery descended to the streets of an evening, his chest expanded in contentment, for conditions were supremely congenial to his outlook on life, which lends ready understanding to his statement that the *Americani* lived lives of water, which every Italian knew was tasteless and colorless.

By *Americani* the Don meant people who were other than Italians and had been born in America. And what



he said was true, for at night, when people, done with the day's labors, should have been enjoying themselves, the city beyond the Eastside was lifeless. On Main Street, only a block west of the police station, the mannikens and displays in the lighted windows of the closed department stores beckoned to deserted sidewalks; a few blocks south, the emptied insurance office buildings were silent, smartly dressed sentinels standing guard over nothing. Moving a block further west, the rich lawns of Bushnell Park began their ascent to the grounds of the gold-domed State Capitol Building. In the center of a square on its south side, an equestrian Lafayette disrespectfully gave the men who made the laws the back end of his horse and pointed his sword dramatically in the direction of the men who prosecuted the laws in the new County Building. But that too was empty, for its officials had long departed for home to enjoy the peace and privacy their prosecutions insured them.

Front Street, on the other hand, teemed with life. Pushcarts lined the gutters, and vendors and customers and captured pilferers vied vociferously with each other; the music blaring from the loud-speaker set in the transom of the door to Salvatore Pielo's radio and record shop, which started a moment after its owner had turned the key in the door early in the morning, would be stilled only after he departed from it somewhere in the neighborhood of midnight; the sidewalks in front of the stores spilled over with crates of fruit imported from Sicily and bushel baskets of rare *verdura* and boxes of snails and chestnuts peeking out from their beds of straw; the windows of the numerous grocery stores were always filled with hanging *provolone* cheese, clusters of *pepperoni* sausage, *prosciutti*, Genoa *salame*, and the many other choice cold meats wrapped in colorful tissues which proclaimed to all that they had been imported from Italy and thus were the best; in the window of Pepe Pupolo's butcher shop there were whole lambs with halos of aromatic herbs, and the suckling pigs with gleaming apples in their mouths; the windows of the pastry shop were miniature wonderlands with their displays of the incomparable Italian *pasticci* and figurines of all descriptions sculptured from almond paste. And if it was a summer evening, the plump and jovial proprietor, Mr. Corrado, sat outside the door by his huge tub of *limonata* serenading passers by with

his accordion. From the other side of town, adventurers who had heard what Front Street had to offer, rubbed elbows with the natives as they came in quest of those items which made living more palatable and outlooks a little rosier. On almost every corner there were groups of men discussing important philosophies and the topics of the day, and the Capo Collettore, by merely sauntering along and listening in discreetly, could have his pick of a wide variety of subject matter upon which he could then authoritatively declaim.

Of course it had not always been so. Like all truly great men, Don Peppino had worked himself into his important post. As a matter of fact, a scrutiny of the Capo Collettore's history would prove that he had been sidetracked from his destiny by the caprices of circumstances and, like the water he despised, had attained his true level only because he sought it.

Don Peppino had migrated from Italy to a small town in Massachusetts, where some *paesani* had promised him work. It did not take him long to decide that the town was incapable of holding his guitar, let alone his expanding philosophies, and having a married sister who had settled in Hartford, he instituted discreet inquiries about the city. When he heard it was the capital of a *provincia*, he had someone print the correct spelling of the city down on a piece of paper and, with it, departed to the nearest railroad station.

When he arrived on Hartford's Eastside he was as yet untitled, being only Peppino Fazzone, one of that anonymous mass of commoners. His only material possessions were a suit of clothes in impeccable condition, the guitar, and a straw hat which he wore at a rakish angle. It was the straw hat which had captured the heart of Tony's mother, who later said that if she'd known then what went on in the head it covered, she'd have taken the next boat back to Italy.

This was not an altogether fair remark, for Mrs. Fazzone, in making it, alluded to her husband's love of life which, in going to make up the whole of his magnetic personality, kept him in constant demand socially, a fact which, to answer the iniquitous charges made against him, more than justified his perennial absences from his own hearth.

For Don Peppino's soul, unlike his beloved Eastside,



was unboundable, unless one wished to point to the limitations he set himself with his discriminating sense of propriety and that keen susceptibility to duty for which he was famous.

Before destiny restored him to his proper niche in life, the Don, like so many of his friends and neighbors, was forced to the indignity of laboring in a factory to keep food in the mouths of his growing family. In keeping them from want, Don Peppino subjected himself to the severest of regimens, for he subscribed heartily to the belief that all work and no play made Jack a dull boy indeed, and it was his contention that as long as he arose in the morning, shaved and went to work, he could not be rightly chided over how strenuously or how late he had celebrated the night before.

Now Don Peppino did not abhor work, nor, as it was scurrilously broadcast by his enemies, did it exude a peculiarly unpleasant odor for him. It was the nature of the work rather than the labor itself he took exception to. To be a factory worker was no great distinction, and Peppino Fazzone yearned mightily for distinction. There were so many things to accomplish, so many goals to attain, and much honor to be reaped. There was, for instance, an ever present need on the Eastside for men with authoritative voices to settle the many issues that were forever popping up. On the Eastside, arguments and differences were usually settled by mediators who commanded the respect of all parties. In any case it was deemed highly inadvisable to call in the police.

Peppino Fazzone knew that he was eminently suited for things of this nature, and, like the thoughts within the poet's breast, he strained for expression and recognition. True, he had already established himself as a musician of note, a guitar player who was in constant demand at the various social functions. But he yearned for larger worlds to conquer. The philosopher in him chafed at the bit, and as yet he had made no progress in that direction. Whenever he was among a group of men discussing grave issues, he was forced to the humiliation of awaiting his turn to speak, and invariably he was heatedly interrupted long before he had had his say.

But all that was before a group of five small business men, inspired by a common zeal for public service, banded together to form a company to back an Italian

lottery play and climbed the two flights of steps to Peppino Fazzone's flat to offer him the post of Capo Collettore.

Fate had become aware of its sin and was hurrying to expiate it.

## 2

The public-spirited men had a definite idea of the type of man they wanted. He must be handsome, he must be honest. He must be a man who made friends easily; he must have organizational ability, complete freedom of movement, and he must show promise of being able to rise to the level of his important office. In inquiring they learned that only one man fitted all these exacting requirements, and that man was Peppino Fazzone.

The object of their search, his attentive face reflecting his awareness of the historic moment, listened closely to what they had to say. Tony knew that it was something very important, because his mother had shooed him out of the house—Nicky was already out—and had taken Fran and herself upstairs to visit with the neighbors so that the men could be alone. When she returned, her husband—and these are the words of Mrs. Fazzone only—had been completely seduced into a life of crime, *La Compagnia* having left him fully installed as Capo Collettore with a nominal salary to carry him over the unremunerative period of organizing. The lottery was based on the very numbers drawn in Italy and was to be run exactly like it, with only one inconsequential difference. In Italy, where it was conceded that people had a finer sense of right and wrong, it was legal.

Now, had Don Peppino been a weaker man he would immediately have been sidetracked from his true destiny, for Mrs. Fazzone had at once lodged a protest against his intentions to widen, as she put it, the already too large space separating him from the straight and narrow path. To give weight to her protests, she threatened to call in her brother Theo if he did not at once desist in his ambitions. Though Don Peppino paled at the mention of Uncle Theo, he firmly held his ground and stated



nobly that he intended sacrificing a few doubtful principles for the benefit of his *whole* family.

The mention of the word "principles" raised the comparison—by Mrs. Fazzone, and thus a biased one—of the two brothers-in-law. *Theodoro*, Don Peppino was informed, was the man of principle, not he.

Uncle Theo was the intellectual of the family. He was a handsome, aesthetic looking, broad-foreheaded, soft-spoken man with deep, pitying eyes. He never raised his voice no matter how heated the discussion, relying upon the power of his logic and words rather than force to drive his points home. Uncle Theo didn't believe in God or Mussolini, and refused to discuss the possibility of the existence of Heaven or Hell on the grounds that it was an idiotic premise, and had more than once stated that no man, living or dead, was deserving of either, as they were popularly conceived to be. He did not believe in the survival of the fittest in its strictest sense, saying that the world would be better if the strong helped, not trampled, the weak. Uncle Theo believed in bettering the working man's lot, and in the Darwinian theory, the proof of which he claimed abounded. Though he disclaimed any ambitions to acquire wealth, he allowed that it was a sacred right. But he also claimed it was a privilege with inherent obligations, and when these were violated, the privilege should be revoked. The pious Mrs. Fazzone, who adored her brother in spite of his agnosticism, claimed he could walk through the jungles unmolested, for even the lions would not fail to be moved by his eloquence. He was reputed never to have lost an argument, and Mrs. Fazzone, tormented by the conviction that her brother would face his Greatest Opponent in the epilogue of life's drama, had once found the courage to ask him, "But, Theo, supposing you are—" she drew in her breath, for the very word she was about to use was a kind of blasphemy when used in relation to Theo—"wrong? Supposing there is a God?"

Uncle Theo had set his lips grimly and replied, "I hope there is. There are so many things wrong with the world, so many things He needs to be told."

Mrs. Fazzone had gasped and quickly crossed herself. But the picture of Theo arguing firmly with God was as irresistible as it was anguishing. She couldn't envision either one losing the argument. She finally resolved her

dilemma by telling herself that God was all compassionate and that Theo would have little trouble persuading Him to open the portals of Paradise for an innocent sinner in spite of a lifetime spent in disclaiming their existence.

It was little wonder then that the Don should be disquieted at the prospect of entering Uncle Theo's figurative woodshed. For unlike one of the more famous Dons of history, he had no desire to quest at the windmills; rather did he find it expedient to let them turn and ignore the grist of their milling. And though he was seen to pale whenever the prospect of a lecture from Uncle Theo loomed up before him, the truth was that experience had inured him to them, the Capo Collettore having survived many of Uncle Theo's more brilliant mend-thine-ways efforts.

Don Peppino's system was simple, and it was to his credit that he never bragged about it and let it get abroad that he was forever besting the invincible Theodore Gallo. He merely listened until Uncle Theo, who, after all, was only human and capable only of human endurance, inevitably was spent both of wisdom and wind. Uncle Theo always ended with a sad, what-can-you-do roll of his eyes at Mrs. Fazzone. But he always saved a little strength to utter some wound-healing platitude for the benefit of his sister's faith in him.

"Right and logic," Uncle Theo once told Mrs. Fazzone, "are like the sun and the pure air; one cannot benefit from them if one hides in the dungeons."

And then, like the sun and the pure air he was to his sister, he departed to shake off the nightmare of futility in solitary meditation. And there usually remained, after the departure of those admirable qualities, nothing but gloom.

And now it was indicative of the Don's moral courage that in spite of the threat that Uncle Theo would be called in, he set about laying the groundwork for the operation of the lottery.

There was little need for schooling the people in the lottery, for most of them had been born in Italy and were familiar with it. The nature of the lottery was such that only negligible bets were needed to win satisfying sums of money, the majority of the bets being ten cent ones and many of them beginning at a penny. Occasionally a plunger would risk a quarter, but anything over



that was a fantastically large wager and extremely rare. As Don Peppino pointed out, the sums squandered on the lottery were hardly of a nature where the player had to deprive either himself or his family in order to indulge his passion for the lottery; and his first step toward acquiring giant stature as a philosopher was his assertion that though only a few people ever won, everybody had something to look forward to beside the certainty of a lifetime of work days inexorably succeeding each other.

Mrs. Fazzone, resigned to the fact that her husband was not to be swayed from his intentions, was relieved to find in her kitchen of a Friday evening—the day the lottery play was turned in—not *gangisti* or members of the Black Hand, but only simple folk and neighbors making a social affair out of playing their numbers. There were dreams and incidents to be interpreted into numbers, and these often involved hour long discussions. Instead of guns and knives, the most important equipment in the operation of the lottery was a book. This was the *Smorfia*, an Italian dream number dictionary. To the illiterate Mrs. Fazzone, a book was an awesome thing, and though she would never admit it to her husband, its presence in the house thrilled her.

On Friday evenings the people came into the flat, and Don Peppino, sitting ceremoniously at the head of the kitchen table, laboriously wrote down their selections on a triplicate pad and handed them the original slip. He retained one of the duplicates, and the other he handed in to the *Compagnia*. The players, having done, seldom left. The men lit their pipes and ferocious stogies and the women gossiped, and they all had something to say about every set of numbers handed in thereafter.

It was Tony's inordinate curiosity that first sucked him into lottery duties. Instead of going out to play after supper, he stayed around the kitchen listening and watching and having his nose stuck into almost everything. One Friday the Don was having a difficult time looking up the number for unrequited love for a client called La Zingarella, who was named that because she looked like a gypsy.

"Ah, *caro* Don Peppino," said La Zingarella impatiently, "let Antonio consult the book. There is still the love potion the poor Mellina gave Luigi, and how it caused the *stupido* to vomit; there is still the story of how

he fell in love with the daughter of the druggist. Ah, Gesu! There are so many important points in the affair and I can use only three! *Fortuna, fortuna!* Which three? Ah, it is not enough that I have a husband whose pants are never buttoned that I should concern myself with the love affairs—”

“Perhaps,” interrupted Don Peppino, “two sets of numbers—” He thumbed the volume impressively.

“Ah, two sets, indeed! Come, I have decided! Let Antonio find the numbers for unrequited love, the potion of love and despair. Ah, *si*. Despair, despair, despair! *Povera Mellina!*”

“*Un’ momento, signora,*” interrupted a man. “Are not despair and unrequited love almost of a one thing?”

Tony, eager to show how smart he was, had taken the book from his father and was expertly flipping the pages.

“Ah, *si*, perhaps,” said La Zingarella. “Is it wise then to combine the two?”

“*Femmine, femmine,*” muttered another man, sucking placidly on his pipe.

“*La gelosia,*” said a woman firmly. “Is not Mellina now jealous of the druggist’s daughter?”

Mrs. Fazzone’s eyes misted. “Ah, *peccato, peccato,*” she said. “*Povera Mellina!* Is one not to feel sympathy for her? I know nothing of these matters, but is it not an important point?”

“Pooh!” said La Zingarella. “She will catch another.”

The word “jealousy” was finally picked over “despair,” and Tony quickly found the numbers. Don Peppino, impressed with the speed and ease with which Tony had found the words, next gave him the task of totaling the plays. When Tony added them up right the very first time, his mother’s eyes lit up with pride and Don Peppino went into deep thought. The following Friday Tony was *ordered* to stay home and attend to the business of the lottery.

Tony, who had become rapidly bored with the whole business, now learned that what was fun when he didn’t *have* to do it, became a chore when he was ordered to do it. As usual, the resentment flared quickly in him.

“Why can’t Nicky do it?” he cried. “He’s in the sixth grade. I’m only in the fifth. He can write and add better than me.”

Don Peppino frowned. “Nicolo is ill,” he said.



"Ill?" sobbed Tony in frustration. As an infant Nicky had almost died of diphtheria, a fact which had especially endeared him to his parents. In addition to this, Nicky's being *primo nato* automatically excused him from all chores. Don Peppino, in giving Tony the short end of the many decisions with Nicky, always justified them with, "Nicolo is ill," or "You must respect Nicolo's age. He's your older brother."

Tony could never reconcile himself to this palpable injustice, and it had more than once caused him to run away from home, though these frequent excursions seldom extended past the supper hour. "Ill?" he repeated now. "How come he can stay out later than me? He plays baseball better than me, and he can beat me running—"

His mother, noting that her husband's frown had deepened, said quickly, "Come, Antonio, why must you always argue? In the end you always do it."

And so it went. Don Peppino, relieved now of the tedious details of the business, devoted his talents to the social end of it, for which he was better suited. Things went along smoothly and with phenomenal success, for the Capo Collettore, by his very interpretation of his duties, placing them, as it were, on a par with the duties of the most sacred and honored positions, inspired the people's confidence in the lottery, more than repaying *La Compagnia's* faith in him.

As the lottery grew, Don Peppino appointed several of his friends as subagents. When it became apparent that the Don's post was an important one, some of the jealous few went around saying that Don Peppino was a lucky man to have been picked as Capo Collettore. The Don admitted that in a sense this was true. But he was constantly forced to remind the jealous ones that he had been handed an empty crown; it was he who had made the kingdom.

And of course these jealous few criticized the lottery on another point, and to still the first whispers which drifted back to him, Don Peppino was forced to lay down his first official opinion. He stated publicly that he was not a maffiast or *malandrino* of other sorts, as were the bootleggers, for instance. He was a man of honor and integrity. His very position implied that. Was not the lottery legal in Italy and the Capo Collettore of a village socially a few steps above the mayor himself? Was it not

as well to make it illegal for Italians to cook spaghetti in America as it was to outlaw the lottery to them?

And of course these same jealous few said that Don Peppino had, after his appointment, started to put on airs. Especially after *La Compagnia* had a telephone installed in his home. The families on the Eastside who had a telephone could be counted on the fingers of one hand, and the people who turned green with envy at this luxury went about asking sarcastically if Don Peppino now considered himself a doctor that he must have a talking box in his home.

Actually, Don Peppino was a modest man, though not falsely so. True, he discarded the informal *tu* in favor of the formal *lei*, and there did suddenly appear other affectations in his speech, but this was only the sign of a man rising to his position, and not proof that he was putting on airs. Nor was it fair to malign him when he subtly let it be known immediately after his ascension that he was henceforth to be addressed as *Don Peppino Fazzone*. Surely this assumption of title was no more than his right, for he was not a man to trudge wearily in search of gold, and after having found it, not mine it. To be head of anything was to be something, and it was well for the newly created Don that the majority of Italians understood this thoroughly. Most of them had lived a life of complete servility, and if any people knew the meaning of the word *capo*, they were that people. They knew, for instance, that to be a head man was to be one who delegated instead of one who did. Thus, while a sweeper was a laborer who swept, the Head Sweeper was an official who pointed out what was to be swept. This latter point, incidentally, was one of many clarified immediately by the Don after his appointment.

Don Peppino's prestige grew and grew until almost everyone swore that he had been born a don in the old country. The Capo Collettore, far from discouraging this claim, began to suspect its plausibility, and thinking perhaps that a cruel fate had somehow deprived him of his birthright, retained a genealogist in Italy to trace his family tree. The genealogist obliged him by returning to him a colorful coat of arms and a tracing which proved beyond a doubt that he was descended from a long line of ruling barons. The report contained, also, strong hints that there may have been a prince or duke down the



line somewhere. How he had been deprived of his title they did not know, nor did they make pretense of knowing. Mrs. Fazzone's scoffing at the report and her insinuations that he had been victimized by unscrupulous racketeers, he catalogued as a fear on her part that he would leave her in view of the difference in their births. At any rate he had the colorful chart placed in a gilded frame, and accorded it a position of prominence on the wall above the telephone stand in his bedroom.

With Don Peppino's administration of the lottery he became an authority on almost every subject in the cosmos. It was no longer necessary for him to await respectfully his turn to speak. His opinions were not only sought after, but often quoted, especially the one in which he stated that veterinarians, since their patients could not help them diagnose by telling their symptoms, were brainier than physicians. He became, at a stroke, an astronomer who could tell you the secrets of the universe, a vintner of no mean ability, a connoisseur of wine with whom one did not argue, an expert on politics, and a gourmet who was constantly invited into homes to test the quality of the cuisine and subsequently to pass judgment on the advisability of marrying the cook. Since he played the guitar, the fact that he was a master of music went without saying, and when he publicly announced that a musician had no "ear"—a fault with which he endowed almost everyone but himself—that musician was rarely hired for a christening or wedding.

It was not in Don Peppino's nature to be reticent on any subject or occasion, and there were some people—the jealous few again—who said he spoke of things he could know nothing about. Now the Don's constituency was large, and most of these insidious charges reached his sensitive ears. But if they disturbed him, he gave no sign of it. He went his way drinking heartily the wine of adulation from a seemingly inexhaustible cask. Inevitably he came to believe implicitly in his omniscience. Of course, many of his opinions held sway because of a lack of opposition, but one day he dared to give a drastic opinion on a subject in which he might well have been opposed.

He had come upon a group enjoying a recording of Caruso's "Recitar!" from *Pagliacci*. They stood gathered on the sidewalk before Mr. Pielo's store as Caruso's

voice came out of the loud-speaker. In rapt attention they stood, enthralled as always as their idol's voice played upon their emotions and brought tears to their eyes.

Don Peppino paused to listen. At once it became obvious that while the one great man sang, the other wore, instead of an enthralled expression, one of serious, if not pained, meditation.

"Ah, *magnifico!*" breathed one of the listeners when the record ended.

"Ah, *si, si,*" sighed another reverently. "There is only one Caruso."

"What sweetness. *Che forza! Che melodia.* Ah, Caruso, Caruso!"

Don Peppino waited patiently until all had had their say. Then he screwed up his face and sternly raised his hand. Since the gesture could only presage a weighty announcement, the group turned their attention to him.

"What manner of men are you?" said the Don. "Thus did the sheep in the old country respond to the cacklings of the shepherds."

His listeners gasped into silence. Here was *lèse majesté* of the most flagrant sort. Others in history had perhaps dared to criticize kings, but Don Peppino attacked deity. The shepherds mentioned in the same breath with the incomparable Caruso? Then and there Don Peppino's hard won reputation wavered and, like the human fly whose fingers grip precariously for a firm hold on the next ledge, teetered dangerously between sky and earth.

But Don Peppino's words found irrefutability in their very boldness. Would the Capo Collettore dare make such criticism if he did not know what he was talking about? Who would be the first to parade his ignorance by questioning such a superior person? And who would be the first to risk subjecting himself to a withering glance from Don Peppino, to say nothing of a possible oral lashing? Horrified though the group of men appeared to be, standing on the threshold of disillusion as they might well have been, Don Peppino's words, and the firmness with which they had been spoken, prevailed. Such a one's opinions were not to be questioned, least of all by those who had no education and lacked, moreover, a facile articulation. It may have occurred to some to ask Don Peppino to explain his words, but perhaps fearing that he would only stun them all into severe headaches by the



very depth and incomprehensibility of his answer, they remained silent.

And of such circumstances are dictators born. From that day forward, Don Peppino's opinions were accepted *senza questione*. After the Caruso triumph, of course, each one that followed had to be anticlimactic. Thus, one day, when Don Peppino, in a scathing denunciation, announced that America had been stolen from the Italians, for whom Cristoforo Colombo had found it, it might well have been said that his friends were disappointed, for that was common knowledge. But when he went on to add that Mussolini should move forthwith to annex America and settle for all time the centuries-old dispute, great shouts filled the air.

"Bravo, Don Peppino!"

"Ascolta Don Peppino!"

"Mussolini would do well to also listen to the words of Don Peppino!"

"Pe' la maddonna, what wisdom!"

Don Peppino stood in the center of this cascade of hosannas with head bent modestly and nostrils quivering with pride. He had arrived. The pig, to hurl back at him a saying with which he continually ridiculed Tony, had indeed broken into the apple orchard.

### 3

In addition to all the troubles of his friends and lottery constituents which Don Peppino's interpretation of his duties forced upon his broad shoulders, he had his own. The Capo Collettore adhered strongly to the old school of thought and could never reconcile himself to the barbarous customs of America.

Though the elder Fazzones seldom left the confines of the Eastside, Nicky and Tony roamed all over the city. One of Tony's many duties was gathering wooden crates from the department store receiving platforms, smashing them into kindling wood, and then taking it up to his rear porch, where he stacked it neatly. After school and during summers he shined shoes on Main Street and in the streets around the town hall and the post office,

which was located a block south of the police station. At times he scoured the Asylum Street alleys for loot which he could sell to the junk man, and in his leisure time he would go through the stores getting free rides on the elevators and staring, with the anguish of yearning, at the many toys.

Mrs. Fazzone, unlike her husband, had an insatiable interest in everything that went on outside her Eastside world. The only way she could learn of America was through her children, and she questioned them and listened with wonder at the descriptions of men assisting women into trolleys, how letters were mailed and delivered, and once, when Tony's school class had been taken to visit the museum, she made Tony give her an exhaustive account of everything he had seen and learned. When Tony told her it was all free and she could herself go anytime to see with her own eyes, she clasped her hands in joy, though she was never to go because she did not think she could dress herself properly for the occasion.

Of course there were many things that confused her—Nicky demanding custard pie, to which he'd been treated by one of his friends in an Asylum Street cafeteria. Did the Front Street bakeries carry it? The uptown bakeries? Ah, but it is expensive and we cannot afford it. Can it not be made at home? It could not, for Nicky did not know what went in it, and his description of it meant nothing to Mrs. Fazzone.

And there was the time when Tony, with two pennies clutched fiercely in his fist, had boarded the trolley car for Camp Courant, a trip sponsored daily in the summer by the newspaper. The pennies, a friend who'd been there had told him, were to help pay for his lunch. When Tony saw the lunch he wouldn't give up the pennies, and a minor tug of war had taken place between him and the camp attendant. The attendant won and Tony was given a dish of milk in which were what appeared to be tiny brown eggs.

There now reposed on the Fazzone kitchen shelf, a box of puffed rice, which Tony, heedless of the consequences, had dared to buy on one of his trips to the store. His mother, in the interest of learning, had eaten a few and weakly declared that they were good. Don Peppino, upon venturing to taste some—without milk—



said that like most American food, they tasted like cardboard.

And then Nicky, in another trip to the lunchroom, had tasted catsup. He liked it so much that one of his friends stole the bottle for him. Tony and Nicky only used it on sandwiches and fried potatoes, for Don Peppino, being told that it was a tomato sauce, took one sniff of the bottle and banished it from the table.

"It is what the *Americani* use on their spaghetti," he stated scornfully.

But what aggravated the Capo Collettore most was that all the rebellions against him took place at the dinner table, for the Fazzones, having different interests, were seldom all together at any other time. The Don, having seen how the subtle Americanization of his children had breached his rule of silence at the dinner table, was determined that another important one was not to be dented.

This was the rule that no one could rise from the table until the head of the family had finished eating. This imposed a tremendous hardship on Tony, Nicky, and Fran. The Fazzones, like most Italian families, never had dessert. Sweets were holiday treats, and even then were consumed only between meals. But after the main dish there were always olives, cheese, celery, and if things were going good, an occasional dish of fruit. Don Peppino lingered fondly over these items, often for as long as an hour, eating with an agonizing slowness, and Nicky and Tony, fretting to get outdoors, Fran to get her dishwashing over, had to sit at table until he was done.

Nicky, who seldom argued and as often as not ate right along with his father, rarely challenged the rule. But Tony wasn't built that way. Tony, as his mother often said, would argue with St. Peter at the gates of Paradise even if they were being opened for him.

"What's the use of us sitting here, Pop?" he would say.

"Again?" said the Don, who never ceased to be amazed at his second son's effrontery. "Have the youth of today no respect for their elders?"

"Whaddya mean, no respect? Don't we have to kiss your hand before we sit down to eat? I kiss it, don't I? I never say nothing."

The Capo Collettore frowned. "Antonio, you are a boil

on the tip of my nose. Does your brother argue?" He turned to Nicky. "Come, Nicolo, have a glass of wine with you poor father and here is a piece of this delicious peach to dunk in it."

"Oh, sure," retorted Tony. "Nicky never says nothin'. Nicky can stay out as late as he wants to and you can stay out as late as you want to. But me, I have to be in at nine o'clock, and you make me waste an hour sittin' here for nothin'."

"Si, Peppino," said his mother. "Of what use are they to you at table? Let them go."

"*Porco diavolo!*" exclaimed the Don to his wife. "Were you brought up among the goats that you do not observe the customs?"

"You and the customs of Italy! In America it is different! Is it not said that the son of Carmello, who married an *Americana*, brings her the coffee in bed? In America the men wait on the wives and the fathers go out with the sons to fish in the boats and some even play the *basaballa* with them."

"*Per certamente!* Can one expect figs from an apple tree? This is a land of peasants and savages who eat boiled meat and make soda and jelly from their grapes, which every one knows *Il Don Dio* intended for wine.

"Ah, *Italia, Italia, Italia*," cried Mrs. Fazzone scornfully. "It is true, as my brother Theo says, that Italians know how to do all things, but they have nothing to do them with. Did not my mouth, as a young girl, water at the sight of the beautiful orange and fig trees in our fields which I could not eat because every single one was needed to pay the rent of the land? It is said in the magazines which Francesca reads to me that we Italians are lucky because we know how to make the delicious sauce that covers our spaghetti, *bracciole*, *polpetti*, and *sazizza*. And when did we this in Italy? At Christmas, if we were lucky! The rest of the year our spaghetti was eaten with greens and an occasional sauce from an over ripe tomato which had fallen from the vine. Go back to Italy! As for myself, I am grateful to America where one gets a piece of meat now and then for one's children."

Don Peppino raised his eyes heavenward. "Must I hear all this while consuming my dinner?"

"At what other time are you home?"



"It is the duty of the man of the house to go forth from it to gather that which his family requires."

"Much would I prefer to be wife to Alfonso, for though he is never home, it is at least known where he is."

"*Un' cafone!*" said the Don scornfully.

Tony grinned. Alfonso was their upstairs neighbor, and everyone knew that he preferred spending his evenings in his cellar with his wine barrels instead of at home with his family.

"And *povera* Florenza Nasodolce! Each day I have to listen to her complaints that you keep her husband out late. And what should I do, say I to Florenza? Tie mine to the bed to keep yours home?"

Martello Nasodolce was a dapper little man with a pencil line mustache and a courtly air and flowery manner of speech. He was a shoemaker by day and a trombone player by night, and since he invariably tromboned to the Don's guitaring, the two were almost inseparable. Mrs. Fazzone's only grievance against him was that he followed her husband about like an adoring little puppy, agreeing always with what he had to say, and had once delivered a unique eulogy in which he had compared the Don to the Fontana Fredda in Rome.

"*Tanta storia!*" exclaimed the Don angrily. "Enough! I am done! It is not good to eat when one is disturbed. *Vatinni, vatinni!*" he shooed his children away.

The next instant they were scrambling down the stairs, and their voices yelling eagerly for their friends soon came floating up to the little flat.

But if Don Peppino had his crosses to bear, Mrs. Fazzone was not without hers, for the multitude of children in the neighborhood inevitably embroiled her own in trouble, and every scream in the back yards brought her running fearfully to her rear porch railing.

The Fazzones occupied a three-room flat in a large tenement block built in the shape of a squared letter *U*. The part of the building forming the base of the letter contained the three-room flats with the bedroom windows facing Front Street. To the right and left of these were the front bedrooms of the four-room box-car flats, which, from there, extended back past the rear porches of the three-room flats to form the sides of the letter *U*. The Fazzone kitchen, running the width of the two bedrooms,

led out onto the porch. From there a stair well led down to a roof terrace which covered the stores on the street level. From this roof the brick walls of the four-room flats rose on either side to form a man-made canyon. In this canyon there was action all around the clock.

If one of Tony's many neighborhood friends was not blaring away on the variety of instruments being mastered inside the canyon walls, player pianos pounded out their monotonous and discordant tunes; if the brawny Corsini brothers, Joe and Frankie, who were truck drivers by day and disciplinarians to a large and lusty brood of brothers and sisters by night, were not thrashing some virtuous lesson into the beautiful Gina, the fourteen-year-old one, a husband was bound to be administering a well-merited beating to his wife. And more often than not all the noises blended together in a deafening cacophony of life.

And there was always Minnie Fouche. She was Tony's favorite neighbor. She lived in one of the four-room flats next to the roof, which made peeking into her window easy. His father and mother always shut up suddenly when they were talking about Minnie and he came within ear-shot. But he knew any way. He guessed everybody but Mr. Fouche knew about Minnie, and it was a big joke among his friends and himself how Minnie couldn't control herself when she had visitors.

And Minnie had a lot of them while Mr. Fouche was working. When Tony and his friends knew one was in the flat they would steal up to her window and, pretending to be playing quietly on the roof, be ready to run when the time came.

The time always came. From the other side of the drawn window shade would come piercing squeals of delight. Then the visitor's voice, whispering angrily, "For Christsakes, Minnie, shut up! You want everybody to hear? Put a goddam pillow over your mouth."

The boys would scramble quickly out of there before their uncontrollable laughter gave them away. In a safer place there would be more laughter and fun as they imitated the shrieks of delight and the urgent whispers.

Donato and Filomena Rucci lived in the flat directly above Minnie's. Filomena painted her face and there was some talk that Donato couldn't be sure that the children were his. Everybody, including Tony, despised them be-



cause Donato called the policeman at every trivial thing and it was well known that he curried O'Rourke's favor by taking him home to drink wine. Lots of people said that O'Rourke went there even when Donato wasn't home, though they couldn't be sure because cops were always in and out of the tenements and it was hard to tell which flat he was going into. For that reason Mrs. Fazzone told Tony never to play with the Rucci children.

"If you have a fight with one of them," his mother said, "Donato will call Rooka and have us all arrested. Is it not enough that your father is always mixed up in Donato's arguments with the neighbors? One of these Fridays Donato will send the police to our house and make your father pay in one lump sum for all the times he has rendered against him."

"I can't help it, Ma. They're always hangin' around. You get in trouble if you play with them and you get in trouble if you don't."

"Pattern yourself after Orlando," his mother admonished him severely. "See you not what a good boy he is? He has *finished* school."

Tony, and even Nicky, detested Orlando. The Perruccis occupied the other flat next to the roof, across the canyon from the Fouches. Mr. Perrucci was a quiet, dignified man and a tailor by trade. Mrs. Fazzone and Mrs. Perrucci were close friends. Mrs. Fazzone was always sending Tony over with something she had cooked, and if this continuing chore were not irritating enough, Tony always had to wait while Mrs. Perrucci fixed something to send back in return. Orlando had graduated Brown Grammar School, a feat not accomplished by too many Eastside children, and had a job as shipping clerk in one of the department stores. Orlando, his mother was continually telling him, went to work with a *cravatta*. In addition to these awesome virtues, Orlando was an accomplished violinist and made spare money playing with an orchestra. When Orlando was practicing on his violin, all the inhabitants of the canyon quieted down out of deference to him, though Don Peppino did say that Orlando occasionally struck a false bow.

However, if Mrs. Fazzone was always exhorting Tony to follow the shining examples set by Orlando, he could not very well play with him, for Orlando was practically a grown-up young man. Since all the children used the

roof in the canyon as a playground, it was difficult for Tony to steer clear of the Rucci brood.

One Saturday afternoon the kids were playing cops and robbers. Tony was the judge, and as the robbers were arrested and hauled up before him, he fined them various sums. The equivalent of money was broken pieces of glass and soda bottle tops. Along about midafternoon the court had acquired a sizable amount, which it kept in a paper bag.

It was at this time that Angelo Rucci insisted on playing. The court, mindful of the maternal injunction, ruled that he could not. An argument followed and the court settled it by whacking its principal offender on the head with the bag of money. In no time Angelo's screams brought people to every window and porch in the surrounding area. Among them, noted Tony apprehensively, was Mrs. Fazzone, leaning over the porch railing and calling down to him frantically.

"It's all right, Ma," Tony shouted up to her. "Go back in the house. I didn't get hurt."

"But what happened?" she wanted to know.

Tony shrugged his shoulders innocently.

But everyone soon knew, for Angelo had put his fingers on his scalp and they'd come away red with blood. Immediately all the mothers in the windows began screaming at their children, whom they naturally thought were involved.

"Giovanno!" shouted Mrs. Santangelo, who lived in the flat above the Perruccis. "*A casa, subito!*"

"Tomaso! Remove yourself at once!"

"Guido! Guido! May you and who gave you birth bust open with poison! Trouble, trouble, is all you give me! in the house! At once!"

All the Ruccis filled their windows, and Angelo sobbed up his story to his father.

"*Animale!*" Donato screeched down at Tony. "*Bestia!*"

Tony trembled. His mother would know now. And Mrs. Fazzone did know, for she was flying down the steps and out to the roof. Filomena had also reached the roof, along with many of the other women, and now a throng had gathered. Donato was no longer in the window.

Most of the families in the canyon despised the Ruccis, for at one time or another Donato had summoned the law against them all. Now the cries flew at Filomena.



"Zingara!"

"Trouble-maker! Lover of Irish bums!"

"Where is the father of the hurt one?"

"Tell me first who the father is!"

"Mind your own business!" Filomena screamed at them.

"I have affairs only with the mother of this little animal!"

"Puttana!"

"Oh, *il ponte, il pontel*! Into the river I shall throw myself and let *Gesu*, Who can bear them better, have all my woes."

Mrs. Fazzone, ignoring the clamor, was trying to get Tony's side of the story. Most of the women had crowded around Filomena and were shrieking threats and obscenities at her. Filomena turned her back on them, lifted her skirts, and flipped a bloomed rear end at them. That did it. Mrs. Santangelo, who was in the direct path of the insulting gesture, grabbed her by the hair and they were soon clawing at each other with the rest of the women cheering Mrs. Santangelo on.

Now the cries went up in the back yards. "Look out the window! Look out the window! Over there! On the roof!"

Porch railings and windows filled suddenly with people straining for a sight of the fight. The roof was out of the line of vision of many porches and windows, and since no one wanted to miss the excitement, the stairs leading from the yard up to the roof were soon resounding with hurrying footsteps. Before long the roof was jammed with people, and though Mrs. Santangelo and Filomena were almost completely out of sight now, their curses and screams gave proof that they were still at it.

"Awright, awright! Break it up! Break it up!"

It was the detestable O'Rourke, shouting to make himself heard above the clamor. Brandishing his night stick, he elbowed and shoved his way to the fighting women. Accompanying him was Donato Rucci, wildly screaming out the story of how Tony had tried to murder his son.

It took O'Rourke about ten minutes to pull the women apart, and more threats and swings of his stick to restore a semblance of order among the spectators.

Mrs. Fazzone wrung her hands and wept. "But, Donato," she pleaded, "Angelo is not hurt. The bleeding has stopped and see how he stands there grinning now. Must you cause us all this trouble?"

"Phwat's yer name, kid?" O'Rourke glowered down at Tony.

Tony's face puckered, but he manfully suppressed his tears. O'Rourke grabbed him roughly by the arm.

"Let him go, *figlio d'puttana!*"

"Taker of bribes! Let the boy alone!"

"The oil that made you should have wet the air instead of poisoning your mother's womb!"

"Git goin', all o' yez!" O'Rourke swung his stick menacingly at the shouting mob. "Oi've a maind to run yez all in!"

"Hey, O'Rourke, you yellow bastard!"

All the heads on the roof turned upward to a third floor flat. There, the windows were filled with Corsinis of every age and sex. In one of them, Joe Corsini, with a towel swung around his tanned shoulders and his still wet and uncombed hair showing he had been interrupted in his toilet, stared down belligerently at the policeman.

"You still pinchin' kids, you yellow louse?"

O'Rourke waved the stick up at him. "I kin easy run yez in, too."

Corsini vanished abruptly from the window. The crowd, sensing that the fight would soon be between O'Rourke and Joe Corsini, suddenly shut up. For the Corsinis to get to the roof, they had first to descend to the yard and then up the one flight of stairs leading to it. Since there were times when it was imperative that one of them get there more quickly, they had a rope which they threw out the window and on which they then slid down to the roof.

A second after Corsini disappeared, the rope came flying out the window, and in another second he was sliding down on it to the cheers of his younger brothers and sisters.

He hit the roof and hurried toward O'Rourke, a young, tanned giant, built as sturdily as the Mack trucks he drove. O'Rourke knew that the threat coming toward him was no bluff, for Joe Corsini and his brother Frankie were famous cop-fighters, as their police records would prove.

Corsini bounced a palm off O'Rourke's chest, and the cop went staggering back. When he straightened up he had an uneasy look in his eyes.

"Yer lookin' fer trouble?" he said.



"Never without it," snapped Corsini. "But a bum like you ain't no trouble."

Tony pressed hard against his mother's side, buried his face against her apron. The crowd had forced itself back, leaving O'Rourke and Corsini facing each other. O'Rourke crouched and raised his stick threateningly. Corsini started toward him. The clash between them seemed inevitable.

"Run and find your brother Frankie!" screamed Mama Corsini to one of the children.

"Joe don't need him, Ma, and I'll miss all the fun!"

"Kill him, Joe!"

"Use your muscles on *him*, you big bully!" screamed Gina Corsini bitterly.

"Yer interferin' with an officer in the parfarmance o' his dooty," said O'Rourke.

"Guilty!" snapped Corsini. "So come and pinch me. I'll take that club and gun away from you and stick 'em up in your rear end. Or is it just kids you wanta pinch?"

"Areesta the keeda!" screamed Rucci.

Suddenly a threshing sound came from the direction of Rucci's voice, and Donato quieted down. O'Rourke turned to stare uneasily at the spot.

"Oi wuzn't goin' to pinch the kid," he said defiantly. "Oi wuz jest after teachin' him a lisson."

"Watch out you don't get a lesson on the Fourth of July."

Tony jerked his face out of his mother's apron and ventured a look at O'Rourke as a thrill shot suddenly through him. The cop was really scared now. And he'd better be scared, thought Tony. The Fourth of July treatment! That meant that when O'Rourke came to the corner box to check in, the big guys would be waiting on the four rooftops. They'd toss down five-inch salutes at O'Rourke. Tony had seen it done before to another bad cop. O'Rourke would have to run out to the center of the intersection and dance and skip as the salutes came at him, and he'd be lucky if one didn't blow up in his face.

Now O'Rourke took a sullen look about him and, muttering some face-saving threat at Corsini, strode to the edge of the roof and disappeared.

The crowd melted away then, and Filomena's voice, plainly audible as she and Donato made their way back to their flat, could be heard berating and deriding him

for being only half a man who always needed the police to fight his battles. It was wonderful then, the way Joe Corsini put his arm around Mrs. Fazzone's shoulders and steered her gently toward the stairs, telling her not to worry, because cops couldn't really arrest kids Tony's age unless they did something real, real bad. Tony, his eyes aglow with hero worship, could have died for him.

Mrs. Fazzone always used to deplore the way Joe and Frankie Corsini beat up the beautiful Gina, for, as she said, it was not the girl's fault that she was born beautiful and that the young swains were forever hanging around her. But thereafter, whenever Gina's yowls of pain filled the canyon, Mrs. Fazzone would say, "Isn't it wonderful how the brothers worry over the sister? Ah, *si*, she will grow up to be a fine girl."

As for Tony, he would look at the Perruci flat and say, "Orlando, my eye! I want to be like Joe Corsini when I grow up."

#### 4

As Don Peppino was wont to say, the measure of any man's success is the amount of criticism he draws and the number of enemies he makes. Now, with the denouncements of butcher Pepe Pupolo and Mrs. Pupolo ringing in his aristocratic ears, the Capo Collettore found himself again in the vortex of a whirlwind of libels, a vortex, which, to speak the truth, was becoming increasingly familiar to him. Because the charges, if true, pictured the Don as being inconsistent with his declared high standards of office, he would have been false to his trust if he did not try to battle himself back to the calm air of vindication.

Tony, with that healthy curiosity of his, possessed the unique advantage of hearing both sides of any affair in which the Don starred, for his mother, in castigating his father in the privacy of their home, laid one side of it open for him, and in defending him loyally in her accounts to the neighbors, exposed the other.

Now, not only was his father an authority on any given



subject, but the Capo Collettore also held title to an impeccable record of matchmaking, to which his numerous godfatherships attested. Since the Pupolos threatened to destroy that record, along with its creator, Tony was inclined to agree with his mother when she told Mrs. Perucci that her husband had no alternative but to lay the facts bare, and, in fact, should be commended for his moral courage in doing so.

It was true, as the Pupolos claimed, that Don Peppino had been instrumental in bringing about the marriage of their daughter, Carmellita, to the little *Professore di Numeri*; but it was not fair that Don Peppino should be rapped for this when, after two months of marriage, the Professor suddenly deserted both his farm and bride and was believed to be on the high seas heading back to his native village in Italy. The facts will reveal that Don Peppino, through no fault of his own, had been under some pressure from the butcher to persuade the Professor of Numbers into marriage; and they will further reveal that, in order to accomplish this, he had been forced, against the wishes of his heart, to outwit the wily professor.

As the Capo Collettore was well aware, the treacherous currents of the nearby river were nothing compared to the eddyings of fate, for he had been tossed about in them too many times. Tony's mother, who too often sustained the brunt of the Don's involvements, would have bitterly pointed out that the river's currents were powerless against those who did not first leap into them. But certainly Don Peppino, who, on that summer Tuesday evening was doing nothing but standing on a corner with a group of cronies, could not have been accused of leaping into the currents. As a matter of fact, he was *pulled* into them, for a frown of resistance came over his face when he felt the tug at his elbow. When he turned, however, the frown disappeared and a solicitous look of inquiry took its place. For as head of the lottery, the Don looked upon himself as shepherd to the flock of players, and here, obviously, was one of his lambs in trouble.

This particular lamb was a wizened, sun-darkened, wind-leathered, wiry little man of indeterminate age with a tiny nut of a face. He looked like a lentil. It was the self-styled *Professore di Numeri*. Don Peppino did not

know him by any other name, though there were people who said that the Don respected the fellow's right to title only because he was a valuable client in the lottery.

This was not true. Don Peppino, who himself had been forced to produce proof of his nobility, had learned to be tolerant of the claims of others.

And the little man's professorial franchise did appear to be a valid one, for he swore that he could, through the most intricate and mysterious mathematical processes, divine winning combinations of numbers. And that wasn't all. He claimed to be the greatest interpreting authority on the selections of the salient points of a dream, a field which the Don, because of his position, could not very well enter. As a matter of fact, the little Professor's opinions were widely quoted, especially the history making one in which he proved that a certain type of laughter, instead of being a reaction, was an opinion. And all his claims were further corroborated by his assertions that in the old country, when he came to town, the young maidens in the village would strew flowers in his path and beseech him to favor them with his selections. Don Peppino had a genuine affection for the little man, and not just because, as unkind gossip had it, the Professor was what would be the equivalent of a horse tout.

"*Professore!*" exclaimed the Don warmly. "What brings you to town on a Tuesday?"

The question was a natural one, for the Professor was known to own a farm somewhere outside of town and only came in on Friday evenings.

"Don Peppino, I must speak to you on a matter of the utmost importance." The Professor's voice, in contrast to his appearance, was cultured, and the words flowed past his dry lips as mellifluously as the lentils he resembled being poured out of a bag.

The Don, perceiving that the Professor's manner presaged a serious matter, at once drew off to one side with him.

The Professor came immediately to the point. "I seek Don Peppino's aid in a matter that is dear to my heart."

"Speak," commanded the Don.

"For some time now, Don Peppino, I have been enamored of Carmellita Pupolo, the daughter of the butcher. Needless to say, she has now honored me by consenting to be my wife."



Were the Don a less polished man, he would not have succeeded in concealing his shock at the Professor's choice, for the matrimonial waters had long flowed by the butcher's daughter. To give her the rosy end of the decision, the girl was on the plump side, owned to being thirty-two years old and looked forty; her face, even in the bloom of youth, had never been known to draw customers to her father's store, and it was bruited about that she had to shave her upper lip. Moreover, being an only child, she was spoiled to the point where she was used to having her every wish indulged, and most disconcerting of all, was reputed not to know even how to boil spaghetti, to say nothing of concocting a savory sauce. Don Peppino would have been less than human, however, if his thoughts did not manifest themselves in a ruminative pursing of his lips.

The Professor bristled visibly. "Don Peppino disproves?"

"*Per l'amore di Dio*, no," quickly recovered the Don. "It is only that you should have consulted me on the matter first."

"Don Peppino must explain his words."

Now Don Peppino had learned through the bitterest of experiences that it was easier to dry up the Mediterranean Sea than to change a lover's mind. Therefore, his next words must stand forever as a refutation of certain charges that he possessed no tact.

"It is fortunate, Professor, that your intended is a girl above reproach and one of whom I heartily approve as a wife. But supposing it were not so?"

"As usual, Don Peppino is correct. I must be forgiven my hasty words."

"Very well, then," said the Don magnanimously. "How can I serve you?"

"It has been arranged between me and my intended that tomorrow night we will wed."

"Is this wise, Professor?"

"Don Peppino confuses me again."

"But it is so quickly."

"I am to meet her at nine o'clock and carry her away."

"Ah! An elopement!" exclaimed the Capo Collettore, his adventurous blood tingling with anticipation. "But the butcher, then, he knows nothing?"

"It is advisable that he not be told, Don Peppino."

Don Peppino considered a minute. True, the butcher was a friend of his and probably, as any father, would be angry at being denied the opportunity of getting drunk at his daughter's wedding. Yet, to find a husband for his daughter, the butcher would have to go to the New York docks and fasten his meat hook on an incoming, unsuspecting *paesano* and whisk him off before he had a chance to take a square count. Therefore, the Don was to be excused if he saw not only an opportunity to serve the Professor but to put the butcher in his debt to boot.

"Very well, Professor," he said. "What do you wish of me?"

"Don Peppino has many friends."

The Don confirmed this with a modest, deprecatory shrug.

"Among them, perhaps, is one who possesses an automobile?"

"There is."

"Then, if Don Peppino and his friend will come to yonder corner tomorrow night at nine o'clock, I will meet them with my intended. We will then drive out to my farm, where a priest will be waiting to marry us."

"It shall be done."

"I was not wrong in my judgment. Don Peppino is generous. I shall be eternally in his debt."

The Capo Collettore disparaged this, but not too strongly, for he knew well the value of a little indebtedness here and there that he could draw on if needed. Then he parted with the little Professor and returned to the group of men, who were patiently awaiting his views on a current matter of weight.

The next morning Don Peppino, wasting no time, went to inform Teddie the Barber, who was the proud possessor of a secondhand Packard limousine, that his services would be required that night, and to ready himself as well as the car. Before he left the shop he told Teddie that it would be well if he closed for a few hours and polished the limousine, for, since it was to be used in an elopement, it would be unseemly to have it dirty.

Now one may wonder that Don Peppino ordered this instead of asking, and perhaps wonder if he were not a silent partner in the ownership of the car. He was not. Teddie, though Americanized and a few years younger than the Don, idolized him, and Don Peppino needed but



to speak for him to leap. This was not so one-sided a friendship as it appeared, for Teddie had long learned that to be associated with the Capo Colletore was to accompany him to the many parties which required the Don's guitar, and the young man generally had a good time for himself.

At supper that Wednesday evening, Don Peppino was seen to appear more than his usually jovial self, and even permitted a rebellious remark or two by Tony to pass unnoticed. When he left the house later he had his guitar tucked under one arm and a gallon of wine in either hand. The family took no exception to this, for its head leaving in so encumbered a manner was no unusual thing.

The barber shop had long been closed for the day when Don Peppino arrived there. But Teddie, wearing a suit with sharply creased, bell-bottomed trousers, and his hair sleekly flattened in a pompadour, was inside awaiting him. Since there was some time yet before they must meet the Professor, Don Peppino opened a gallon of wine, and he and Teddie started taking on wedding atmosphere. In no time at all the young man was singing the popular ballads of the day while Don Peppino, frowning sternly at Teddie's taste in music, nevertheless strummed out the necessary chords of accompaniment.

Nine o'clock found the conspirators at the appointed corner not far from an alley which connected Front Street with Charles, a block to the east. The limousine sparkled in the dark, and in it, Don Peppino, sparkling also, rose in spirit in direct ratio with the descent of the wine level in the jug. He drank alone, for Teddie, since he was to drive, was under severe injunction from the Don, who frowned severely on lawbreaking, to drink no more.

Don Peppino smacked his lips, slapped Teddie heartily on the back, and savored to the full, the spice of adventure. Ah, Cellini! Ah, Casanova! In his mind the Don metamorphosed Teddie's limousine into a prancing steed, and the dark gray tenements surrounding them became ivy-colored ramparts down which he climbed with a kicking princess on his shoulders.

"Where the hell's this guy and his broad?" said Teddie, intruding harshly on his thoughts.

Don Peppino frowned and was about to discipline Teddie for his uncouth sentiments when, out of the dark, merging from shadow to substance, came a man who ap-

peared to be the Professor. Don Peppino concentrated on the approaching figure. He seemed to be struggling under a large bundle slung across his shoulders.

"Professor!" gasped the Don as the man reached the car.

"Don Peppino displays an unsuspected indiscretion," whispered the Professor, not without some asperity. The girl was wrapped in a blanket and tied about the ankles and chest, but this did not prevent her from squirming and wriggling, and the little man, though he was displaying an unusual strength, had to struggle to hold onto her. "The door, please," he panted angrily.

Don Peppino bestirred himself. Circumstances were not what he had pictured they would be, but at the same time he couldn't let the Professor remain on the sidewalk struggling with his burden. Explanations could be demanded later. But at the moment, passersby might misconstrue matters. He reached over, opened the rear door, and the Professor staggered into the car and deposited his burden on the rear seat, where it continued to kick and flop around like a fish fresh out of water.

"Why are we not moving?" demanded the Professor.

"Professor," said the Capo Collettore, losing almost in one shuddering moment, the effect which he had so prodigiously been acquiring with the wine, "I demand an explanation."

"It will be given you, Don Peppino. But let us be on the way before we are interrupted."

Don Peppino, concerned only for the moment with getting away from the spot, gave Teddie the order and the limousine moved along the streets. The Don didn't relax until the car was humming along smoothly on the blessedly deserted highway. Then he turned and faced the rear seat.

"Professor, the time has come for explanations."

"Because a liquid is red, Don Peppino immediately assumes that it is wine. All is not as it appears. I am but following out the wishes of my intended."

Don Peppino, studying the wriggling bundle on the seat, trembled anew. "Wishes?" he said.

"Don Peppino," said the Professor softly, with the tone of a man patiently explaining something to a child, "we are men of the world. *Pe certamente*, some things appear silly to us. But my intended has a highly romantic soul. It was her wish that she be abducted and carried off in



this manner. Perhaps she dreams too vividly or has been to the theater too often, but she is a bride, and everyone knows that the wishes of brides must be indulged. These little things are dear to them, Don Peppino, and the memory of them helps to soften the harshness of the later years."

"Do you tell me, Professor, that this girl is merely pretending to struggle and that actually she wishes to be carried off in this manner?"

"To think otherwise would be insulting to me, Don Peppino."

Now the Don considered the Professor's words, and the more he thought about them the more he began to see their reasonableness and, once convinced of that, the thrilling excitement of it all. And then, having been reassured, he felt constrained to apologize. He did so and the Professor graciously accepted it.

"These goddam broads are all cracked," said Teddie, removing whatever doubts the Capo Collettore may still have entertained.

And now, having been frightened into sobriety, an exceedingly inappropriate state under the circumstances, Don Peppino returned to the jug to repair matters. Now and then he would turn to stare mischievously at the bundle on the seat, slap his thigh in appreciation of the lark, laugh heartily, and enthusiastically tilt the wine jug.

In the meantime the limousine, under the direction of the Professor and the guidance of Teddie, had turned off the main highway and was slowly rocking along a rutted country road. Suddenly the Professor gave the order to halt, and Don Peppino, straining his eyes, saw in the distance the shadow of what appeared to be a deserted farmhouse.

The Professor had opened the door and was struggling to get his burden out of the car. Don Peppino alighted from the car and hastened to help him. The Professor held up a restraining hand.

"Don Peppino over-extends himself," he said.

"Come, Professor, I will help you carry the girl. Can we not get closer to the house? It appears to be some distance yet."

"It would be an imposition to trouble Don Peppino further," said the Professor firmly. "I am already too deep in his debt."

"But the matter is not concluded yet," protested the Don.

"Don Peppino has done more than I could have expected. In all fairness I must bid him good night."

"Good night?" echoed the puzzled Don. "But I have brought wine and my guitar. Is this right, Professor?"

"We wish to be alone, Don Peppino," insisted the Professor, and the issue of good manners reared its head.

Don Peppino scratched his head in uncertainty. While he deliberated, the Professor succeeded in hoisting the hefty Carmellita to his shoulders and, again bidding Don Peppino good night, started off toward the house.

Don Peppino, thoroughly bewildered now, started to get back in the car, changed his mind, looked after the receding Professor, turned to the car again.

"It stinks," said Teddie succinctly.

"This is not so, Teddie," chided Don Peppino. "Is it not a natural thing?"

"There ain't nobody in the house."

"Of course not," said the Don, growing annoyed. "They wish to be alone."

"Well, where's the priest?"

Don Peppino smote his forehead with the heel of his palm. He had completely forgotten the priest. Apparently a more thorough investigation of the Professor's home, to say nothing of his intentions, was indicated. The possible consequences of such a course of action made Don Peppino suddenly take note of the deserted and eerie surroundings. And now his senses, forced to undergo the rigors of another abrupt sobering, became acutely aware of every noise of the night. A breeze, stirring around the wild brush, filled the area with soft wails, and it is indicative of the great man's courage that without the slightest hesitation he signaled Teddie to follow him and started up toward the house. Just before they reached it a light went on inside. Don Peppino, his face darkly reflecting his determination, knocked peremptorily on the door. It opened a crack to reveal the annoyed features of the Professor.

"Professor," demanded Don Peppino in his most authoritative voice, "there are certain things I must ask you."

"One would not have thought Don Peppino capable of such rudeness," said the Professor coldly.



Don Peppino paled at the insult, but realizing that the words also contained a hint of flattery, he was disposed to overlook them. "The Professor needs but to reassure me on a few points and I will go," he said. "Where is the priest who will perform this marriage?"

"He is not due for another half-hour."

"In which case I must hear from the girl's own lips that all is as she wishes it."

"Don Peppino maligns me."

"Tell him to cut out the crap!" said Teddie.

"Professor," said Don Peppino, drawing himself up resolutely, "at the risk of rupturing our friendship I must insist that you do what I ask."

"It grieves me to utter these words, but *Il Capo Collettore* intrudes."

As Don Peppino was absorbing this latest broadside, Teddie, in an exasperated voice, said, "For cripes sake get outa the way, Don Peppino."

Pushing the Don aside, he forced the door and the Professor back and walked into the house. Don Peppino, appalled by this breach of etiquette, knew not whether to remonstrate with Teddie or follow him in. The little Professor compressed his lips and stared resentfully at Don Peppino.

Suddenly the girl's shrieks reached the Capo Collettore and rooted him to the rickety steps.

"Kidnapers! Kidnapers! Help, police, help! Don't harm me! My father will pay! Help, police!"

It seemed to the deactivated Don that her shrieks must have succeeded in reaching the far corners of the world.

"Aw, shaddup!" came Teddie's voice. "Nobody hurt ya."

Don Peppino, stung suddenly into action, rushed by the Professor and into the house to plead with the girl for silence. When she saw him she spurted another stream of shrieks.

"You gangster! You *are* a member of the Black Hand gang! Oh, police, police!"

"Carmellita, *per l'amore di Dio*," pleaded the Don. "Be silent. You are safe. It is all a misunderstanding. All will be explained to you."

"And you, too, Teddie!" shrieked the girl hysterically. "I know all about you, you big wolf!"

"Aw, shaddup. If I was on an island all alone with ya, I'd dig a hole and bury ya."

"I want the police."

In spite of Don Peppino's great courage, the blood drained quickly from his face.

"C'mon, Don Peppino," said Teddie disgustedly. "Let's get her home."

The girl, about to unloose another scream, looked at Teddie instead. "I wouldn't get in that car with you, you big wolf," she told him.

"Walk home, then."

"Don Peppino! You take me home! I'm holding you responsible! Oh, wait until I tell your wife!"

The Professor stood by the door saying nothing, forgotten in the confusion of shrieking accusations, the disgusted remarks of Teddie, and the futile attempts of the Don to calm the hysterical Carmellita. Somehow the Capo Collettore succeeded in getting her out of the house and down to the car.

"I won't get in that car!" screamed Carmellita. "I know all about that car!"

"Jeezus, this broad's really rocked," said Teddie.

Don Peppino, feeling that Teddie had been allowed to say enough, silenced him with a look. He tried then, to no avail, to get Carmellita to enter the car, and it was only after an irrepressible threat by Teddie that she took one look at the deserted surroundings and climbed in.

All the way back she continued to sear the Don's sensitive ears and to stun his brain with her repeated threats to call the police. When they reached her home the Capo Collettore felt that it were wiser if he went along with her and explained matters to her parents.

As it turned out, Carmellita belonged to a *societa'* which met every Wednesday evening, and she usually returned home at nine o'clock, a fact the Professor must have been aware of. Now it was well past eleven when, accompanied by Don Peppino, she opened the door to her home to find both her parents distraught by her absence. There ensued one of those scenes that is possible only among people of Latin temperament. Don Peppino stood in the kitchen midst the tears and the sobs of relief, and a tender lump, engendered by an awareness of the role he had played in the girl's rescue, came into his throat



as he saw her embrace passionately, over and over, first the one parent and then the other.

And then the geyser of hysteria spurted and, propelled by the Pupolos' frantic demands for explanations, rose higher and higher, and Carmellita's recitation of the evening's adventure rode with it. As Don Peppino listened, the tender lump left his throat and was replaced by a constricting tenseness. Then, like a batter trying to step into a pitch before it curves in on him, he tried to interrupt the girl's story. But the confusion mounted, and Carmellita, taking a screaming possession of the floor, accused Teddie, Don Peppino, and a small sinister stranger of abducting her, and claimed that she had saved herself from that fate which is worse than death only by screeching for the police at the top of her voice. The mother shrieked in horror and covered her eyes; the butcher's face took on the darkened hue of an overripe leg of beef, and Don Peppino, finding himself about to be swept under by a tide of ruinous accusations, tried all the harder to make himself heard. But now the three Pupolos were all shouting and crying, and the Don, frustrated, yelled, perhaps more heatedly than unkindly, "Anyone who would abduct this barrel of vinegar is doing you a favor!"

The butcher stopped talking abruptly; his wife clamped her lips shut, and Carmellita turned an outraged pair of eyes on the heretofore ignored Capo Collettore. In the slammed-down silence Don Peppino felt as if he were mired in a slowly churning mass of glue.

And then the butcher's arm, fired by a father's wrath, shot out, and the balled fist at the end of it caught Don Peppino both unawares and flush on the eye.

The Capo Collettore drew himself up proudly, for his high office precluded his stooping to the indignity of swapping blows, and, taking out his handkerchief, applied it to his eye, used the remaining one to give the butcher and his family one loathing look, and walked out of the flat.

In the car Teddie waited patiently. When he saw his idol with a handkerchief to his eye he clicked his tongue in sympathy.

"Get whacked?" he said laconically.

Obviously there was no need to reply to this. Don Peppino merely lifted his hand and pointed a finger in the

direction of the barber shop. Teddie drove the car the short distance and the two friends went inside, where Teddie put his star customer on a chair and began the application of cold compresses to the wounded eye.

After some time had passed it dawned upon the Don that it was quite possible that the Pupolos would send the police to his home to arrest him. This thought made his mind dwell on the various implimenta necessary to the operation of the lottery, which he had secreted about the house. Though in his heart Don Peppino was convinced he pursued a legitimate and honorable career, he feared the police might take a prudish view of his activities. Thus, though it was not yet his customary hour for retiring, habit bowed to discretion, and the Don hurried home to prepare for the possible visit from the police.

Fortunately for the Capo Collettore, his family, as he was constantly reminded, kept decent hours, and they were all asleep when he stole in. He quietly collected the lottery pads and records and took them down to the cellar and hid them. Then he went to bed, to lie awake all night trying to think of some way out of his present woes. But he couldn't concentrate, for the tenement was always alive with movement, and the occasional sounds of ascending footsteps kept him in an undeserved agony of dread. When the first gray light of dawn arrived and the police had not come, the fate-tossed Don took heart and fell into a fitful sleep.

In the morning his appearance did evoke some surprise, for though he had come home often in varying degrees of instability, it was the Don's proud boast that he always came under his own power and, if one discounted an occasional disarray of his usually meticulously groomed hair, physically unscathed. Obviously, fifty percent of this boast had now been vitiated, and the Capo Collettore, who had piled up enough credits to have one good lie believed, tried valiantly to keep one of the few of Mrs. Fazzone's remaining illusions intact by stating firmly that he intended to demand of the landlord that the door in the lower hall, which constituted a menace to the lives of innocent men, be removed at once.

Whether this story would be shattered by the mouthings of the butcher was, however, as the Don was wont to say, a wine of another grape.

His first move after he hit the sidewalks was to put his



handkerchief to the region of his eye to give the appearance of a person about to blow his nose. As he neared the vicinity of Pupolo's shop on his matutinal tour of the Eastside, he thought it wiser to pass it on the other side of the street. The butcher, however, seemed to have been on the lookout, for Don Peppino had no sooner come abreast of the shop when out the man shot, apron and all, running across the street and gesticulating wildly.

Don Peppino paled. Was his person to be attacked in public and in daylight where all could witness his ignominy? In spite of this danger the Don bravely stood his ground. Pepe Pupolo, paunchy and large under normal circumstances, loomed larger and larger yet, until by the time he'd reached the apprehensive Don Peppino, he'd grown to the proportions of a catastrophic tidal wave.

"Don Peppino! Don Peppino!"

The Capo Collettore gathered himself up and bestowed a haughty look on the man, who was now busily wiping his hands on his apron.

"Don Peppino, how will you ever forgive me?" cried the butcher, grasping him by the hand.

Don Peppino, as yet unsure what road the butcher was traveling, received this question in the wisdom of silence.

"Ah, ah, Don Peppino," continued the butcher, shaking his head lamentingly from side to side, "Tempers rise, heads lose control, and tongues know not what they say. *Dio!* Animal that I am! I am abject, inconsolable that I should have treated in so base a manner, one for whom I have had nothing but an undying respect and admiration."

The Don, about to select the attitude of righteous indignation, remembered in time that he needed the corroboration of the butcher on his door story, and if not that, at least the support of his silence.

Treading his way cautiously, he said, semisternly, "I was surprised."

"A mistake! May my veins be impregnated with poison! A deplorable mistake, Don Peppino! Ah, ah," the butcher wrung his hands in misery, "how will I ever forgive myself? After you left I had the truth out of that wretch of a daughter of mine. I tell you, Don Peppino, if she were not—ah, but she is still a child. I shall hate to lose her. However," and here he dug a meaningful finger into Don Peppino's stomach, "it is the way of the

world. The bird, after it tries its wings, scorns the nest that nursed it."

Don Peppino, thawing to ease by the man's words and manner, thought he began to see a ray of hope.

"Don Peppino," the butcher grasped him by the arm, "display the bigness of soul for which you are noted and accompany me to the rear of my store, where there is a certain matter I must discuss with you."

The Don, feeling himself in those familiar currents of fate, allowed them to wash him across the street and into the butcher's shop, where he was again showered with praise and apologies, this time from the butcher's wife. Thereupon Pupolo, after an admonition to his wife to watch the store, gave her a broad wink and led Don Peppino through the curtains which hid the rear room from the front.

Don Peppino had no sooner seated himself than the butcher produced a bottle of real brandy, real in the sense that it appeared to have come from reliable sources and had none of the homemade look about it. The Don, now in an atmosphere he found more congenial, cocked a judicious eye at it.

"I take it out only on special occasions," explained the butcher with a hospitable smile. "Don Peppino will serve himself."

The Capo Collettore poured himself a generous helping, sipped it tentatively, toasted the butcher with a brief, unintelligible grunt, and tossed the rest of it neatly down his throat.

"Don Peppino is disposed to overlook my disgraceful conduct of last night?" probed the butcher.

Don Peppino pursed his lips. It would, of course, not do to give in too readily. He clasped his hands together, eyed the bottle, and connected it with a look to the empty glass before him. The butcher, no slouch, pushed the bottle to his guest, and the Don felt compelled to fill his glass again.

"As I have said, I had the truth of the matter from my daughter after she calmed down."

"My reputation is untarnished," stated the Don sternly. "And I was surprised, Mr. Pupolo, that you should think Don Peppino Fazzone capable of such an act."

"A mistake! A mistake, Don Peppino! Ah, wretched



man that I am! Where shall I find the courage to seek a favor of you?"

The Capo Collettore sighed, pursed his lips thoughtfully, then said, "Calm yourself, Mr. Pupolo. You will find Don Peppino Fazzzone as generous as he is just. Where the danger and honor of one's children is concerned, a little hot blood is to be excused. You must promise never to speak of the matter to anyone," he added, remembering to protect his door story.

"Don Peppino's generosity suffocates me with gratitude and barely leaves me with voice to speak. The truth of the matter, *caro* Don Peppino, is that this man swept my Little One off her feet."

"Ah!"

"It was like the romances of old," sighed the butcher wistfully. "She did not sleep the night for talking about how this lion had abducted her and taken her to his secret lair. He must be a man of iron genitals, this one my daughter heard you call Professor."

"He is a man who knows what he wants," said the Don firmly.

"Eminently desirable as a son-in-law," murmured the butcher softly, and then reached a hand quickly upon the arm of Don Peppino, who had allowed an expression of surprise to visit his face. "*Pe' carita!*" implored the butcher quickly. "Hear me out, Don Peppino, I beg you—"

"It will be difficult in view of—" The Don trailed off with studied dubiousness.

Pupolo smiled ingratiatingly, spread his palms. "Difficult perhaps. But to suggest that something is impossible to Don Peppino—"

The Don acknowledged this subtle accolade by pouring himself more brandy.

"You understand, Don Peppino?" said the butcher anxiously. "You will act for me in this? I am prepared to contribute generously to the couple's future."

Now Don Peppino, in view of the Professor's zeal, really did not think the matter difficult. But naturally it was unwise to give the butcher that impression. "We will see what we will see," he promised vaguely.

The butcher, apparently pleased with the answer, grasped his hand and shook it gratefully, and when Don

Peppino rose to leave, the man took the bottle of brandy and placed it inside the Don's coat, under his armpit, whispering the while that it tasted better when one had more leisure to drink it. Out in the store proper another surprise awaited the Capo Collettore. Mrs. Pupolo informed him that while he and her husband talked she had taken the liberty of filling a box with choice cuts of meats and hams and sending it to his house. Then there arose another wave of profuse apologies and protestations of eternal friendship, and the Don, riding it, found himself swept right back out on the sidewalk.

There was an inherent fairness about the Capo Collettore which made him go at once to Teddie's barber shop and there, while restoring his protege's dented faith in him, share the bottle, for, after all, Teddie had shared some of the misadventure. It never occurred to him to return home to explain to his wife the box from the butcher's, for the arrival of material tributes to the Fazzone home was no unusual thing.

Now Don Peppino did not actually think that the Professor would be so brazen as ever again to come to his home, and it speaks well for his faithfulness to a pledge that he intended to seek him out at his farm, Teddie having assured him, after delicately reminding his mentor of the difference in their conditions the night before, that he could find it again. However, since it was Thursday, Don Peppino put off the trip on the remote chance that the Professor would show up on Friday as usual.

Therefore he was greatly surprised and relieved to see the man at his home at his usual hour. The Professor appeared to act as if nothing untoward had occurred, and as Don Peppino watched him going about the routine of laboriously writing down his selections with amazement, he began to wonder if he had not dreamt the whole thing.

"Professor," finally spoke the Don.

The little man looked up from his studies, turned an inquiring smile to Don Peppino.

"This affair of Wednesday evening—"

"I am disposed to overlook the unseemly actions of Don Peppino," murmured the Professor fluidly.

The Don, thrown off balance by the man's words, tried another tack. "Professor, I am empowered to speak for the girl's parents."

The smile waited patiently on the Professor's face.



"They have agreed to give you their daughter in marriage."

"Naturally," said the Professor. "However, Don Peppino, it is an honor I must decline."

Don Peppino was stunned. "Decline?" he said. "But Professor, did you not yourself—?"

"Don Peppino," said the little man patiently, though he was obviously irked that he was being interrupted in the important task of selecting the week's numbers, "if I had to marry every girl who wished me for a husband I would need thirty farms to support them."

And with that the Professor returned to his task. Don Peppino stared with mouth flopped open at his bent head. "Professor," he said, "I must ask you to reconsider the matter."

The little man seemed to have a limitless patience, for again he looked up and smiled pityingly. "Don Peppino," he said softly, "I am constantly deluged with these offers. However, I cannot consider them. The day I left my village to journey to America, all the maidens gathered to bid me adieu, and to assuage their grief at my departure I promised to return and select a wife among them."

Don Peppino coughed. "And the daughter of the butcher?"

"I have nothing but pity for her. Out of the kindness of my heart I offered her a night with the *Professore di Numeri* that would have shone forever in her memory, and she repays that kindness with the bleating of a lamb that is about to be slaughtered."

"But, Professor," said Don Peppino, "know you not that it is against the law to abduct a girl?"

"Against the law?" echoed the Professor. "Did not the men of old come out of the mountains to swoop maidens out of their native villages?"

"Professor," said the Don, recalling uneasily the answer he himself had received on one or two occasions of his mentioning that the lottery was legal in Italy, "this is not the old country. In America they have different laws. I grant you that they are foolish ones, but then—"

The Professor smiled understandingly. "It is of no matter," he said. "*Il Capo Collettore* must surely know *Il Presidente*. Our close bond of friendship demands of Don Peppino that he speak to him and dispose of this small annoyance for me." And obviously considering the

matter closed, the little man returned to his beloved numbers.

Don Peppino, for once, found himself unable to answer. How could he disabuse so simple a soul of the completely sensible notion that a man of his rank and caliber should be on speaking terms with the President? In the meantime, the Professor, having made his selections, handed them in, shook hands with the still marveling Capo Collettore, and quietly left.

Upon considering the matter, the Don saw that he had more than done his duty by the butcher. It was, therefore, with the unhesitancy of that perennially clear conscience of his that he went to him and informed him that his offer had been regretfully rejected.

"Don Peppino—" The butcher paused, adding with the pause, additional weight to the portentous tone in which he had addressed his emissary.

At the tone, Don Peppino's ears stiffened. It was significant then that Pupolo, who assuredly had not committed the folly of giving away his last bottle of brandy, had on this occasion allowed the table to remain coldly bare. Indeed, the bareness of the table grew as ominous to the Don as the gathering rumblings of Mount Vesuvius must be to the people who live at its base.

"*Caro Don Peppino,*" sighed the butcher sadly, "it is with the greatest reluctance that I must call the police, for Don Peppino is my friend, and one's heart aches when one remembers how he was implicated in a certain crime. But this man has put a stain on my Little One's reputation, and—"

Don Peppino did not hear the rest. It was unnecessary that he do so. Out of the chaotic spinning of his mind, duty emerged, clear as a full moon on a clear winter night. After asking for more time and having it generously granted, he departed, on this occasion without the helpful momentum of praise.

Accordingly, he again presented the wishes of the Pupolos to the Professor, and again he met with an adamant, albeit polite refusal. Since to threaten the little man was not only distasteful to the Don, but would further constitute an unkindness in that it would disillusion the Professor on a certain point, Don Peppino let it go at that. This left him only with the hope that the passing of time



would dull, and eventually erase, the ambitions of the Pupolos.

But the contrary was true. Don Peppino could never meet the butcher, or his wife, that they did not question him with their hands, implore him with their eyes, and, on one or two occasions, pierce him with a subtle threat. Finally, under the impetus of desperation, Don Peppino conceived the brilliant idea of building Carmellita up as a formidable rival to the Professor as a number tout. The campaign took a little time, but he managed, with the help of her father, who, following his instructions, claimed loud and often that his daughter's selections were fattening his purse, to establish her as an infallible oracle of winning numbers. The harried Professor, seeing in her a threat to his treasured fame, was driven to the desperate point of marrying her to keep his place in the sun intact. He naturally retained the Don to represent him in the negotiations, and one of the conditions the communal arbiter was forced to lay down was that the Professor hear no more about his fiancée's wild and risky speculations in the lottery.

So, harsh as the facts may be, the Don had no alternative but to air them. For howl and blare as they might, the Pupolos had no one but themselves to blame, since, in addition to the unfair coercion Pupolo brought upon the Don, there were several signposts on the road to the culmination of their ambitions for their daughter to warn them.

In the first place, Don Peppino, who disliked having his name associated with failure, had not given the alliance his customary stamp of approval and had, of course, negotiated the contract under duress. But more ominous still, that was as far as he would go, for in spite of his exacting sense of *noblesse oblige*, he was known to have regretfully declined the Professor's request that he be best man. And though the Don would never be so rude as to officially announce it, the Pupolos should have taken alarm when Martello Nasodolce, who was known to infallibly reflect the Capo Collettore's policies, predicted that the great man, despite his known love of parties of any kind, would absent both himself and his guitar from the wedding.

As the lottery customers grew in numbers, it became obvious that the little three-room flat could not accommodate them all, and it became further obvious that a larger organizational structure was needed. Because of this, Don Peppino converted more of his clients into sub-collectors, who went about taking play from their friends. This created the need for an Assistant Head Collector, whose duties would be to go from agent to agent picking up their play.

It was only natural that the Don should pass over his *primo nato* and give this important post to Tony, for Tony was already familiar with the operation of the lottery. When the appointment was announced, Tony was thrilled and even grateful to Nicky for not registering an objection, for the Assistant Collectorship held promise of two things. First of all, being a hazardous job, it would bring him prestige in the neighborhood; secondly, as a *bona fide* post with a title and all, it should bring him some kind of a salary. His gratitude soon withered into bitterness, however, when he learned what assistants all over the world eventually learn—that along with the title went all of the work and none of the remuneration. However, it did bring him the prestige, and Tony was badly in need of prestige.

Don Peppino, wishing to take his family along with him to the top, had suggested that Nicky take violin lessons and Antonio clarinet lessons. There were some who claimed that Don Peppino did this for selfish purposes, to add clusters to an already glowing escutcheon. But since it did involve financial sacrifice, he must be credited with having in mind the nobler purpose of enriching the lives of his children.

Nicky, when apprised of the Don's ambitions for him, had said, "You nuts, Pop?" and that was the end of it for him. Tony, encouraged by his brother's resistance, had attempted to stand on its precedent, and was immediately cuffed for being disrespectful. Then, with a mind whirling with confusion, bitterness, and apprehension, he was



dragged to the home of Maestro Ventrillo, where, to his further horror, he heard the Don delegate to the maestro full authority to beat his new pupil if he was not an apt one.

Thereafter he was forced to the weekly ignominy of traversing the Eastside with the disgraceful clarinet case stuck under his arm on his way to his lesson. And every week he had to run the gamut of ridicule and abuse heaped upon him by his less aesthetic friends. And that wasn't the only misery in Tony's life. Never athletically adept, he was always the last one chosen whenever there was a game to be played, and if there were an uneven number of contestants, he was thrown to the weaker side as a doubtful bonus.

Therefore, his new appointment, though throwing heavy burdens on his eleven-year-old shoulders, made him a respected figure, for in spite of the Don's protests that he pursued a legitimate and honorable career, it automatically made Tony an enemy of the cops, a status fervently desired by his many friends.

During the week, when Tony performed the prosaic duty of distributing pads to the subcollectors, he did so alone. But on Friday nights, when he set out on the dangerous and therefore glamorous job of collecting the play, he had any number of friends to pick from to accompany him. These he designated in the manner of a feudal lord handing out largesse, though there were times when Nicky, who would let everyone know that he was Tony's *older* brother and his *boss*, grabbed some of the credit by doing the picking. It was the duty of these candidates to guard the alleys and the doorways on the lookout for cops while Tony disappeared into the tenements. And since a few tussles with the police were more important to the young bloods than a degree is to a college professor, it was well for the cops on the beat that they confined their activities to shaking down bootleggers. It was easier and far more rewarding.

After his appointment, Tony no longer had to endure the ridicule of his friends, for they well knew that he could either put them on his black list or stop speaking to them.

One of the many bad points of his lottery post was his mother's attitude toward it. Mrs. Fazzone had registered the most strenuous objections to it and spent many nights

weeping over it before she had resigned herself to the uselessness of her pleas. But she was never reconciled to it, and every Friday, when he returned from his rounds, she embraced him and kissed him as if he had just returned from an expedition into the mouth of Mount Vesuvius.

One evening fate dealt Tony another opportunity to reap glory. Shortly after supper, while playing in the streets, he fell and couldn't get up. The pain in his leg, as he lay helpless in the gutter, was excruciating. A neighbor who happened by hoisted him to his shoulders and carried him up to the three-room flat.

In a matter of minutes the whole Eastside knew that disaster had struck at the home of Don Peppino. Neighbors, friends, relatives, and people motivated only by curiosity, began to converge on the Fazzone home. In no time it was so packed that to get from one room to another one had to elbow one's way through.

The women of the neighborhood came loaded with unguents, herbs, poultices, broths, bread, advice, sympathy, camphor balls on strings, garlic on strings, tea made from roots grown in boxes on their window sills and some even brought mysteriously concocted brews, the ingredients of which they would not reveal. Someone sent for La Donna Ciccina, the sorceress, to determine, if possible, who had caused this curse to descend upon the honorable head of the Capo Collettore. There was wailing, lamenting, wringing of hands, screaming, laughing, gossiping, and peacemaking among enemies who accidentally came face to face. There were even some people to whom the Fazzones were not at the time speaking. Before calamity all bitterness fled. And in the midst of this uproar Tony lay limp on the bed, crying in pain and having his brow wiped by at least twenty women who took turns at holding his head and whispering words of encouragement and endearment to him.

*"Coraggio, Antonio!"*

*"Povero ragazzo."*

*"E' in dolore, Antonio."*

Mrs. Fazzone wrung her hands and wept.

After some time had passed, someone suggested calling a doctor, and it was then that Don Peppino's absence asserted itself, for the responsibility for that move was his.

"But Don Peppino is never at home!" cried another.

This was not a strictly pure statement of the facts. It



told only part of the truth. It did not, for instance, credit the Don with the times he was the loser for not having been at home.

At any rate, the word was sent out to find him and tell him to hurry home. In the meantime, Zia Maria, the mother of Mrs. Fazzone, had arrived and assumed command.

Zia Maria, straight as an iron pole and twice as hard, enjoyed the reputation of being the toughest and the most fearless person on the Eastside, and, to Mrs. Fazzone's unending embarrassment and consternation, its most famous cop-hater. The latter distinction was comparable to being the shiniest pebble on the beach. And her great age and the fame of her caustic, indiscriminating tongue made questioning her authority unthinkable. She had no need to elbow her way to her grandson's side. At an imperious glance from her glinting eyes, the women made way for her.

She sat on the bed and asked Tony where it hurt. Then she ran her gnarled fingers over his leg and felt the bones jutting out of place.

"Does this hurt, little one?" she said, pressing a finger on a bone. Tony screamed. "And does this hurt too, little one?" Tony screamed again.

"He has a broken leg," announced Zia Maria. "We must send for a doctor."

The women gasped. Zia Maria was an outspoken foe of doctors, having more than once condemned the profession categorically and consigned them all to hell.

"Don Peppino is not at home," one of the women reminded her.

"It is the way of men," replied Zia Maria grimly. "They stay at home only long enough to sow the seeds of trouble for women. It's of no matter. We will send for the doctor."

"There is no need," said someone. "I have brought ointments and—"

"Save them to wipe your behind with, Rosina. There is needed here one who knows how to put bones back in place."

"Ah, here is La Donna Ciccina! Let her perform the *maleocchio* on the boy. She will soon find out who it was that caused this curse to descend upon the shoulders of Don Peppino."

"Let her first find out who cursed her womb that she begets nothing but monsters," said Zia Maria with a scathing look at the sorceress. Then she commanded Francesca to make use of the diabolic instrument in her mother's bedroom to summon Dr. Kurh, the family physician.

Before the doctor arrived Don Peppino had been found and brought home. Ten minutes after his arrival a young man, holding a black case in his hands, tried to elbow himself into the flat. It was not Dr. Kurh, and Don Peppino paid him no attention. After some moments of confusion, shouting, and tugging, the young man made it understood that he was Dr. John Leone, Dr. Kurh's assistant, and that he had come because Dr. Kurh was not available.

When this fact was generally understood, an ominous silence descended upon the Fazzone kitchen as the mob paused to study what was, on the face of things, an absurdity. The boy standing there with the bag in his hand—a doctor? Was it not well known that doctors, like professors and judges, had of a necessity to have hair which had grayed with experience? It was unthinkable! It was a jest, an impertinence that should be dealt with swiftly. Zia Maria took one look at him and ordered Don Peppino to throw him down the stairs.

The young doctor, who looked as if he had not yet had his first shave, ignored her words and turned to Don Peppino.

"Where's the boy?" he said.

"In the room," answered the Don, replying unthinkingly in Italian.

"Then let me through," the doctor told him, also in Italian.

Zia Maria, arms akimbo, blocked his path and cocked an eye at him. "Is this a doctor?" she demanded. "He looks like he still pisses his pants. Throw him out and call another."

Don Peppino, realizing suddenly that the doctor understood her, reddened in embarrassment. "*Per l'amore di Dio*," he whispered pleadingly. "Be quiet. He understands Italian."

"Ah! He speaks our tongue? Good." She turned to the doctor, her eyes glinting angrily. "Take the way out of here!"



When the doctor held his ground she proceeded to insult him with an efficiency that could only have been inherited, casting a cloud not only over his capabilities but his birth as well. Fortunately, the young man seemed to have a sense of humor, for he grinned throughout it all, and when it was over he did a beautiful job of assuring her that he was capable of repairing a broken leg.

Somewhat reluctantly she allowed him to pass, but not before she had expressed a great deal of skepticism at his age and disclaimed any responsibility for what he was about to do. It took the doctor another five minutes to fight his way to Tony's side. While some of the women held Tony firmly on the bed and Mrs. Fazzone wrung her hands in anguish, Dr. Leone began his examination. As his fingers probed the broken leg, Tony cried out in pain, and immediately everyone shouted that Zia Maria, as usual, was right. The doctor was a blunderer! He did not know what he was doing! They said that he had hurt the little one, forgetting that the little one had been in pain all the time. Pandemonium broke loose in the little flat, and what with the babble of accusations, imprecations being heaped upon the head of the youthful doctor, the smoldering fires of confusion were whipped into new flames.

It was more or less the custom for the doctor to do what he had to do in the home, and he performed every duty short of the most serious surgery in the sprawling Eastside tenements. But Dr. Leone must have seen at once that he could do nothing in the midst of that frantic mob. Amidst yelling and screaming, pushing and pulling, he managed to get Tony up on his shoulders and started for the door.

"*U'spidale! U'spidale!*" immediately came the cries.

"Ah, yes! He is taking him to the hospital!"

"They're all alike, these animals! They wish to take everyone to the hospital!"

"For every customer they bring in they receive a fee!"

"The knife! The knife!"

"*Povero ragazzo!*"

"They will cut off his leg and feed it to the pigs!"

"*Si, si.* For an arm, so much! For a leg, so much!"

"They will kill him and use his body to practice on! Is it not true that one who plays the piano, needs first a piano to practice on?"

"Don Peppino! Don Peppino! Where is he taking your son? Have you gone mad? Don't let him take him! La Donna Ciccini has cured more people than this thief will ever cure!"

Dr. Leone, seemingly impervious to the remarks, which he must have understood only too well, sweated his way to the door with his burden, telling Don Peppino in rapid Italian to follow him down the stairs. His car was parked by the curb, and he placed Tony in it tenderly so as to not cause him more pain than was necessary. Then he motioned Don Peppino and Mrs. Fazzone, who had followed them, into the car and drove off to his office.

There, in the blessed quiet, he anesthetized his patient, set his leg, and put it in a cast. Then, with Don Peppino carrying his still unconscious Assistant Head Collector, he put them all back in his automobile and drove them home.

There, Don Peppino found that many of the original visitors had left. But others soon came in their place, and with no thought to the fact that the Fazzones must already have had their supper, brought huge baskets of food, for they would not allow a wife in the midst of calamity to concern herself with cooking. Don Peppino laid his still-sleeping son gently on the bed, where his mother, relieved to have him back from the jaws of death, kissed and hugged him passionately. Then they returned to the kitchen.

By now the table had been set. Around the gallon of wine set prominently in the center of it, there were pepperoni sausages, salame, prosciutto, provolone, roast peppers, preserved egg plants, many varieties of olives, steaming dishes of snails swimming in a tomato sauce, and Mr. Corrado had even sent over a tray of delicious pasticci to help the little one over his pain.

After half the wine gallon had been consumed, someone started to sing, and others joined in lustily. Don Peppino, seeing this was so, stepped out onto his rear porch and whistled up into the canyon for Nasodolce. A half-hour later Nasodolce's inspired trombone poured out gay melody after melody as Don Peppino grimaced him into the various keys. Neighbors, hearing the music, came to join the party, and soon the Fazzone flat was again filled to overflowing as people sang, laughed, and gossiped.



Don Peppino and Nasodolce tirelessly accompanied them with their instruments.

In the bedroom, the still drugged Assistant Head Collector slept painlessly on. Mrs. Fazzone, hands folded in her lap and her heart filled with gratitude for young Dr. Leone, smiled happily through her tears.

## 6

Zia Maria and Uncle Joe, Mrs. Fazzone's bachelor brother, occupied a four-room flat, which they shared with four boarders, on the top floor of a four-story tenement located in the rear of another on Front Street, a few doors south of the Fazzone tenement. A concrete alley, running along the side of the front building, led to an iron staircase which led to the porches of the rear building and the back doors of the one facing the street.

Tony, tired and dejected, stood at the beginning of this alley and contemplated with dismay, the task he had set himself. Behind him, a wagon, which he'd made from a wooden crate and a set of carriage wheels he'd picked up in the dumps, was stacked high with wood. He stared at it and thought bitterly about the circumstances which had brought him to his present plight.

Certainly the start of the day had given no inkling of what was to come. True, he'd awakened unpleasantly, just before the mid-January dawn, shivering with cold, to find that Nicky had wrapped their blanket all around himself. But his resentment had quickly disappeared when he saw that the kitchen light was on and his ears and nose caught the sound and fragrance of dough cakes sizzling in pure olive oil. *Pizze fritte!* Saturday! No school! And *pizze fritte!* It was a double joy. The evening before he had helped his mother knead the dough in the large *tiana*. Twice a week his mother baked bread, and twice a week there were *pizze fritte* for breakfast instead of cocoa and stale bread.

He scrambled over the foot of the bed without disturbing Nicky and hurriedly drew on the despicable breeches he was forced to wear in spite of his constant

pleas for long pants. But it was cold and he had no time for the self-sympathy which usually accompanied the donning of them. The stove would be warm by now, the oven taking on the necessary heat to bake the bread to a rich, dark crust.

When he came out into the kitchen his mother was standing over the stove attending the dough cakes. "Antonio," she said, "hurry and dress and get downstairs to light the stove for Anna. The poor woman must be shivering with cold."

A look of dismay came over Tony's face. He'd forgotten. Every Saturday he had to light the stove for the Goldfarbs, because Jews couldn't do anything on Saturday. It was at least a fifteen minute chore. The Goldfarbs owned the dry goods store on the street level under the three-room flats. Mrs. Fazzone and Anna were very friendly and Mrs. Fazzone bought everything she could in the store. But the *pizze fritte* were ready and Tony didn't want to postpone eating them.

"Who do I have to all the time?" he cried out in protest. "Why can't Nicky do it for a change. Why *me* all the time?"

"Ah, anger, anger, all the time. Has Nicolo ever lit a stove? Will it kill you, Antonio, to do such a little thing?"

"I don't like to go in her house. It stinks of onions all the time."

"Stinga?" said his mother puzzledly. "*Che parola e' questa?*"

"Puzzo," said Tony, almost automatically. "*Puzzo d' cipolle.*" These unobtrusive lessons in English went on constantly between Mrs. Fazzone and her children.

"Ah, *si*, Antonio. But can you not put some *basilico* in your nostrils?"

Tony, about to retort that the aromatic basil herb only grew in the summer, saw the smile on his mother's face and realized that she was only teasing him. He angrily pulled on the long black stockings that he hated more than his breeches. Eleven years old and his father wouldn't let him wear long pants like Nicky.

"I'll bet when *I'm* thirteen I'll still be wearing these sissy pants," he muttered under his breath.

"*Ancora?*" said his mother in amazement, thinking he was still harping on the subject of Anna's stove.

"I didn't say nothin'," said Tony. His eyes went to Don



Peppino's guitar case, leaning against a wall. By its side rested two empty wine jugs. They told an eloquent story.

"What time did Pop get home?" he grinned.

His mother set her lips grimly. "In time to remove himself from the paths of people on their way to honest labor."

Tony, restored to good humor, grinned as he tied his laces. Then he ran downstairs and knocked on the Goldfarbs' door. Anna, a fat jolly woman, opened it, and a strong odor of onions, which seemed to have impregnated itself in the walls of the flat, assailed his nostrils.

"It is Tony, mine goot boy!" cried Anna. "A nickel you should get for lighting Anna's stove. If only your poor mother shouldn't get mad."

Tony, grumbling under his breath, busied himself with the stove. A nickel in the pig's eye, he thought. Everyone was always going to give him this or that, but all he ever got was chores, chores, chores.

When he was sure the fire was lit to stay lit, he went back upstairs. Nicky and Fran were still sleeping and he ate his breakfast alone.

The halls began to fill with people on their way to work, and the canyon in the rear came alive with noise. There were the usual screams from Mrs. Salcietti to her sons to get up for work, and the usual snarls back. The Salciettis lived in the flat above the Ruccis. They were always getting fired off jobs for stealing things, and Little Julio, the twelve-year-old, had already been arrested twice for petty theft and was still on probation. The Corsinis checked in with their morning racket as Mama and Papa Corsini screamed their settlements of the many squabbles that arose, and Joe and Frankie enforced them with a slap here and there. From the street came the angry voices of storekeepers as they fought with the early delivery men, who sought to cheat them or palm off rotten merchandise on them.

"Antonio," said his mother, "the stores are open now. Go and get some black coffee. There is none in the house, and you know your father cannot speak until he has his coffee."

Tony jumped up angrily. "Jeezus!" he cried. "I ain't gonna get up early no more!" He strode out of the flat, leaving his mother shaking her head after him.

Later in the day he took his wagon and went uptown

to gather wood. He knew all the alleys and receiving platforms of the department stores and what time most of the merchandise was uncrated. There was one special alley where, after ten o'clock, clerks sneaked out for a couple of drags on their cigarettes and then threw them away. The butts in this alley were long and clean, and if he picked up enough of them he could sell them to the balkies, as the Eastside alcoholics were known, for two or three cents.

In the alley his eyes searched the ground expertly and, while gathering the butts, he came across a nickel. He scooped it up and jumped up and down with joy. It was his day, all right.

He didn't get home until well past noon, for on his way back to the Eastside he had come across some boys playing football with a stuffed pillow, and they were a man short. He brought the wagon and crates up to his porch, went into the house, and had a cold leftover *pizze fritte* for lunch. By that time the *stampini*, the sheets with the results of the lottery drawings, were ready. He went to the printer's, collected them, and set out to distribute them to the sub-collectors. When he returned home he smashed the crates into kindling wood and stacked it neatly on the porch. This done, he went into the house and bent over the sink to wash himself. The rest of the day, he thought happily, except for an hour's practice on the clarinet, was his, and he intended trying to skip the practice. As he washed, a cigarette butt fell out of his pocket and to the floor.

"Ma!" screamed Fran. "Look Ma!"

Mrs. Fazzone picked up the butt and faced him accusingly.

"I sell 'em," said Tony. "Honest I do. I don't smoke."

His mother reached into his pockets and drew out the rest of the butts. Tony, groping desperately for a way to substantiate his alibi, thought of his nickel. He untied a knot in the corner of his handkerchief and took it out. "See, I sell 'em. Look, I already made a nickel."

"Ah," said Mrs. Fazzone grimly. "So you have taken the nickel from Anna. After I told you not to so many times."

"I didn't take no nickel from Anna! Go ask her!"

"Go ask her, go ask her," Fran mimicked him. "Don't



believe him, Ma. He only says to go ask Anna because he knows you wouldn't bother her until after sundown."

"Mind your own business!" cried Tony. "You're always tryin' to get me in trouble! I didn't take no nickel from Anna!"

But Mrs. Fazzone was angry beyond reasoning. She reached out, took the nickel away from him, and cuffed him about the ears.

"Good enough for you, good enough for you," chanted Fran.

Tony, his eyes hot with tears of outraged innocence, ran out of the house.

On his doorstep he nursed and nursed his injury until it grew into a great ball of self-sympathy which threatened to suffocate him. Nobody loved him. They didn't care about nobody but Nicky. Well, he'd show them. They'd be sorry. He'd run away. Then Don Peppino could collect his own lottery play and his mother could go down and light Anna's stove herself. Suddenly a vindictive satisfaction shot through him. The wood. He'd get even. He'd brought the wood home, and he'd take it away.

He went back upstairs, opened the door and, without a word or look to his mother or sister, stamped resolutely through the kitchen and out to the porch. He loaded his arms with wood and took it down to the yard. Neither Fran or his mother interfered with him. And they'd better not, he thought grimly. He went back for another load, another, and another until he'd taken it all off the porch.

When he was done he stared gloomily at the wood. He didn't know what to do with it. He certainly couldn't take it with him on the road, and he couldn't sell it to anyone. But if he left it in the yard it would be gone in a few minutes. He stacked it all up on his wagon and tied it with a rope. His grandmother would appreciate having it. Maybe she'd even wrap some food in a handkerchief for him to start out with.

Now, as he stood at the head of the alley and dismay took the place of his anger and the sustaining force it had given him, he contemplated the formidable task of transporting the wood up the four flights of stairs to his grandmother's porch. The alternatives were to abandon the wood or bring it back home. His stubbornness

would not permit the first, and the picture of Fran laughing at him ruled out the second. Then he thought of hiding it somewhere, but that implied that he would one day return home, and he had no intention of ever going back.

His grandmother happened into the alley then and took the decision out of his hands.

"Ah, little one, do you bring me wood?"

"*Si*, Mammavecchia. There is not enough room on our porch for all of it."

"Ah, little one, you are a good boy to think of your grandmother. Come, I will take a load, for I am going up."

Tony filled her arms with wood and she started up the alley. As he watched her, he filled with shame. There he was worrying about taking the wood up and his grandmother, an old lady, thought nothing of it. Of course he didn't know how old she really was. No one knew, not even Zia Maria. She claimed to have been born sometime before, during, or after Garibaldi's march through Italy. That could have made her anywhere between sixty-five and seventy-five years old. But old or not, she carried wood, and the ice and coal she gathered in the freight yards, up her stairs many times a day. He could do no less.

He had to make four trips before he got the wood upstairs. He stacked it neatly and then went into the house and opened his grandmother's icebox. In it there was always sure to be pieces of fruit which she also picked up in the freight yards and salvaged by cutting the rotten parts away. He picked a quarter of an apple, a sliver of an orange, and a third of a banana and ate them. Then he decided to spend the night with Zia Maria, and start off early in the morning.

There remained yet an hour before darkness, at which time the boarders and Uncle Joe would come home to supper. He spent it playing about the veranda. From it, a half-flight of stairs led to a small balcony-landing which led to the roof. Assuming the role of D'Artagnan, that fearless musketeer, he leaped from the balcony to the porch with wooden sword in hand, and attacked the stack of wood, darting his sword viciously in and out among the cracks. Once the pile came tumbling down. Zia Maria came running out and, regardless of the fact that he had



made her a gift of the wood, made him stack it all up again. He was getting awfully, awfully tired of stacking wood, and his labors had made him ravenously hungry.

The four boarders paid only for their room and laundry and for having their food cooked, which they bought themselves. There were never less than four different pots of food cooking on Zia Maria's stove, and often five, and Tony, whose presence there for supper was no unusual thing, could have his choice of any, for he had but to select it and go stand next to the boarder who was eating it. It is an unwritten Italian law that anyone who looks at one's food should be immediately invited to partake of it, and especially so if the one in question were a child. His mother, hearing about this shameless practice of his, had once beaten him, admonished him never to do it again, and invited the boarders to her own table one by one until she was sure she'd squared matters up. But tonight it made no difference what his mother thought. She had no authority over him any more. As it happened, however, this night he ate legitimately, for Zia Maria and Uncle Joe were eating his favorite dish, *cavatelli*.

On Saturday nights, Uncle Joe and the boarders usually went out. They would return about eight-thirty or nine o'clock at the latest, but in the winter, Zia Maria always retired after cleaning up the supper dishes. When she was done she noted with amazement that Tony was still in his uncle's room, studying Uncle Joe's collection of books on opera.

"Is it not time to take the way for home, little one?" she called.

Tony came into the kitchen, looked her blandly in the eye, and said. "I told my mother I was sleeping with you tonight."

"Is it so, little one? Are you to warm these old bones for me tonight?" A glint of anger came into her eyes. "Have you wet the bed lately?"

Tony blushed. He hadn't wet the bed in years, but Zia Maria somehow couldn't realize that he'd grown up, and that all that was behind him. Then he remembered that the last time he had done it, Nicky had punched him, and this bolstered his determination never to return home.

He stripped down to his flannel underwear and climbed aboard his grandmother's large bed with the high bumpy mattress stuffed with chicken feathers. He

watched as Zia Maria lit the votive candle in front of the ancient and cracked statue of the Virgin Mary on her bureau, and then took off the black house dress she wore every day of her life, except when she went visiting. Then she climbed in beside him and pulled the blankets over them.

"See that you stay on your side of the bed," she warned him sternly, "for I am not a piece of dough you can knead over and over."

"Mammavecchia, tell me the story of Padrevecchio."

Within three months of her arrival in America, his grandmother had lost a teen-aged boy and girl and her husband. The first two had died from the influenza, but his grandfather's death made a story he never tired of hearing, for Zia Maria's telling of it was liberally sprinkled with the picturesque Italian curses which, since they usually embraced one's self, he found so amusing.

"Ah, *si*, I will tell you," said his grandmother grimly. "May the intestines of that policeman, and those of the one who opened the door for him, be impregnated with poison!"

"But, Mammavecchia, was it not you who opened the door?"

"*Si*, little one. But was it not the law? What was I to do?"

"But why do you curse yourself?"

"And who am I to curse—the Virgin Mary who abides innocently in Paradise?"

"But it was not your fault. You did not know."

Zia Maria's eyes took on the familiar glint. "It is that cursed fear that we poor have of the law. In Italy we were always told what we could *not* do, never what we *could* do. In America, your Uncle Theo has told me, one need not bow so low to the police, that there are those to whom they must also answer. Not one, I have sworn, shall ever cross my threshold again. Have they not come here in search of you when you knocked down the string of shoes hanging by the door of the Jew's store? Did they not chase you when you tipped over the cart of Angelo?" The memory of the misdeed drove her to reach out and cuff Tony. "Did I let them in?" she said angrily, when she had settled back on her pillows, "while you crouched in fear under this very bed? Did I not chase them back the way they came?"



Tony rubbed his cheek where Zia Maria had cuffed him, but his eyes lit up in admiration. "*Si, si,*" he said eagerly.

"And who knew, that miserable night, the laws of this abominable country, where the cold reaches out and snatches children from their mothers' breasts? What did my poor Antonio know when the policeman came charging in here that night with his revolver drawn as if he were going to face all the demons of hell? Was it not the law to always say yes to these animals? Did Antonio not do right to nod his head when the animal talked? How were we supposed to know that he had chased an Evil One up the alley and that the Evil One had made his way up the stairs to who-knows-where? Were we required by law to understand the tongue the beast spoke? Ah, *Dio mio, benedetto da tutto*, did not my heart stop when he grasped Antonio and marched him off to the dungeons?"

Tony's eyes flamed with anger, and he shook his fist in the air. "If I was here I'd have poured hot water on his head!" he cried in English.

"*Animale!*" said Zia Maria, who shifted easily from terms of endearment to those of reproof. "Address me not in that tongue, for you know well I do not understand it."

"What happened after?" said Tony, calming down.

"He languished in the cell for ten days, not knowing why he was there or how long he'd be there, while your Uncle Theo searched for him and the person who could explain why he was there. At that time we learned that your grandfather should not have said yes to the policeman, for he had asked him if the Evil One had come into our home, if he had helped him escape down the stairs outside my window there. Ah, *povero* Antonio, Antonio —" Zia Maria's eyes filled with tears.

"When I get big," said Tony, "I will be like Joe Corsini and fight them all."

Zia Maria reached out and cuffed him again. "Conduct yourself always in a manner which will steer you clear of them," she admonished him. Then she gave him another cuff, pushed him away from her, and set herself to sleep.

Tony lay in the flickering light of the votive candle, thinking sadly of his grandfather. From his mother's descriptions, he held a vague image of him. He was a gentle, timid man, his mother had told him, nothing like his

grandmother. He'd died soon after his release from jail, whether from the heartbreak of losing two children in an alien land or from the disgrace of having been in jail, which he felt keenly, it was never known. No wonder his grandmother hated cops!

"*Che onore!*" he'd once heard his mother say bitterly to Uncle Theo. "It is said that every new policeman who comes to walk on Front Street is warned about her. *Che disgrazia, che disgrazia—*"

Tony had grinned. He knew what his mother meant. It was well known that if policemen strayed under his grandmother's windows they were apt to be hit with unidentifiable wood or coal or garbage. And there was no way of proving conclusively from which of the many windows the attack had come. The cops were lucky if they didn't accidentally stray under the window of a flat in which his grandmother happened to be visiting.

And there were times when she attacked openly. The sight of any uniform incensed her, and she slugged cops on the streets with anything she happened to have in her hand, from full or empty wine jugs to pieces of logs or ice. Many times she had been started, after the most violent resistance, on the march to the box, but no cop had ever got her there as yet. The old lady was too beloved by everyone, and storekeepers intervened with hurried promises of loaded bags. If they also happened to be bootleggers and the policeman was on their payroll—which was almost invariably the case—there were whispered words into the ears above the red necks to the effect that if they were not careful they could easily be patrolling a beat in some remote park, where they would collect nothing but what the birds were famous for handing out.

Tony was inordinately proud of his grandmother. It didn't do a fellow any harm to be related to the most famous cop-hater on the Eastside, because cops were everybody's enemies, as he'd often heard her say. His mother's attitude confused him. Why did she always say Zia Maria embarrassed them? Being arrested was not the terrible disgrace his mother appeared to think it was. If it were, almost every family would be forced never to show their faces, because Tony seldom looked out the window that a cop wasn't holding someone by the shoulder with one hand and turning a key in the police box with the other.



But his grandmother's attitude confused him even more, for when he wanted her to know that he was on her side and wished to fight the cops right along with her, she cuffed him and warned him not to earn their attention. And so, attempting to rationalize the irrational, he was soon asleep.

Mrs. Fazzone was not.

When Tony did not come home for supper, she had put a dish on the stove to keep warm for him. She knew her son and thought he'd be hiding in some hallway or alley until his hunger won over his pride, and when he came home he would kiss her and she would give him his supper. When Don Peppino, after uttering a dire threat against Tony for being absent at table without leave, had gone out, she sent Nicky out to search for his brother and went herself from door to door to inquire about him.

At seven o'clock Mrs. Fazzone grew uneasy and descended again to the streets, ostensibly to the stores, but with the hope that she would spy her son. At seven-thirty she began to inquire on the streets about him. At eight, frantic with worry and trying to suppress hysteria, she asked that the word be passed for Don Peppino to be found and told to return home at once. It never occurred to her that Tony was with her mother, for Zia Maria would have shooed him home long ago. More than that, she did not want the old lady to know Tony was missing, for there would be no calming her.

At eight-thirty the hue and cry went through Front Street and the search for Tony Fazzone was taken up by every man, woman, and child. The last anyone had seen of him was when he was dragging the wagon load of wood out of his yard. Through the back yards and alley, from window to window, people shouted and screamed their questions and answers.

"Have you seen Antonio?"

"Which Antonio?"

"*Stupid!* U' figlio d' Don Peppino, u' Capo Collettore."

"Ah, him! Did he not bring me the *stampina* today?"

"*Che te pozzene sciattà!* That was early in the day. We seek him now."

"He is not here. Seek him elsewhere."

"*Pezzo d' puttana!* send your children to help find him! His mother weeps on the streets!"

"Ah, Dio, Dio—*si, si, subito!*"

And so the alarm spread. Remarkably enough, the people who could have helped were unaware of the commotion. Uncle Joe had gone uptown to a movie, and the four boarders were playing cards at the home of a friend at the lower end of Front Street.

The inconsolable Mrs. Fazzone ran up and down the street, frantic with fear and remorse, questioning every group that came out of an alley or building. Nicky, seriously efficient, was organizing a gang to go and search the river banks on the not too remote possibility that Tony had fallen in it.

"He's a crazy, thick-headed kid," Nicky explained to his friends. "He maybe was gonna dump the wood in the river. You can never tell."

Fran cried and said she'd never be mean to him again.

It was just before nine o'clock that Slannigan, who alternated the around the clock shifts with O'Rourke and Murphy, became aware that a boy was lost. He sought out Don Peppino and Mrs. Fazzone and attempted to get Tony's name and description. But by now it had become alarmingly obvious that something terrible had happened to Tony, for if he were only hiding until he could come home without fear, he would have come out or been dragged out long ago, and neither Don Peppino or Mrs. Fazzone were in any condition to talk coherently. A neighbor gave Slannigan the description.

"The kid got any relatives he could go to?"

"Sure."

"Well, let's go ask 'em."

"*Stupido!* They are all out searching for him!"

"He must be dead by now!"

"The river has swallowed him!"

"No! No!" screamed Mrs. Fazzone. "*Pe' carita, no!*"

"Has anyone been to the home of Zia Maria?"

"Could he be there? *Impossibile!* Zia Maria would have sent him home long ago."

"Si, si," wept Mrs. Fazzone. "Ah, *povero figlio mio, povero figlio mio*—"

"Zia Maria?" said Slannigan. "The old devil? Is she the kid's grandmother? I know him now. Somebody better go and check with the old devil. He might be there."



"But she'd have sent him home!"

"*A legge e' stupida!*"

"Ah, *ste' Ireshe!* It is truly said that their brains are all in their flat feet. Is Zia Maria a mother to cause a daughter so much anguish?"

"*Questa e' na cosa giusto!*"

But Slannigan, despite all the remarks to the contrary, was an efficient cop. Zia Maria's home was a lead that had not been explored. Seeing that his suggestions met only with ridicule, he strode off to inquire himself. The crowd, still doubtful, followed him, heaping abuse and more ridicule on his head. On the way, more people joined the procession, so that by the time it had reached Zia Maria's porch, there was hardly room there to hold them all, and people jammed the stairs leading up to it. Slannigan, waiting for someone to knock on the door, saw that everyone was interested only in trying to calm the now completely hysterical Mrs. Fazzone. He lifted his stick and rapped on the door.

For some time Zia Maria had been dimly aware of the distant screams and shouts, but had paid them little attention. Now the rap on her door brought her completely awake. She went into the kitchen and lit the dim bulb. The handles of her clock stood at a few minutes before nine o'clock. She tiptoed into Uncle Joe's room, which had windows looking out on the porch, carefully parted the curtains, and peeked out. The porch was full of people all screaming at once, and it was difficult to make out what they were saying. Then she saw the police uniform at her door. She let the curtains fall back into place.

She made her way quickly to the stove. Something had happened. Someone was in trouble with the police. Could it be Giuseppe? She could not imagine him in trouble with the law. Perhaps it was one of the boarders or someone bringing false charges against her. What had she done that day? The bananas in the freight yard were on the ground and rotten, thrown away. She had not stolen them. Then suddenly it didn't matter. What did matter was that a policeman threatened to cross her threshold. She lifted the stove lid, scooped up a shovelful of live coals, and started for the door.

She turned the key silently, pulled the door back quickly, and flung the live coals out in the direction of the uniform.

Yowls of pain and curses rent the air as she quickly closed and locked the door.

"Ya damn witch!" Slannigan's voice bellowed out in anger.

"Zia Maria! Open the door! It is us! We search for Antonio, *vostre pronipote!* Is he with you?"

"Ma! Ma!" implored the voice of Mrs. Fazzone.

Zia Maria returned to the window, opened it a crack.

"What do the police want of him? What has he done?"

"The police want nothing of him! He is lost and the policeman helps us find him!"

"The little one is not lost. He is here with me."

"*Grazia Dio!*"

"He is found! He is found!"

"*Dio benedetto!*"

"Produce the little animal!"

"The mother weeps! Give him to the arms of his mother!"

"For every tear he caused to fall, a whack upon his behind!"

"Someday I'm gonna lose me temper and hurt that old devil somethin' bad!"

"Leave alona, eh, Slana? Poor olda lady no meana nothin'. C'mona my store. We feexa little somethin' taka homa, eh, Slana?"

"Ma, ma, *per la amore d' Dio*, open the door!"

Zia Maria went to the door and opened it. The mob, all talking and screaming at the top of their lungs, rushed in, with Mrs. Fazzone at the fore. Don Peppino, an angry look on his face, made quickly for Zia Maria's bedroom, but Mrs. Fazzone reached it first and barred the way. The mob was now heaping dreadful maledictions on Tony's head for all the trouble he had caused, and they demanded that the little animal be dragged out and chastened before their very eyes.

Mrs. Fazzone stared defiantly at her husband. "Enough!" she sobbed. "Enough! You shall not touch him! He did not take the nickel from Anna. I asked her. Let him sleep and he can come home in the morning."

Then she turned and went into the room, bent over, and kissed her son, who, quite healthily, slept right through the uproar. Zia Maria, when apprised of the little one's deception, was, like the mob, all for awakening



him and chastising him on the spot. But Mrs. Fazzone would not have it so and even made her promise not to beat him when he awoke in the morning.

When Tony walked sheepishly into the house the next morning, the first thing Fran said was, "Ain't you going to lick him, Ma?"

But Mrs. Fazzone only threw her arms around him and satisfied the hunger she had put off the night before.

## 7

If very few Eastside children completed grammar school, fewer still went to high school, and college was a vague, unattainable dream. Mrs. Fazzone knew this, but she was determined to see her children through grammar school at all costs, and though Uncle Theo had more than once assured her that there was no reason why they couldn't set their sights on a high school diploma, the illiterate Mrs. Fazzone trembled excitedly at the audacity of the suggestion.

Many Eastside parents, when they heard of their children participating successfully in such strenuous games as baseball and football, saw in these accomplishments only the fact that young muscles had matured. The next day they were out of school and either laboring in the ditches by their fathers' sides, or mixing cement and carrying bricks for them. Mrs. Fazzone, whenever she heard of these instances, would cry, "Not mine! Not mine!" and fling her arms convulsively around whichever of her children happened to be nearest.

Mrs. Fazzone, it was well known, had ambitions for her children. They would go to work one day dressed in a suit with a clean white shirt and tie. Why, she stated defiantly, Nicolo and Antonio would someday be book-keepers in an office. Did not Antonio keep the accounts of the lottery neatly?

But a fear lurked in the back of her mind, and she watched her children's report cards closely. This she did by taking them down to Anna Goldfarb, who read and explained the marks to her. Mrs. Fazzone had good rea-

son to fear for her children's marks, for if they did not pass from one grade to another there was a good chance that they would be expelled by a huge pipe wrench.

The pipe wrench belonged to Jerry, the school janitor. Every fall, when school opened, it was Jerry's duty to go from room to room to raise the desks of the boys and girls whose physical growth had outpaced their mental growth. Some children were left back two or three times, and when Jerry had raised the desk as high as he could and the pupil still was unable to get his knees under it, he would say, "The ditches for you, kiddo."

When Antonio was absent on account of his broken leg, Mrs. Fazzone fretted over the possibility that he would not be promoted. Antonio was a large boy, but his mother, surveying him critically, was thankful that he had short legs. They would stand two or—God forbid!—three raisings of the desk.

But Uncle Theo, who somehow knew what to do in such cases, went to the school and arranged for Tony's teacher to give him lessons to take home to his nephew. In the evenings he went over them with Tony, and when Tony returned to school he found that he had kept right up with his class. Not only that, but Miss Flynn, the teacher, treated him with a perceptible respect, and once she told him that his uncle was the most amazing man she had ever met. That June, the Fazzone trio, each a grade behind the other, passed smoothly up. Fran went into the fifth grade, Tony into the sixth, and Nicky into the seventh. Mrs. Fazzone was very proud.

To Tony it was no particular thrill. Throughout his fifth year he had viewed school as a sort of sissified activity. Some of his friends were already out of it, and many days, as he sat in the classroom, which faced Market Street and the areaways leading uptown, he could see them pass by on the way to a movie or some equally exciting adventure. At these times, school work, boring at its best, became a downright drudgery. Instead of paying attention to Miss Flynn, his mind would stray, and with Miss Flynn that wasn't good.

Miss Flynn was a tough old bird. Teachers at the Brown School had to be tough. John Clark, the gym teacher, for instance, was invited outside now and then, and there were a few guys who claimed they held a decision over him. But Tony doubted this. Mr. Clark never



had any marks on his face, and he never mentioned having fought anybody, though when one of his pupils later became the featherweight champion of the world, he claimed, with a strange gleam in his eye, to have given him his first boxing lesson. When Mr. Clark, shoulders back and chest out, ran his stern, proud eyes over a line of kids, they straightened up quickly. Anytime he saw a slouching pupil, he'd give him his famous one-two, a jab in the stomach to bring the chest out, and a flip under the chin to bring the head up. But most of the kids loved Mr. Clark, because he was always around the Eastside bullying parents into letting kids out of their chores so that they could play on his various teams.

Miss Flynn was a different story. She couldn't be invited outside. On top of that she had a little ebony stick with which she rapped her pupils smartly over the head. The best the kids could do with her was to claim that she was in love with the vice-principal.

It would have been the principal, only Mr. James was too old. Mr. James was a gentle, doddering old man in his eighties: *Povero vecchio*, the Eastsiders called him. Mr. James's ruling passion was the Brown School's Safety Crossing record. Every assembly meeting he made speeches warning the children always to look in every direction before they crossed. And the Brown School did have the best record in the city. There was only one constant offender.

This was Mr. James himself. The poor man was feeble and almost blind. This caused him to run into trolleys while trying to board them, and on a few occasions he had mild brushes with them. But he was never seriously injured, for motormen knew about him and were always on the lookout for him.

To the Eastsiders, Mr. James's adventures with the trolleys were the cause of great merriment, being, as they must, a supreme frustration to the old man, and every time he was hit they would run to play the numbers, which had long ago been taken out of the Smorfia. They were never drawn, but it was never held against *Il povero vecchio*.

Some of the teachers thought that being sent down to Mr. James's office for a strapping was the worst punishment they could give a pupil. Rumor had it that Mr. James would always drop a pencil to begin with and ask

a kid to pick it up. When the pupil bent over he would kick him hard in the seat of his pants and send him sprawling. This puzzled Tony. He couldn't see Mr. James lifting his foot higher than it was necessary to walk, let alone imparting the required force to bowl over a retarded giant, for instance.

One day Tony played hooky, and the next morning Miss Flynn told him to report to Mr. James. Tony had a tough time keeping himself from smirking, and he turned his head around slyly to see if any of his classmates were noting how unafraid he was. After all, why should he be afraid? Wasn't he the Assistant Head Collector of the lottery, and didn't he go around every Friday night without worrying about the cops? He should be afraid of Mr. James! He walked cockily out of the room and, mindful of the pencil story, down to the principal's office.

Mr. James, supporting himself on his desk, came slowly to his feet and beckoned Tony closer. As he did so, his glasses fell off his nose to the carpeted floor.

Oh, oh, thought Tony. Everybody's wise to the pencil act, so now he's switching to the glasses. He didn't move.

"Oh, dear," said Mr. James. "I hope they're not broken. Are they broken, Anthony?"

"No, sir," said Tony.

Mr. James sighed his relief. Then, "Well, Anthony, aren't you going to pick them up for me?"

So it was true, thought Tony grimly. Mr. James had dropped the glasses on purpose. He knew right well they wouldn't break on the carpet. Well, he had a trick or two up his sleeve, also. He'd rather take a face to face shellacking than suffer the ignominy of being booted in the rear. Besides, Miss Fenton, the gentle secretary whom everybody liked, was looking. Instead of bending over for the glasses, he squatted down on his hind quarters and picked them up.

"Thank you, Anthony," said Mr. James. Tony studied the wrinkled features for a sign of disappointment. But Mr. James was busy wiping his glasses. "And now, Anthony, what have you to say for yourself?"

"I was runnin' an errand for my mother."

"The truant officer spoke to your mother. She thought you were in school." Mr. James sighed sadly. "He asked her to say nothing to you in the hopes that you'd be a little man and tell us the truth."



Tony gave Miss Fenton a sidelong glance and hung his head. He didn't like being caught in a lie. Mr. James opened a desk drawer and took out a strap. At the sight of it, Tony's stomach hollowed sickeningly with fear. It was a sturdy looking belt in which were embedded shiny brass studs about half the size of a dime.

Mr. James waved the strap in the direction of the supply closet. Tony, filled with apprehension now, entered the closet. Mr. James followed him in and closed the door. Tony became frightened then. Apparently the beatings were so horrible they could not be executed in the presence of the sensitive Miss Fenton.

"Hold out your hand," said Mr. James grimly.

Tony held his hand out a little, drew it back nervously, then finally got it out there. Mr. James lifted the strap and swung it down. Tony jerked his hand back quick and Mr. James missed. The impetus of the swing made him reel, and Tony had to reach out quickly and catch the old man to prevent him from falling.

"If you do that again," panted Mr. James, "I'll have to tie your hand to a shelf."

Tony stuck out his hand and closed his eyes. He felt a small sting. Mr. James gave him about a half-dozen blows, resting between each one. Then he sent him back up to his class.

Tony swaggered back to his room, conscious of the awed looks of his classmates.

"Come here, young man."

He approached the desk. Behind it Miss Flynn toyed idly with the stick in her hand.

"The next time you play hooky you'll stay after school for two weeks in addition to going down to Mr. James!"

"Yes, Miss Flynn," said Tony, smirking. After all, he had braved his punishment and it was all behind him. He turned cockily and had taken one step toward his desk when he felt the rap of the ebony stick on his skull. And that *hurt*.

"In case you forget, young man!"

Tony walked back to his desk blinking his eyes and trying to keep the pain from showing on his face. Later, during recess, he bragged to his friends how he'd thwarted Mr. James's attempt to get him to bend over and how he'd endured a licking with a strap that had *nails* sticking out of it.

But whether Tony liked it or not, knowledge, like medicine, was being crammed down his throat. His mother forever urged him and Nicky and Fran to study and do as Uncle Theo suggested and go to the library, where one could obtain books *free*. She marched them to the windows to show them the street cleaners shoveling up the manure, the garbage collectors, the begrimed men trudging warily to the cellars with bags of coal on their backs. That's what they'd be if they didn't read.

Zia Maria disapproved of it all. The boys were old enough to be sent to work. To be learned, she told her daughter, was an evil thing. Did not Theo toil in the factory each day instead of being *U'Managero* of the East-side bank, a post he had refused because he did not wish to align himself with capitalism? And how had he learned these silly things if he had not found them in the books he read?

"Ah, ah," lamented Zia Maria. "I should have torn up his infernal books long ago and put the pages on the nail in the toilet. They would then have been put to a nobler use."

"But, Ma," protested Mrs. Fazzone, "he would not have been offered the post if he was not educated. In a bank one must know how to keep a reckoning."

"Away with you! Who keeps the reckoning for me? I need but to see the pictures on the money to know what it is worth."

They were the last words spoken in the argument, but by no means the deciding ones.

Don Peppino awoke to all this frenzied quest for learning only on instances at table, when in making certain statements, he found himself being refuted by his children, and especially Tony, who always offered to *prove* it to him. Mrs. Fazzone, at these times, always reprimanded her son sternly and told him that he should know by now that he couldn't speak at table unless he was granted permission. There was always the possibility that the Don, as did so many of his contemporaries, might view this ostentatious show of erudition as an offensive trait in his children, and to correct it, take them out of school. Whether he had considered that possibility and discarded it, was a moot point, for he never mentioned it. It would be nearer the truth to suppose that he did not trouble his head with such trivia.



Be that as it may, Mrs. Fazzone learned by a subtle probe here and a harmless query there, that Don Peppino had no intention of taking his children out of school to help support the family. For the fact that he was the sole breadwinner was often his only defense against the objections of Mrs. Fazzone and Uncle Theo to the life he led. But more than that, Mrs. Fazzone learned happily that her aims did not collide with her husband's. Don Peppino believed firmly that Antonio's future, though he had no "ear," was in music, and since he conceded that Toscanini was, on the whole, an educated man, he could see no reason why Tony shouldn't be.

Not only did the poor Assistant Head Collector swirl dizzily in a maze of lottery and household chores, clarinet lessons and practice, and school activities, but his ears were forever being dinned on the one side by the many examples of what education accomplished, as quoted by his mother, and on the other by the Don's descriptions of the glories that would be his if he studied his music lessons faithfully. Some day he would be another Toscanini. There would be a villa on Lake Como to buy and a room in it for an old and deserving father. Perhaps, when the famous maestro's engagements did not take him from his villa, he would honor his old father by asking him to get his guitar and joining him in a duet on the moonlit terrace. The very waters of the calm lake would leap up appreciatively at the music they would make.

It was a dream, but, as Uncle Theo always said, life was nothing without one.

In the meanwhile, the dream threatened to materialize. Maestro Ventrillo, noting his pupil's progress, had enlisted him in a boy's band. Tony, forced to attend weekly rehearsals, saw another of his precious evenings go by the board. He had never liked his music, but now the clarinet became a bitter, personal enemy.

Shortly after, Tony came home one night and announced that the band was going to play on the radio and that he had been selected to play a solo. Don Peppino, as usual, was not at home and the news had to be delivered to him in the morning. Though mornings were not the Don's better times, he did not fail to rise to the tremendous occasion. His eyes filmed suspiciously, and his nostrils quivered almost imperceptibly as he sought to suppress any visible signs of the great pride which surged

through his chest. And he is to be forgiven if he went about the Eastside that morning proudly spreading the news. The broadcast was to take place Saturday morning on WTIC.

And then, all of a sudden, the Fazzones remembered something. They had no radio. Little Julio Salcietto had a crystal set which he'd stolen, but he had not as yet succeeded in making it work, and if he had, the Fazzones would not have demeaned themselves by asking Little Julio to give them turns at the earphones. Don Peppino, when apprised of this glaring omission, as usual rose to the emergency. He descended to the street and arranged with Salvatore Pielo to disconnect his phonograph from the loud-speaker and hook up a radio to it. Then he went to inform everyone that those who wished to, could hear the performance of his son on the radio by standing in front of Pielo's music store.

As Saturday drew near, Tony experienced a little the type of thing that Don Peppino lived with constantly. There were many of his friends who told him he was going to be famous and warned him not to forget them. But there were many who were jealous of him and tried to make a joke of his coming appearance on the radio. But Tony, like his sire, heard, or paid heed to, only what he wanted to hear. He was going to be famous. For a rare moment he was almost grateful to Don Peppino for having forced him to master the clarinet.

That Friday he was relieved of his lottery duties in order that he could go to bed early and be rested for the important moment. After supper, Uncle Theo, who came to the house to commend as well as condemn—but not as often—arrived to congratulate him, wish him luck and warn him not to be nervous. Later, a neighbor brought them a bottle of homemade *Strega* and forced them all, including Francesca, to drink a toast to the young star. It was too early in the evening for the lottery collection and the Don was not yet at home, it being one of the aforementioned times he was the loser for it.

After the excitement had quieted down, Mrs. Fazzone gave Tony a towel and a piece of yellow soap and sent him to the public bathhouse, which stayed open Friday and Saturday evenings, to take a shower.

In the morning he was scrubbed again around the ears, dressed in fresh clothes, kissed, hugged, blessed, given ad-



vice and warnings, kissed, hugged, and blessed again—and sent off. At the hour of the broadcast, a great crowd had assembled before Pielo's music store.

In the broadcasting studio, the young star was sweating in apprehension. The room was hot, the leader of the band was nervous, and, what was worse, he communicated his nervousness to his youthful charges. The band played "The Star Spangled Banner" and "Our Country 'Tis Of Thee," coming through, because of a sharing of the responsibility by all of them, quite creditably. Then the announcer stepped to the microphone.

"And now we will hear a clarinet solo by Anthony Fazzone. Anthony will play 'Onward Christian Soldiers.'"

The leader gave Tony a skeptical look and raised his baton. The hour of destiny had arrived.

Tony trembled nervously as he placed the mouthpiece between his lips and pressed firmly on the reed. A piercing squeak filled the room. Tony turned white with horror. The only thing he could think of doing was to look at his clarinet as if it was the instrument's fault, much in the same way an infielder who makes an error will examine his glove. The leader of the band implored him with gestures and frantic looks to start again, but Tony remained frozen, staring accusingly, his face a deep red now, at the culpable clarinet.

The leader tapped quickly on his podium and held up his fingers to signify to the band what selection he wanted and wanted quickly. When the band blared out, it was apparent that he had been misunderstood, for "America the Beautiful" vied valiantly with "*Semper Fidelis*" and "The Stars and Stripes Forever." The leader tore at his hair and committed the unforgiveable sin of screaming, "No! No! No!" The announcer held up his hand and the music trailed off to a discordant stop. Then he spoke something into the microphone, but Tony, though he had not committed the added sin of participating in the discordant music, still felt so miserable he didn't hear him.

The worst was yet to come. He did not have to face the leader of the band, for he took advantage of the confusion to sneak out of the studio. But on his way home, with clarinet case in hand, he had to run the gamut of ridicule and abuse which was handed out to him by the people he passed.

"He went to play a concert—and called the goats. Ho there, herder of goats!"

"Is he a clarinetist or a flutist?"

"Hey, Tony! Sell it and buy a whistle!"

"*Povero ragazzo! Leave him be!*"

"*Povero ragazzo? Povero Don Peppino! Che disgrazia, che disgrazia—*"

"He is not the son of the father!"

Tony walked along with head hung low, looking neither to the right or left, slunk into the doorway of his tenement, and wearily climbed the stairs to his home.

There he was forced again to endure censure. Don Peppino, his face set sternly in disapprobation, averted his eyes when he walked in. Fran was saying something about never, *never* showing her face outside the house again, and his mother wrung her apron in her hands and caressed him with compassionate eyes.

He'd disgraced the family. He'd squeaked. Even Nicky, who usually didn't care about such things, gave him a dirty look.

## 8

If the Fazzones were occasionally plunged into disgrace by the inept attempts of one of its less seasoned members, its top performer was not long in repairing matters.

Though Don Peppino was frequently accused of giving his opinions freely only because it gave him an opportunity to dramatize affairs and send people running to the Smorfia, it was, in this instance, conceded that the lottery did the whole Eastside a great service by being instrumental in exposing one of the most insidious movements ever to threaten its moral structure. There were, of course, those jealous few who insisted that it was a man called *Il Miserabile*, and not Don Peppino and the lottery, who should have got the credit. In a small way this was true, but since *Il Miserabile*—a grumpy, penurious old rag picker who, though owning two tenement blocks, still went about the streets scavengering rubbish barrels and doing odd jobs—had been motivated purely by avarice



and Don Peppino only by an unselfish desire to serve his fellow Eastsiders, few people, if any, thought Il Miserabile had any credit coming. In fact, Il Miserabile was lucky he was still living.

However that may be, it all started when Filomena Rucci was caught in a mildly compromising situation with one Gabriello D'Annunziato. Donato had followed the indiscreet pair to a theater, and when they emerged, he belabored D'Annunziato—known as a gentle and inoffensive man—with a stick with which, for the purpose, he'd armed himself beforehand. Serious harm was spared D'Annunziato only by the intervention of a few law-conscious citizens. But before they were able to seize Rucci and have him arrested, D'Annunziato had received, if not a fatal beating, a painful one. In court the next morning, Rucci was found guilty of assault and battery and fined fifty dollars.

This caused another tumult, for D'Annunziato, appearing as the aggrieved party, thought that the fifty dollars would be paid to him. When he learned, however, that it would go to the city, he asked how this could be so, since it was he and not the city who had received the *battete*. When he persisted in this argument to the point of vocally disrupting not only the general peace but that of the court as well, he in turn was placed under arrest, and though his claim that the fifty dollars belonged to him was nothing but justice in its purest form, it was too primitive to be grasped by the modern mind, and he was fined ten dollars. He emerged from the Hall of Justice a bitter and disillusioned man, especially where he had gallantly claimed to have been on a purely platonic basis with Filomena.

Now there were many people on the Eastside who were struck by the justness of D'Annunziato's claim to the fifty dollars, and in seeking to clear their minds of the webs of confusion caused by his failure to get it, it was only natural that they should turn to someone who not only had the mind to interpret such matters to them but also the courage to stand by that interpretation. Obviously, Don Peppino was the only man who filled these qualifications.

Now lesser men would have edged and pursued that middle-of-the-road policy which Mrs. Fazzone euphemized as tact, but the Don was, if anything, heroically as-

sertive in his opinions. Not only that, but in judging any case, the Capo Collettore considered it always in all its ramifications.

In the first place the Don expressed surprise and no little disdain that in view of all the interesting points of the affair, the one that should stick out for his listeners was D'Annunziato's claim to the fifty dollars. Though according this point the tremendous merit it deserved, the Don pointed out that it was a relatively minor consideration, being, as he himself had so often contended on other occasions, an example of the silly and illogical laws they had in America. What was more important was the question of whether or not Filomena had made D'Annunziato a secret partner to her husband, and the inevitable repercussions springing up from this intriguing possibility.

Though Mrs. Fazzone's reputation for faithfulness was as great as that of Ulysses' Penelope, the Capo Collettore, for some mysterious reason, claimed to be an authority on the subject he was about to enlarge on, and to this end he bade his listeners give him their full attention.

He started off by deploring Rucci's precipitate action in chastising D'Annunziato for two reasons. The first was that in doing so he precluded the possibility of eventually establishing concretely that the two were more than they claimed to be; secondly, Rucci should not have beaten poor D'Annunziato, for since a man's stature increases with his amoral conquests, he is to be commended rather than punished for them. And since the reverse was true of women, it adds weight to the Don's subsequent statement that the wrong party was belabored.

From there the Don went on to give an admirable discourse on intent and act, and in the end adjudged Rucci a cuckold, for, as he claimed, no one had yet come forth with a plausible reason for D'Annunziato's being in the company of Filomena, who was more than capable of taking herself to the movies. As for D'Annunziato's claims that his relationship with Filomena was platonic, the Capo Collettore pointed out that it was all cant, and that the word had been manufactured solely for the use of women of the lesser mold to cloak their indiscretion with an air of quairespectability and approved by husbands who did not wish to be forced to acknowledge publicly an unflattering condition.

Being a thorough man, Don Peppino went on to



strengthen his point by citing numerous cases where Filomena had displayed an unbecoming independence. Then he added that since he was not a man to take a vessel out to the middle of the ocean and leave it there, he would not feel easy at mind if he did not go all the way. This, of course, meant no less than adding the term "contented" to that of cuckold in hereafter referring to Donato. For in the face of the facts, Rucci continued to live with his wife.

Of course the repercussions, as usual, were many and varied. The first, and most important of these was Donato's charge that Don Peppino was a *maffioso*. In view of the man's fondness for calling the police, and his unsuspected tendency to violence, it was at the moment perhaps wiser for the Don not to divorce him from that belief, for the *maffiosi* reaped their greater fame from their ability to administer rather than receive *battete*. This reluctance to set Rucci straight is of course no reflection on the Don's physical courage, but rather stern proof of his distaste for unnecessary imbroglios.

Now Don Peppino, in letting his opinion chips fly, usually cared little where they landed or what reactions ensued. But in this case he was surprised that there was no comment from the only other affected party in the case. D'Annunziato having been absolved by the Don in the aside opinion relative to the respective culpabilities of the female as opposed to the male, this left only Filomena. By having her husband labeled a *cornuto contento*, she stood exposed by the laws of logic as a *puttana*. The Don found it singular then that there were no howls of righteous protestations from her. It had seemed, as he later said, as if one had kicked a hornets' nest open and had, instead of being viciously attacked by the little pests, seen them meekly crawl away. It just wasn't right.

As a matter of fact, the Capo Collettore was seen to frown one Sunday morning as he stood in the midst of a group of men. Strolling along the other side of the street was none other than Donato Rucci. This fact in itself was not enough to bring the frown to Don Peppino's face; but stuck prominently in Rucci's lapel was a huge red geranium. Since it was well known that Filomena grew them in her window box, it was clear that she had pinned it on her husband, and that the pinning thereof not only signified that all was well between the couple, but it also testified to a disrespectful callousness to Don Peppino's

opinions. It was this latter conclusion which had brought the frown to the Don's face.

On the following Sunday the Don was amazed to see, in addition to Rucci, three more men parading about the Eastside with geraniums pinned in their lapels. Now the Capo Collettore wondered if he should give the vogue impetus by sporting a geranium himself, but since he did not originate it, and it would, in fact, be following an example set by an enemy, he refused to demean himself by doing so. In the meanwhile, each succeeding Sunday found more men parading about each sporting a geranium in his lapel, until one Sunday the Don counted ten in all.

In truth, the sight of the boutonnieres disturbed the Don and often caused him to falter in the midst of some particularly important dissertation. And well he might have been disturbed, for he was reputed to be one of the more fastidiously dressed men on the Eastside and did not relish being beaten to the punch in the world of fashion, especially by one of Rucci's caliber.

It was along about this time, while Don Peppino alarmingly saw this threat to his reputation as a fashion plate grow more dangerous every Sunday, that Il Miserabile entered the picture. Now Il Miserabile was not one to waste so much as a penny on the lottery, but once, after peeling and splitting a potato, he'd found, traced in potato rust, three numbers. He was so moved by the startling vision that he risked ten cents on the numbers. As luck would have it, they were drawn and he won five hundred dollars. When the people heard about it they wanted to kill the despicable miser then and there, and there were many criticisms directed to Heaven on the injustice of it.

But Il Miserabile merely cackled in satisfaction and went about saying that most people were foolish and played every trivial incident which came up. Only the most dramatic, he insisted, should be translated into winning numbers. And true to his word, he played no more, hinting that when an event of earth-shaking proportions took place, he would play again. Naturally, Don Peppino was displeased with this attitude, for it set a bad example to his lottery constituency.

It was, therefore, with a pardonable feeling of vindictive satisfaction that the Don saw Il Miserabile enter his home one Friday evening, for it would now get around that the miser had recanted and returned to the fold. Il Miserabile,



wearing the proverbial look of the cat who had swallowed the canary, handed the Capo Collettore a dollar bill and a slip on which there were three numbers.

Don Peppino was shocked. A dollar wager was a fantastically large sum which stood to win Il Miserabile five thousand dollars. Seldom was there so much money put on any set of numbers, and Don Peppino would have to notify the company before drawing time so that they in turn could lay some of it off to another company.

Don Peppino pursed his lips. "What historic event have you witnessed now?" he said, unable to keep the sarcasm out of his voice.

"Ah, ah, it is none of your business," replied Il Miserabile smugly. "See only that the money is paid me when I win, or I will have you and the company which backs you behind bars."

Don Peppino frowned severely and thought of hurling the numbers, along with the money, into the old man's face. But he said nothing, for, since Il Miserabile would doubtlessly spread the story of how his wager had been refused, this would not only lend credence to the claims of certain people that the Don knew beforehand what numbers would be drawn, but also spawn the rumor that he was afraid to take Il Miserabile's play.

The next day, when Tony handed Il Miserabile a *stampina*, the old man scanned it quickly, turned pale, tottered, and almost fell. When he recovered, he went about the Eastside yelling that they'd handed him a slip with the wrong numbers on it. On Sunday *The New York Daily News*, which always published the results of the drawings in Italy, confirmed the authenticity of the local *stampina*.

And yet Il Miserabile was not satisfied. He went to the Italian bank and dispatched a telegraph to a relative in Italy, asking that a copy of that week's numbers be sent him, and was forced to add that he be replied collect. Not until he received the return wire did he bitterly accept the fact that he had lost. And all in all, counting the price of the telegrams, it had cost him a pretty sum. Il Miserabile was boiling mad.

The following Sunday Il Miserabile was seen to station himself on a street corner, and as the men who had taken to wearing the geranium boutonnieres passed near him he engaged them, on one pretext or another, in conversation,

until he had them all grouped together. Don Peppino, watching from an opposite corner, wondered what the old eccentric was about. He soon found out.

Il Miserabile had started cursing the bewildered men, heaping maledictions and fearful imprecations on their heads. The first inkling came when Il Miserabile heatedly exclaimed; "It is a wonder your hats all fit you with the horns that stick out from your foreheads!"

This was villainy of the worst sort and brought about angry protests and demands for explanations. Il Miserabile hurled them at the men.

"Jackasses! *Malandrinos!* Piles of dung! Husbands of whores! Know you not why you wear those flowers? Ah! *Caro mio!* The parade of the cuckolds! Ha, ha, ha, ha." The old man's laughter trailed off hysterically.

The regiment of cuckolds attacked at once. The old man was grabbed and in the ensuing melee the geranium petals flew about like feathers in a pillow fight. Il Miserabile, though he put up a surprising battle, was mauled about quite a bit before Officer Slannigan appeared on the scene and dispersed the men, leaving the petals of ignominy glued to the sidewalk with quite a bit of Il Miserabile's blood.

Later the story came out. It seemed that Il Miserabile, unknown to one of his tenants, had entered her flat and was under the sink repairing a leak when she returned with a group of women. He had overheard all. It was a weekly meeting of a club organized for the mutual amusement of its members, and it was at these meetings, which were rotated from one home to another, that new members were inducted.

Ah, it was all so beautiful! Even Il Miserabile, who was reputed to have no soul, had been struck by the poetic justness of it all. It seemed that Filomena, who was not a woman to take anything lying down, had marshaled friends who entertained similar views, and in a move designed to avenge themselves on society and its misogynous leanings, and on their husbands as well, had organized the club which was known, only to them, as the Club of the Parade of the Cuckolds. Each one was to recruit as many members as possible. It was a chance to avenge all the beatings they received, to make up for all the freedom they were denied, and to get full value for the prohibitive prices they were forced to pay for the pleas-



ures which men took for granted. When a woman had revenged herself by attaching a horn upon her husband's forehead, she had merely to pin a geranium lovingly on his lapel of a Sunday morning to signify that this was done. The members of the club, looking out their windows, would chuckle among themselves as they saw their behorned husbands strolling proudly about the Eastside displaying their boutonnieres. When the members saw a new recruit, they knew that another fighter had joined their ranks, and she was formally inducted into the club at its next meeting.

It was this tremendously original idea which had driven Il Miserabile to risk a dollar on numbers based on the words "cuckold," "parade," and "geranium." When he lost his money he took to brooding about it, and he not unjustly came to the conclusion that if the men involved had not been incapable of keeping their wives in line, he would not have lost the money. The only way he could revenge himself was to expose them all, husbands and wives.

It was a disgrace which drove all the involved men except one from the Eastside, a few of them going so far as to return to Italy. The exception was Donato Rucci. He endured all the jibes and insults and continued to live with the infamous organizer of the Club of the Parade of the Cuckolds.

It was a personal victory for the Capo Collettore, more than vindicating his harsh branding of Rucci as a *cornuto contento*, and for the Italian lottery, a tremendous civic achievement. For, had the movement been allowed to spread, a too-late exposure might well have denuded the Eastside of husbands at one stroke.

But on the afternoon of that fateful Sunday, Don Pepino, as he mounted the stairs to his home for dinner, did not look like a man who had triumphed. He was at that moment recalling how he had considered adopting the idea of wearing a geranium in his lapel. Upon entering his flat he reached shakily for the bottle of anisette and was forced to consume it all before restoring himself to some degree of normalcy.

It was the first time in his life that the Capo Collettore used liquore to the injudicious point of having it spoil his dinner, though he was never sure after, if it *had* been the liquore.

In spite of the great love Tony bore his grandmother, and the prestige and entertainment she gave him, there was one chore in connection with her where his feelings for her were not enough to carry him through.

This was Zia Maria's weekly trip to Mount St. Benedict Cemetery. Come sickness, hell, or high water, Zia Maria, every Sunday afternoon, went to visit her dead. On these trips it was necessary to have someone accompany her in order to board the correct trolley. Occasionally she selected one of her other grandchildren to accompany her, but most of the times she would notify Mrs. Fazzone to have one of her children ready. This of course meant nobody but Tony. Nicky always ruled himself out, and Fran would have faced the demons of hell single-handedly rather than go with her. For the job Tony would receive the truly magnificent sum of a dime. It wasn't worth it.

Tony was given notification that Sunday morning. He put up the usual beef. "How about Nicky doing it for a change? Why do I have to all the time? Why me? Why?"

Don Peppino, in the act of consuming his morning anisette, frowned and paused to study this amazingly infallible reaction.

"*Grazia Dio*, Antonio," he said, "that Armando Diaz had not such a one as you in his army! How then could Italy have saved the world from the Kaiser?"

"Italy didn't save the world! The United States did, and I can prove it!"

Don Peppino paled. "Is this then, what they teach you in the schools here?"

"*Silenzio*, Antonio!" his mother warned him.

Desperately, Tony returned to the original issue. "Why don't we pin a sign on her saying, 'Please put me on the Blue Hills trolley?' I saw Mrs. Santangelo on Main Street with a sign something like that once."

Don Peppino's frown deepened. Mrs. Fazzone, heading off the coming storm of reprisals, said quickly, "Come,



Antonio, you know well that she could take the wrong trolley on her return."

Tony insisted that they could give Zia Maria another paper which she could pin on herself on the way back, but he was a loser from wire to wire. Accordingly, after dinner, he waited on the street for his grandmother to come along.

Zia Maria, dressed for visiting, would have inspired the most cynical song writer in the world to fly to his piano and compose a tender, moving ditty about sweet old ladies. Dressed always in black—in the winter with a faithfully brushed coat of an obscure fur—she looked so prim and immaculate that a stranger would never have guessed that in addition to her aversion for water as a beverage, she never applied it to her person. She never wore any scent, for only tainted women did that, and the smell of her was the clean, earthy smell of the soil. And when her features were relaxed, Leonardi di Vinci could not have imbued a face with more sweetness and benignity.

As Tony and his grandmother walked the two blocks west to the trolley stop in front of G. Fox's department store, they met many friends with whom the old lady stopped to talk. With the women she gossiped and wept commiseratingly over their misfortunes. Her conversation with the men, however, was at violent odds with her appearance. For in spite of the tender years of her grandson, she exchanged lewd jests with them and, from the unassailable heights of her great age, insulted them freely, more often than not ending by driving home a barbarous shaft deprecating their virility. All this Tony didn't mind too much, for he suspected that people expected it from her and would have felt let down if she didn't treat them the way she did.

At the trolley stop Tony, who'd been through it all before, began his plea to her to get the fare ready. He knew before he started that it would be a vain one, but the thought of what was to follow always made him try again.

"*Silenzio, Animale!*" Zia Maria warned him.

Tony bit his lip and shut up. When they boarded the trolley Tony's glance went automatically to the motor-man's neck. He trembled. The neck, naturally, was coarse red. Uniforms were bad enough, but hand in hand with a red neck, the two were, as far as his grandmother was

concerned, catalytic. Tony mumbled something to the motorman about the old lady paying his fare and hurried to the rear of the trolley where, hoping against hope that the other passengers would not know she was related to him, he kept his eyes nervously on Zia Maria.

The trolley had started, and Zia Maria was preparing to pay the fares. Tony held his breath as she started to lift her skirt. But then she dropped it, and he groaned softly. That meant she had seen the red neck. Now she was glinting at it angrily, but the motorman, unaware of the old woman's stare, concerned himself with guiding the trolley on its course. Tony, breath suspended, let it out in relief when he saw that his grandmother, lifting her skirt again, intended to let the red neck pass with only a grim setting of her lips.

Zia Maria carried a black handbag, but it was nothing more than a prop. She did not keep her money in it, for she had heard of too many instances where women had lost their husbands' wages because their purses had been snatched. The job of robbing Zia Maria would have driven a hardened pickpocket to honest labor. To have robbed her he would have had to strip her, and this would have involved an hour's arduous labor if she submitted willingly, which was highly improbable. She always wore, summer or winter, at least three petticoats, and under these, next to her skin, long winter flannel underwear. Sewn to her underwear, in the region of her upper thigh, was a pocket, and in this pocket, the flap of which was secured by at least four safety pins, she carried her money. And if she as much as needed so insignificant a sum as a penny, she had to go into that pocket for it.

With her feet planted unwaveringly on solid ground, she could extract money from that pocket without help. But on a trolley swaying drunkenly on its course, she was forced to support herself with one hand while she lifted her dress and petticoats with the other. Oblivious to the giggling of the other passengers, she exposed a leg clad tightly in flannel underwear and, as she strove unsuccessfully to release the hand which held her petticoats to un-clasp the safety pins, looked around for her grandson.

"Antonio!"

But Antonio was out of sight, behind the side of a seat, sobbing to himself: "I won't, I won't. It ain't fair. I begged her to get the fare ready."



*"Animale!"*

The motorman looked to see what the matter was, turned pale, and snapped his head back around again. Over his shoulder he snarled, "Why don'tcha sit down and take out yer fare, lady?"

Zia Maria halted her operations, causing her dress and petticoats to drop abruptly, and turned her attention to the motorman. She did not understand what he had said, but obviously, nothing good could come from the mouth of one who wore a uniform. Added to that, the motorman could not possibly be an Italian. To Zia Maria there were only two nationalities in the world: Italians and non-Italians, and the latter she termed, in one embracing swoop, "Iresha bumma."

After addressing the motorman as one of that despicable group, there followed a bath of invective so enveloping that only a Latin could have uttered it. Then she told him that he was a dung heap which even the flies would scorn, and proceeded to call him some more choice names in which the word *puttana* came into great play. The cringing Tony, who heard it bandied about so freely on the Eastside, thought surely that all the passengers on the trolley must know its meaning. In the meanwhile, Zia Maria had gone on to defile the motorman's ancestors for seven generations back and returning, until she arrived once again at the black hour of his birth.

Tony, his ears ringing with the fluid curses, ventured a look from around the corner of the seat. Though at first glance one would not have thought it possible, the motorman's neck had grown redder. There was little doubt that he understood the old woman's words, for the stream of live profanity issuing from her grim lips was a work of art which transcended the barriers of lingual unintelligibility. He brought the trolley to a grinding halt and, almost apoplectic with impotent rage, waited until Zia Maria unloosened the pins on her pocket, extracted and paid the fare.

The motorman having now been thoroughly cursed, the fare paid, and the trolley once again on its way, Zia Maria seated herself and primly adjusted her skirt. A sweet smile came over her benign features.

She loved to ride on trolley cars.

When the trolley reached the cemetery, which was at the end of Blue Hills Avenue, Tony and Zia Maria were

the last passengers to leave it. As Zia Maria neared the motorman on her way out, she lifted her handbag and started to bring it down across the red neck. Tony, warned by similar performances in the past, was ready. He grasped her arm and hurried her along. The motorman, preoccupied with his record book, did not see it all, but he did give them a queer look.

"Jeezus," muttered Tony, scrambling down out of the trolley.

Zia Maria was a prodigious attender of funerals, and once having seen a friend or relative consigned to the grave, she never forgot its location. Neighbors, knowing she went every week to the cemetery, expiated their own absences by asking her to look at the graves of their loved ones and report back to them if the weeds had taken control over the turf. On her way to her own plot she would discharge these little errands and also stop to visit with the graves of departed friends.

It was a performance that Tony always witnessed with awe. The cemetery was a huge maze of circling paths, confusing to anyone who did not visit it often. But Zia Maria, though she could not verify the identities of the graves by reading the tombstones, never got lost or made a mistake. Tony tagged along behind her as she walked, as the crow flies, stepping carefully over the neat mounds, to the various graves.

Zia Maria visited *with* the graves, gossiping with the dead she had known intimately, and she never repeated news which she had already imparted to them, keeping them informed, as it were, of the latest developments of interest to them. As she talked she kept her arms around the tombstone, uncannily personifying it as she hugged and kissed it, for it was to these representatives of the dead below that she directed her words. At some graves she wept and wrung her hands; at others, in a remarkable transition of mood, she laughed and winked as she recounted some piece of ribaldry. And still at others there were tender assurances.

"Ah, Giuseppe, how goes it with you? I saw your son the other day. He is a good boy and helps his mother. Soon the little girl will also find work. *Sì*, Giuseppe, sleep in peace, for all is well with your family." And, giving the tombstone a quick farewell hug, she moved on.

And she was no subscriber to the belief that no ill



should be spoke of the dead. Passing the grave of one of these. "Ah, *fetento!* Whom do you harm now? May your veins burst open, wherever you are!" This curse she accented by giving the tombstone a sharp blow with her handbag.

And so, progressing in this manner, they neared Zia Maria's own plot. The moment she came in view of it she threw up her arms and cried, "Antonio! Palmela! Tito! I am here! I am here!" And then she ran, as fast as her age permitted, toward the graves, muttering with every step, "I come, I come," as if her beloved ones were pleading with her to hurry.

At the graves she fell to the ground, picked up the soil from the neat mounds, kissed it, and let it run through her fingers. She went to each tombstone, caressed and hugged it, and asked if they had missed her during the week. Then she was back on her hands and knees, fussing about the three graves, weeding the turf, burying a leaf here, replanting a flower there, keeping up all the while a running conversation with her husband and children, telling them all the things that had happened in the world of the living since she had left them the Sunday before.

After having touched up the graves to her satisfaction, Zia Maria reached into a pocket of her dress and extracted a length of string. Attached to it, for identification, was a piece of wood rubbed smooth from years of handling.

Tony waited patiently, ready to play, for what number of time he didn't know, his part in the coming scene.

Zia Maria, in the meantime, holding the string in her hand, was glancing slyly around, and then, satisfied that there were no prying eyes about, crooked a conspiratorial finger at her grandson and beckoned him closer.

"Little one," she whispered, "know you that there is room for only four graves in this plot of mine?"

Once—it seemed like ages ago—Tony had tried to tell her he knew everything she was going to say. Often, he wondered how his grandmother could remember the most awesome details and yet forget that he heard what she was going to say time and time again. But he was too young to understand the obsessions that fear can inspire. Now, he patiently nodded his head.

"Ah, you know, then? And do you know that your little sister, whom you cannot remember, also sleeps here?"

Tony, unthinkingly, again nodded his head.

His answer seemed to anger Zia Maria, for a glint came into her eyes. "And how can you know, *Animale*?"

"My mother told me," he hastened to inform her.

"Ah, so that is the way? And did she tell you, your poor mother, that they had no money to buy a plot of graves? Was the *poverina* to lie alone in the dark in a single grave forever? Now heed me closely."

Tony gave her another routine nod.

"Do you listen, *Animale*?"

"*Si, si*, I listen," said Tony, putting a more alert look on his face.

Zia Maria turned and put one end of the string next to one of the neat mounds. She stretched it out to about six inches, where it formed a noticeable knot. She placed a finger on this knot and turned to Tony.

"Your little sister is buried here. The coffin was so small that I knew it would not take much room. Your mother could not bear the thought of her sleeping alone, and when I told her she could put her in the arms of your grandfather, uncle, and aunt, it assuaged her grief."

At this point, Tony always choked with tears. He sniffed and nodded again.

"Now heed me closely, little one," continued Zia Maria. She moved the string. "Here lies your grandfather." She moved the string again to another identifying knot. "Here lies Palmela, and here lies Tito. So you see that your little sister lies between the grave of your grandfather and the one reserved for me. I stayed and watched them fill the grave and I think they left her coffin sticking out a little, though they would not admit this was so. Now, if my grave is not dug just so—*Animale!* Do you watch where I place the string?"

Tony restored the look of attention to his face.

"If my grave," continued Zia Maria grimly, "is not dug just so, they will discover the casket of your sister. Now, this is what you must do. When I am dead you must hurry to the undertaker and tell him you must be present when my grave is dug. The string is always kept in the base of the statue of the Holy Virgin which is on my bureau. With it you can show them where to dig so as not to disturb your sister. That's why it is important that you know where to show them. *Gesu!* I have a fear that if they find there is not enough room for me, the police will insist that I be buried elsewhere, away from my loved ones. You



must not let that happen. You must promise me that you will not let that happen. Do you promise?"

"Aw, you're not going to die," said Tony, believing it.

"Imbecile!" fumed Zia Maria. "Would you deny me that luxury? It is a road we all must travel one day. Why do you think I pay the extra fare on the trolley if it is not to show you where I must be buried?"

"But," said Tony, rising characteristically to the debate, "they have laws. What can I do if the authorities say you can't be buried here?"

"Ah, what can you do! Have I truly begotten an imbecile?" cried Zia Maria, who never gave her children credit for the births of her grandchildren. They were all hers. "Do you not speak their tongue? Do you not go to their school? Must I tell you what to say to them?"

"But, Mammavecchia, you do not lie in bed with illness. Why do you always say you're going to die?"

"Ah, little one, you are young and the young do not concern themselves with death. But it is well to be prepared. And yet you have not promised to do what I ask."

"I have promised you many times."

"Is it so? You see? Is it not as I have said many times? You are a good boy." Then the angry glint came into her eyes. "But tell me, *Animale*, will you come to visit my grave when I am dead?"

"Sì, Mammavecchia."

"Ah, I wonder. But come, let us start for home lest nightfall catches us on the streets. Do you remember what I've told you? Here, little one, take the string and show me."

Under the sternly watching eyes of his grandmother, Tony took the string and repeated her directions. Satisfied that her instructions had been carefully heeded, Zia Maria enacted a heart-rending and tearful leave-taking of her dead and told them that they were to expect her as usual next Sunday.

The trip back to the cemetery gates was again made as the crow flies, but nonstop. As they reached them, Tony was desperately trying to think of an excuse for putting her on a trolley alone and then waiting for the next one. But he knew it would be a vain try. The shadows of late afternoon were beginning to gather, and Zia Maria would never abandon him to the darkness.

## 10

That summer Tony learned how to swim in the Riverside Park wading pool. After that important accomplishment he made the long trek with his friends to the remote ends of the park to a river beach they called the Second Sand Bar. This was disobedience of the most flagrant nature, and one as easily exposed as not.

The Connecticut River claimed many victims. More often than not, Tony and the gang, on their way to swimming, passed a blanket-covered body on the banks of the river awaiting transportation to the morgue. They would pause awhile to watch, to satisfy their morbid curiosity. But after the death wagon had come and gone, they continued unconcernedly on their way.

Many times they had the misfortune of having someone drown while they, unaware of it, were happily swimming farther down the river. The Eastside mothers, however, always knew when someone had drowned. From the rooftops the river was plainly visible to the many women hanging clothes or spreading their *stratto* and peppers in the sun to dry. When Cunningham, the official body retriever, appeared with his row boat and grappling irons, the alarm flared out.

*"Connahamme e' incoppa a' rivela! Connahamma e' incoppa a' rivela!"*

*"Dio! Dio mio!"*

*"La morte! La morte! La morte e' incoppa a' rivela!"*

*"Madonna, Madonna, pe' carita, pe' carita!"*

The cries traveled like fire in the wind. Frantic mothers went screaming through the back yards, and every kid on the Eastside knew that this was no game, but time to step out and be counted. When the inventory had been completed the hysterical mothers of the boys still unaccounted for started out for the park to search the banks of the river. By the time they reached the freight yards next to its entrance, there was a small army of them.

The culprits were usually caught red-handed. Even if they happened to be returning fully dressed, their hair



and faces, glistening with an unnatural cleanliness, gave them away.

Tony didn't mind too much as long as he saw his mother in the group, for she was always so overjoyed to find him alive she only embarrassed him a little by kissing and hugging him in front of the fellows. But with his grandmother it was a different story. The first time Zia Maria came after him, he didn't know how she was going to react to his evil doing. However, she too kissed and hugged him, but just as he was beginning to think he had the rap beat, she turned around and gave him a shellacking with her customary thoroughness. After that, if he saw her in the group of women, he'd run as fast as his short legs could carry him. But Zia Maria never forgot. She put the licking in the bank, so to speak, and drew it out for him later.

In the fall, Tony joined the swimming class at the YMCA. These classes ran for a week and were organized to teach the underprivileged children how to swim. Tony had already passed the acid test of swimming across the river, but it was the only way he could get into a real swimming pool. Of course, for the first few days he had to pretend he couldn't swim or the instructor would have snapped him across his bare buttocks with a wet towel and banished him from the class. But when he could safely reveal his ability it was fun splashing around in the pool and diving off its sides.

When it was all over and they passed the test of swimming the length of the pool, they earned a small button medal. These were sent to the classrooms and presented to the pupils by their teachers. Miss Emerson, Tony's new teacher, cried when she handed them out and made a great ceremony of pinning them on the chests of the boys who had honored her room. Tony, who recently had been captivated by the tale of *The Knights of the Round Table*, felt as if King Arthur had touched him upon the shoulder with Excalibur.

It never occurred to him that Miss Emerson might see Sir Anthony in a different light if she knew of his Friday night quests; nor, in all justice, was his unconditional acceptance of the medallion of honor incompatible with his lottery duties, for he viewed them just as another chore his father commanded him to perform. But even if these

chores had been exposed to analysis, probably Tony would have viewed them in the same light he did his medal.

For in every home he entered he was hailed as the son of Don Peppino, Il Capo Collettore, and he was accorded every honor commensurate with that eminence. No matter what the hour, tables were set for him and he was forced to eat. It was an honor to have him grace their table, and the agents and their wives would not take no for an answer. Friday being a meatless day, Tony acquired a familiarity with dishes that were indigenous to the various parts of Italy and the ingenious improvisations on food staples that made each one a gourmet's item. He also picked up terms and accents which made his Italian a conglomeration of the numerous dialects spoken in Italy.

He received, also, lessons in Italian sociology, for people on the Eastside were known more by what part of Italy they came from than by their surnames. In the home of Vincenzo U'Napolitano he was usually given *pizza* spread with mozzarella cheese and a tomato sauce or fish stewed in tomato sauce. With the Neapolitans, everything was tomatoes. At the table of Pasquale U'Siciliano he was given plain *pizza* stuffed with a seasonal green or a white soup of *pasta* and greens. In the home of Alfonso U'Bruzzeo he was given a plate of *pasta e' fasul* loaded with hot peppers, which the people of Abruzzi ate like candy. In the home of Dino U'Piedmonteso he was given a sauceless *polenta*. It was a gastronomical *giro di forza*, and they plied food onto him unheeding of his pleas that he'd already eaten a number of times. In addition to the food, wine and cordials were bullied into him. Because of all this, his collection rounds took the better part of four hours, and he usually got home long after eleven, bloated, sometimes green in the face, and, as often as not, a little drunk, at which time his mother forced yet another liquor on him. This was no less than the dreaded dose of epsom salts.

The lottery route wove Tony in and out of the back alleys and porches, the breadth and length of the Eastside. Earlier in the evening he was usually accompanied by a number of friends, but as they went home one by one, the last few stops found him alone. An occasional lone companion on these, for a want of anything better to do, was Tokie, a boy about three years older than Tony. When Tony came across him leaning against a building or



astride a hydrant, he didn't know whether to duck him or pick him up, for Tokie's companionship filled him with a mingling of pride, security, and apprehension.

Tokie was known to the Eastside women as *Povero Toka*, for he was motherless, and this fact automatically earned him the sympathy of the Italian mothers. But more than that, he'd been left to shift for himself when his father went back to Italy for a new wife and never returned.

Tokie grew up in the gutters and slept in hallways and poolrooms. He walked around, summer or winter, with an old pair of dungarees full of gaping holes. He was big for his age and one of the toughest kids on the Eastside, holding decisions over many of the grown-up guys. Nicky and Tony often took him home to eat with them, and at these times Mrs. Fazzone would stuff him with enough food to last him a week, and after he had gone she would weep and say, "Who knows when the poor boy will eat again? Ah, his poor mother! I knew her well. Pray to God she has found peace in Paradise."

Tony, knowing his mother, did not attempt to set her straight on one or two points. The fact was that, at the time Mrs. Fazzone was feeling sorry for him, *Povero Toka* probably had more money tied in a knot of his handkerchief than she would ever see in her life:

Tokie knew where almost every five gallon tin of alcohol on the Eastside was stored. He made periodic trips into cellars and barns, hijacking on a small scale, but enough to always keep him in plenty of money. Tokie buying fifteen or twenty admissions to a movie with that many friends in line behind him was no unusual sight, and it was he who had lured Tony and Nicky into cafeterias uptown and given them their first taste of catsup and custard pie.

The bootleggers knew who was pilfering their stock, but none of them ever did anything about it. Tokie was a little too fast with his fists for them, and guns and knives held no terrors for him. They shrugged it off as part of the operating expense.

"Heesa gooda keeda," they would say. "Taka littla bit now an' thenna. Maka no differenza."

One Friday Tony had just completed a stop on Market Street, not far from the police station. He was alone, with the worst stop on his route ahead of him. A number of

times he had pleaded with his father to ask Mr. Fanelli to have his play ready earlier so that he could pick it up at the beginning, but for some reason Mr. Fanelli could not. Now he walked south to State Street and turned east. On the corner of State and Front he bumped into Tokie, strolling along with his thumbs stuck in the rope he used as a trouser belt. It was ten-thirty.

"How much more ya gotta do?" said Tokie.

Tony was glad to see him. "Down the end of Front and then one on Kilbourn Street." Kilbourn Street was on his way back.

"Les go," said Tokie, falling in with him. They turned south on Front and continued past Grove, deep in the heart of the Gas House district.

Don Peppino had often given the opinion that the cream of Italian society lived on the part of Front Street in which his own home was located, and that the lower end was inhabited only by people of *la classe bassa*. There the streets were deserted and dimly lit and the tenements housed a mixture of Chinese, Negroes, and whites. Tony always entered the area with misgivings, walking as far from the buildings as he could get, for every alley and doorway he passed posed as a threat from which attack could come. Now, as he walked along with Tokie, he sneaked sidelong glances at him. Tokie showed about as much concern as he did when strolling down the aisle of a movie theater.

"Jeez," said Tony, shuddering. "I hate this stop."

"I'll go in whijja," said Tokie. "If the guy gets tough—"

"Naw, it ain't that," said Tony, ashamed to tell Tokie one of the reasons was his fear. "Mr. Fanelli's all right. It's the old lady drives me nuts. She's a little dingy."

Tokie grinned. "That the one makes you drink a glass of anisette and only it's water 'stead of anisette?"

"Yeah, but it ain't even that. Her and the old man always have a commotion over her daughter Nellie. He's her stepfather. You know her, Tokie. Is it right what they say about her?"

Tokie shrugged. He wasn't interested in girls. "I know a coupla guys claim they done it to her," he said, matter of factly.

They came to the last building on Front Street, a medium-sized tenement block. Across the street from it the



Gas House intermittently belched flames with a muffled roar, giving the area brief illuminations. Beyond it was a little stream known as the Hog River, which emptied into the Connecticut, a block to the east. A bridge spanned it, and across the bridge was Sheldon Street and the beginning of the Polish section.

In the Italian home, the kitchen was the social center, and in it took place all the entertaining, the everyday living, and the arguments. Among the hot-blooded Italians, there was no such thing as keeping the soiled family linen off the line. Once a family imbroglio got under way, there was no stopping its steady climb to the point where exposés and curses were screamed out at top voice. If later, in the calm of retrospection, it was realized that a few family skeletons had been rattled, this was shrugged off with the assurance that other families had worse and an old Italian quote which said in effect that the beautiful rose springs only from dirt. Tony, sitting at the table figuring the lottery slips, was often an ignored bystander as family arguments raged hot and furious, and his young head held more gossip than a hundred housewives put together.

The Fanelli kitchen was in the back of the building, and since entering by the front meant that Tony would have to walk through the bedrooms of the boxcar flat, he always went through the back. With Tokie following him, he walked through a narrow alley and into a back yard to the beginning of a stair well which wound up through three floors of porches on either side of it.

"Go ahead," said Tokie. "I'll wait in the yard."

Tony, wondering how Tokie dared to wait alone in the yard, entered the dark stair well and made his way up to the third floor. There he knocked on a door.

"*Trasite!*" roared Mr. Fanelli.

Tony opened the door and went in. Mr. Fanelli sat alone at a table laboriously totaling his lottery slips. He was a muscular man in his early fifties, worked on the railroad, and his hands, arms, face, hair, and clothing were always filled with soil and black cinders. Don Peppino always knew which of the collection money was Mr. Fanelli's, for the coins and bills were always gritty with sand or dirt. He was, in the literal sense, a *cafone*, a true clod. In addition, he was notoriously thickheaded, and though Tony could have totaled the slips and checked the sum

against the money in less than five minutes, Mr. Fanelli insisted on doing this himself. Tony, in an agony of frustrated patience, had to wait while the man, wetting the tip of the pencil in his mouth before every jot, slowly, ever so slowly, did his *conti*.

"Ah!" a woman's voice shrilled suddenly. "It is Antonio, u' figlio d' Don Peppino!"

Tony shuddered. It was Mrs. Fanelli, who had come silently into the kitchen. She was a thin, wiry woman of about the same age as her husband, and now she clasped her hands in joy and stared at Tony with a benevolent look. Tony glanced despairingly at Mr. Fanelli, to see if the man was anywhere near done. Mr. Fanelli, seemingly unaware of the presence of his wife, continued to wet his pencil and write. Tony knew there was no escape. The money had yet to be sorted and counted.

Mrs. Fanelli swirled around suddenly, danced lightly to a cupboard and took out a bottle containing a colorless liqueur, and then reached out for a pony glass.

"Un' bicchiere d'anisette!" she sang gaily. "Un' bicchiere d'anisette!"

Tony, invariably angered by Mr. Fanelli's stubborn refusal to co-operate by being ready when he got there, set his lips, but controlled himself. He had learned that it was easier to go along with Mrs. Fanelli's little joke. But it took a lot of doing.

Now Mrs. Fanelli poured the liqueur into the pony glass, handed it to him, and waited, watching him with a sly look. Mr. Fanelli, ignoring the whole thing, continued to wet his pencil and make his sums.

Tony gulped the pseudo-anisette and put the expected look of surprise on his face.

"I have made the fool of thee!" screamed Mrs. Fanelli, laughing hysterically. "I have made the fool of thee!"

A cold shiver flashed its way up Tony's spine. Then the woman, giggling now, put the bottle away and, hopping and pirouetting, danced her way out of the kitchen. From the bedroom came her voice excitedly telling Nellie how she had duped the stupid son of Don Peppino.

But now Mr. Fanelli had done with his totals, and Tony, anxious to get out of there, quickly began to check them. Suddenly a shrill shriek shot through the flat and caused him to jump almost a foot off his chair.



"No-o-o-o-o! Your stepfather is an animal! Go and tell him it is not so! Go and tell him!"

In the next instant Mrs. Fanelli, a look of wild-eyed anger on her face, was back in the kitchen, dragging a reluctant Nellie after her.

"*Brutto animale!*" she screeched at her husband. "Here is my daughter! Dare you call such a sweet, innocent little angel a whore?"

Tony ventured a look at the little angel. Nellie was about twenty years old, liberally made up with rouge and lipstick, and had a hard, tough look beyond her years. As Tony tried to return to his business, Mr. Fanelli, now apparently at the end of his patience, had risen to his feet.

"Is it possible?" he cried bitterly. "Cannot some animal ever come into this house to conduct business without your causing all this commotion?"

Now Tony, knowing that a protracted argument was coming up, suddenly made up his mind. Don Peppino could come himself the next day for the money. He grabbed the slips on the table, flew out the door, and hurtled down the stairs with the screeches of the Fanellis ringing in his ears. In the yard, trying to catch his breath, he looked around for Tokie. A blast from the gas tank lit up the yard for him briefly. Tokie was nowhere to be seen.

Tony began to speculate on what could have happened to Tokie, and the more he speculated the more frightened he grew. It wasn't like Tokie to desert him, no matter how long he had been upstairs. Now, delivered of one ordeal, he found himself in a greater one, as, rooted to where he stood, the belief crept on him that Tokie had run afoul of one of the Negroes who lived on the ground floor and had been knifed and thrown behind some ash cans or under a porch. He wanted to run out of the yard, but if Tokie were still alive and needed help—

"Tokie—" It was a soft, urgent call, a desperate plea.

Two cellar doors yawned open. As Tony watched a shadow climb out of the hatchway, his heart broke loose from its moorings and pounded against his chest as if it would leap that barrier too, and every nerve in his body strained for voice in what would have been one prolonged scream of terror. He heard the muffled roar of another blast and—

"Tokie!" He almost collapsed in relief. "C'mon, let's get outa here," he said quickly.

"Whassa matter?"

"What's the matter?" sobbed Tony. "Where the heck were you?"

"I thought you were in trouble. Wait a minute. I'll be right back." He turned and re-entered the hatchway.

Tony's heart, on its way to normalcy, reversed itself and started thumping again. He stood there, waiting for Tokie to reappear, every minute crawling at an hour's pace. When Tokie did come up from the cellar he had a five gallon tin in either hand.

"Tokie, for cryin' out loud!" whispered Tony. "How ya gonna carry 'em? Everybody knows what's in them cans."

"Wait a minute."

"Wait some more? Drop 'em, eh, Tokie? C'mon. I'm scared."

"Whaddya scared of?"

"I know who owns that alchy. That jig lives on the first floor. He's tough. I see him come home a coupla times bleedin' like a stuck pig. I'm scared of him, Tokie."

"'Cause he was bleedin'? Hell, the guy who made him bleed is the guy you gotta be scared of. Just wait a minute."

Tokie put the cans down and turned to survey the porches on the ground floor. Then he climbed over a railing, and Tony saw his shadow bend down and disappear in the middle of a stack of wood. When he straightened out he beckoned Tony closer to the rail and handed him a wagon which was almost a duplicate of his own and calmly told him to put the cans of alchy in it. Tony, wanting only to get out of the yard, didn't waste any more time arguing with Tokie. Then Tokie started handing him wood, telling him to stack it over the gallon cans.

"That's enough," whispered Tony after a while, not really knowing or caring if the cans were properly covered or not.

But Tokie apparently didn't think so. Tony knew that the wagon and wood belonged to the same Negro whose cellar Tokie had already raided, and as he tremblingly took the wood from Tokie and threw it hurriedly in the wagon, he expected at any moment to hear the rear door



flung open and see the wild-eyed Negro come charging out of it brandishing a razor over his head.

"Tokie, please—the wagon's full."

Tokie nimbly leaped the railing, and Tony, anxious to get going, had to wait more agonizing moments while Tokie calmly searched for a piece of rope and then secured the load with it. They finally strolled out of the alley and onto the street, the one casually pushing a wagon which held ten gallons of alcohol, and the other with his pockets filled with money and lottery slips.

Tony didn't breathe easy until they came to the corner of Front and Kilbourn, where they parted company, Tokie to go sell his alchy to some fly-by-night bootlegger, and Tony to go and make his last stop in a building which was filled reassuringly with nothing but Italian families.

It had been a rough night, and Tony was glad to get home. As he sat at the table checking in the slips with Don Peppino, his mother busied herself with fixing him a little snack. Suddenly a crash of wood tumbling to the porch brought them to their feet. Mrs. Fazzone ran to the door and opened it. Tokie stood on the threshold.

"I found some wood and brought it up here," he said. "I'll be right back. I got another load in the yard."

Mrs. Fazzone, her hands clasped in rapture and her eyes aglow with joy, quickly set a place for Tokie at the table.

"*Povero Toka,*" she said. "He is such a nice boy. *Paro proprio commo la mamma.*"

*He looks exactly like his mother.* It was the highest praise an Italian woman can bestow.

Tony didn't say a word.

## 11

Life in the canyon, never stagnant, moved along at a healthy pace. From the Corsini flat Gina's screams were heard more frequently, for not only had her beauty increased as she matured, but she had come to an age where she now encouraged advances from the younger set. Across the way Donato Rucci pursued his life, brow-beaten by Filomena and supporting children who did not

even repay him with the grace of resembling him. Underneath the Ruccis, the flat next to the roof was empty. Minnie Fouche's husband had finally awakened to his wife's zeal for public service and had magnanimously removed himself from her path. Minnie lived in a room somewhere in the southern section of the Eastside.

There should be some tender memory niche for the Minnie Fouches of this world. And if that very world were ruled by biologists instead of a bigoted society and the lip service paid its tenets, Minnie Fouche's name would be at the head of the award of merit lists. Among Minnie's contemporaries there were few, if any, sex deviates.

On the Eastside, if a boy was still a virgin at the age of fifteen, he was considered a jerk. Naturally this classification had to be avoided at the expense of someone's sister or daughter, and this perplexing problem which, for instance, seemed perennially to obsess the Corsinis, was one of the true paradoxes of life and incriminated society as nothing else ever could, for obviously the golden rule did not apply here. Everybody wanted to break in, and those who had already done so wanted to keep their batting averages up. But nobody wanted their sisters used to attain the goal they were attempting to reach with the sisters of others. The pressure of this cross-purpose tugging was tremendous, and Minnie Fouche was a valve through which most of it escaped.

In the first place she was nobody's sister, and secondly and more importantly, she was French, which meant that she was highly expendable. But even if she had not possessed these two virtues she'd have been the one to be sacrificed, for Minnie generated enough action to obviate the need of junking a few sisters to keep the greater number of them in impeccable condition. Minnie had a capacious heart, and in the finest tradition of those who had gone on before her, took care of all who were fortunate enough to be her contemporaries. As wave after wave of Eastside males arrived at the age of puberty, she initiated them into the mysteries of life and put their eager feet on the straight and narrow path of normal sex experiences.

In another art, Minnie's point of view would have been called a dedicated one, for from the very beginning she knew she was too big for one man to hold. But there were



the amenities to observe and a desire not to hurt her husband who, all in all, was a fairly decent fellow. It was for his sake that she employed the greatest discretion in her affairs, and it was not her fault if nature forced her to emit those telltale squeaks of excruciating delight which announced to the world that she was in action. It was inevitable that Mr. Fouche should discover his wife's perfidy, and more inevitable still, in view of Don Peppino's stern interpretation of the Rucci case, that he be driven to leave her.

Free of the shackles of marriage, Minnie started operating on a wholesale scale. The boys lined her up, and the more there were the better Minnie liked it, taking them all on in the dark with an awesome disregard for the social points, such as being properly introduced, for instance.

Among those who maintain a higher standard of living, things of that sort were performed in private and inviolable boudoirs. Unfortunately for Minnie, she was forced to do her dispensing on one of the innumerable cellar doors in the back yards of the tenements.

On the night that unrelenting society hit Minnie with the tab, someone slipped up. Usually the alleys and hallway exits to the yard were guarded by those who had already been deflated, for from costly experience it was known that blood pounding with passion rendered the still ambitious type of lookout insensible to the stealthy sounds of a policeman's feet. But of course there was always that great imponderable, the human element, and it may well be that the power of the lookout on the job to regenerate passion had not been taken into consideration. However it may be, someone slipped up.

The belated cry of, "Beat it, the cops!" allowed most of the gang to get away, but O'Rourke did manage to catch Minnie and the present object of her charity, who tripped and fell because of his lowered trousers. Minnie herself never had a chance. The sweat of an hour's labor had glued her to the cellar door.

At first there was little or no cause for alarm. Those who got away breathed sighs of relief and turned their rubbery legs homeward. But about two hours after Minnie had been apprehended, the patrol wagon delivered a regiment of police to the Eastside. They disappeared quickly into the many tenements and soon reappeared with young men in their custody. It wasn't long before the word

spread through the Eastside that Minnie, with her customary prodigality, was giving the police a list of her lovers, both past and present. The first contingent of these was now being gathered and placed, like so many neat little piles of manure, on the various corners for the patrol wagon to gather up at its conveniences.

The immensity of the catastrophe became at once apparent. Disaster was enveloping the Eastside, and its inhabitants mobilized quickly for the defense.

As usual, Don Peppino was not at home, and Mrs. Fazzone, after passing the word along that he be found and told to return home at once, descended to the street to search frantically for her sons. When all the male Fazzones had been gathered to their hearth, Don Peppino and his wife put their two heirs through a grueling interrogation, which included the taking of the most frightening oaths. Satisfied at last that they were still as pure as the day they were born, they hid them under the bed and sandbagged them in with sacks of flour and yellow corn meal, several earthenware jars filled with sausages preserved in lard, and bundles of clothes. But the threat was by no means dispelled, and Don Peppino and Mrs. Fazzone went anxiously to the window to look out upon the battle arena.

And it had become a battle arena.

Most Eastsiders considered it a disgrace to submit meekly to arrest, and already, throughout a wide area, could be heard shrilling police whistles and the rattle of night sticks tattooing desperate pleas for help. Everywhere policemen were wrestling with prisoners, and as new culprits were dragged out of the doorways, the arresting officer was badgered on every side by parents, brothers, and sisters screaming out the innocence of the victim.

It was a rare instance when one of the Corsinis did not qualify in any particular imbroglio, and now their cries filled the canyon to the rear as policemen dragged Michelo, the sixteen-year-old one, out from under his bed.

"Run and find your brothers!"

"Bastards! Let him go! *Figli di puttane!* Takers of bribes!"

"*Stupido!* You will find your brothers where they always are, either in the speak-easy of Testadura or at the club! Hurry, before they harm Michelo!"

All these remarks had been spoken alternately to the



policemen and a younger Corsini. The sweating officers had no time to take exception to those meant for them, for Michelo, displaying the fine lines of his breeding, kept them pretty busy.

Don Peppino and Mrs. Fazzone, remaining at the window, were appalled at the scope of the operation as corner after corner was filled with felons awaiting transportation to the police station. The Corsini hope had been dragged to the street and was still valiantly wrestling with his two captors when Joe and Frankie came running on the scene. They wasted no time trying to ascertain if little Mike was at fault. That matter could be dealt with later among themselves. They waded in.

"Kill him, Joe! Attaboy, Frankie!"

"Lookout, Joe—oh, Joe, Joe, lookout!"

Mrs. Fazzone gasped in fright. The voices had come from behind her. She turned to find Tony and Nicky watching the fights over her and her husband's shoulders. She grasped them firmly and returned them to their hiding places. There was no need to caution Francesca. She was already under the covers of her bed with her head stuck under the pillows.

When Mrs. Fazzone had returned to the window, Tony and Nicky slid out from under the bed again, out of the room and into their own. There, kneeling at the window to keep out of sight of their parents at the other window, they had a pretty good view of the action.

All over the block, to the north and the south, the sounds of police whistles and sticks still filled the air. The returning paddy wagon came to a skidding halt right underneath the Fazzone windows, and reinforcements poured out of it. Joe Corsini's head was already bleeding from a blow by a night stick, but he kept swinging away. Prone policemen dotted the sidewalks here and there, and every call box was a hubbub of activity with officers trying to hem in the already captured sinners.

To Mrs. Fazzone's horror, Orlando Perrucci was brought out to the street and taken to stand beside a police box to await his turn in the wagon, which was shuttling back and forth from the station to the Eastside. Orlando, looking like a nun who had inadvertently strayed into a burlesque show, waited his turn meekly and was, in fact, throughout the whole disgraceful affair, a shining example of circumspect behavior.

From the acres of windows, bulging now with people, came the usual screaming requests for information and the relaying of it. In this manner it was learned that Minnie was closeted in a room with a squad of detectives. As names streamed from her lips, they were typed on a sheet, handed to an officer guarding the door, who in turn handed them to waiting police, who then went to the Eastside to pick up the suspects. Police sergeants toured up and down the Eastside, keeping the sweating patrolmen weaving in and out of the tenements.

The activity was tremendous. When the police were forced to the extreme of calling in the fire department to block off the streets with their apparatus, the Eastsiders withdrew to the rooftops, their Maginot Line. There, becoming one great safe mass of anonymity, they brought their major weapons into play. These were bricks, coal, and pieces of railroad ties, all of which, in that type of emergency, could be appropriated from the many rear porches without first receiving permission from the owners. The roof battalions pelted them down upon the policemen, driving them close to the buildings and hampering their operations considerably.

The patrol wagon was overtaxed, and after an hour and a half had gone by, the Police Department was forced to requisition aid from yet another city department. This was the Street Department. They commandeered three trucks and started placing the arrested men in them. This incensed the felons anew, for they declared it was unconstitutional to be forced to ride in the crap wagons. And it was surprising, in view of the general lack of education, how many authorities on the Constitution there were on the Eastside.

More surprising still, however, were the number of policemen who had never heard of the Constitution, and things were getting so out of hand that the few who had heard about it, had no time to apologize for the ignominy they were forcing upon their captives, resorting, instead, to beating the necessity for it into their skulls with night sticks.

And matters were really getting out of hand. Without detracting any credit from Minnie, it was no longer a question of picking up only those who had transgressed with her. For, from the charges resulting from her true life confessions, there had sprung up tributary ones, and



many parents and older brothers, and a few sisters, were arrested on various charges beginning with the lesser one of breach of the peace and ranging to the more serious ones of inciting a riot and aggravated assault. The charges of resisting arrest were too numerous to keep track of.

Don Peppino, growing paler by the minute at the scenes he was witnessing, was unselfishly trying to think of some way he could help his fellow Eastsiders. His attention was taken from the window by the ringing of the telephone directly behind him.

When he talked into it he winced as if he had been struck. When he hung up he told his wife he had to go out. Upon being asked why, he informed her that someone had just called and told him that a group of men were being organized to post bonds for the arrested and to expedite their release.

"What need have they of you?" demanded Mrs. Fazzone.

Don Peppino frowned. "It is an important mission. They need one who can think clearly."

Mrs. Fazzone advanced a few more arguments why he should remain at home, but the Don was never one to be deterred from the greater duty.

Descended to the street, he skirted the buildings, keeping clear of the melees on his way to the police station. The call had come from Teddie the Barber. Not only had he been one of the many caught up in the net, but the limousine had also been impounded as an accessory to the fact. Obviously the Don could not have told his wife all this. For some obscure reason she mildly disapproved of Teddie.

The large lobby of the police station, under normal conditions, was bare except for a few strategically placed spittoons and a high curving bench behind which, at the farther end, perched the booking sergeant. Off to the end of the bench was a barred enclosure. From this area iron stairs led into the tier of overnight cells in the upper part of the building.

When Don Peppino entered the lobby, the scope of Minnie's operations again impressed itself upon him, for it was filled with screaming parents stepping over and around the spilled spittoons, waving bank books and money over their heads, and demanding the immediate release of their innocent sons or other relatives. Below

the booking sergeant, people milled and shoved, trying to get his attention. Don Peppino, perceiving at once that it was from the sergeant he must inquire about Teddie, elbowed his way to him.

"Goddam that O'Rourke!" shouted the sergeant to a man standing below him, who was obviously a detective. "This stinks! He's got to go and make a pinch like this! Maybe the son of a bitch couldn't get to first base with the broad himself. We'll be two months cleaning this mess up."

"Take it easy, Mac," grinned the detective. He turned as Don Peppino tugged at his sleeve. "What is it, pal?"

Don Peppino acquainted him of the nature of his errand. The sergeant, who'd taken time out to wipe his perspiring face, overheard him.

"He'll be lucky to get out by morning," he growled. "I've explained everything to this mob about eighty different times. They all got to take the venereal disease tests. Goddam that O'Rourke!"

Don Peppino, seeing many friends in the mob, turned to discuss the situation with them. From time to time new suspects were brought in, and more than once the voice of the desk sergeant was heard to exclaim, "Mother of God! How far is this thing going? Goddam that O'Rourke!"

Upstairs on the second floor it was rumored that the State Attorney's office might enter the case, because Minnie was now being questioned by a detective named Peter Durkin, who was a sort of liaison officer between the local police and the county detective. This sent tremors of apprehension through the lobby, for Durkin was known as a cruel cop who would pinch his own hand if it accidentally bumped against his face, and *up there*, as the County Building was referred to, lawyers received fancy fees.

Don Peppino, waiting around for news of Teddie, heard a commotion at the side door, and the Corsinis, handcuffed to five policemen, were brought in. Their captors showed evidence of having passed through a few bad moments. The younger Corsini was sent off into the quarantined area where the culprits were awaiting their turn at physical examination, and the older Corsinis were whisked upstairs and locked up.

In the meantime, the roundup appeared to have been concluded, though as it later turned out there were still



a few warrants out for those who had eluded arrest. The cops, released from the duty of picking up suspects, began the task of clearing the police lobby. It took them a good hour to explain to everybody that no one would be released until they had undergone examination. It seemed that this was routine procedure in a charge of that nature. Because of the tremendous task confronting the police doctor, three associates had been called in.

It was decided that the culprits would be brought to court, not the next morning, but the one after. All who wished to do so could post bond for their friends and relatives, and, after they were examined, the ones for whom bond had been posted would be released.

The next day the Eastside was filled with the talk of Minnie's treachery and the unspeakable things the doctors had done to the victims of the raid, which in turn had resulted in additional charges, for many of the statutory patients had created a need for the physicians to heal themselves.

It took two sessions of the court to clear the docket. Teddie was found not guilty and his limousine returned to him, his lawyer pleading that his client had been "entrapped." It seemed that Teddie had denied being implicated with Minnie, and a detective, trying to break him down, had told him that there was no disgrace attached to a thing like that, and if he, the detective, had had a chance, why he would have done the same thing. It was, as Don Peppino severely pointed out to his protégé later, one of those moments when greatness was within his grasp. Teddie had only to agree with the detective and say that he too would have grabbed at the chance, *if* he had had one, to be with Minnie. Instead, Teddie, warmed by the detective's comradely attitude, had admitted his sin and was promptly charged.

The judge, a Democratic appointee, was plainly outraged by the detective's unethical manner of getting a confession from Teddie the Barber. As a result he released all the offenders who were given a clean bill of health, ordering them only to pay for the examination. The fact that they were forced to pay this fee perpetuated the chain reaction of arrests which Minnie's deviation from the Eastside code had started, for there were many parents who quite indignantly refused to pay for services which they themselves had not requested.

Those who were found to have a venereal disease were sent to reform school, along with the younger Corsini and others who had assaulted the doctors. This wasn't so bad, for a *private* school was a private school whatever it was, and since the word "reform," when pronounced with an Italian accent, became *farma*, the parents of those sent there immediately put on airs, declaring that their children had been singled out for the honor of attending *farma schola*.

Some other results of the raid were also noted. Joe and Frankie Corsini, upon their release on bail, went home and, despite the fact that they had already done so once that day, beat up the beautiful Gina just on general principles. For some time after, her screams and sobs filled the canyon and the surrounding area, and there were undoubtedly many unseen heads behind the mass of walls which nodded in approval over this, for it would serve as a warning to all daughters not to attempt to step into the shoes that Minnie was slated to vacate for a while.

Where someone loses, someone has to win. One of the big winners was Tony, for he no longer had to endure the irritation of having Orlando Perrucci pointed out to him as a shining example to follow. Minnie had told all, and Mrs. Fazzone was quite disgusted with Orlando. Orlando had prostituted his art, for it seemed that all the time the inhabitants of the canyon quieted down to allow him to practice on his violin they were actually in collusion with his intentions, for he was in reality asking Minnie, via prearranged musical signals, if the coast was clear for him to come over. Minnie answered by means of the window shade.

One of the biggest losers was Officer O'Rourke. Since the raid had been an extremely reckless one, and thus had hurt some of the more "influential" families on the East-side, room was made for him in the remote reaches of Keney Park. There, on his unrelieved and lonely marches between the far-spaced call boxes, he had ample opportunity to observe wildlife, whose arts, free of the restrictions which society imposes upon itself, were not susceptible to his gross intolerance.



## 12

The following June the Fazzone trio made another smooth move up the educational ladder. Fran went into the sixth grade, Tony into the seventh, and Nicky stepped into the next graduating class. Miss Emerson, Tony's sixth grade teacher, had been moved up to the seventh and he would be her pupil for another term. Tony liked Miss Emerson. Everytime he did something outstanding she praised him and made him feel very proud. He was happy about having her again. And that's all he had to be happy about.

For the advent of summer, normally a happy time with its many daylight hours after supper, saw a further curtailment of his leisure hours. Right after the close of school he was, upon the recommendation of Maestro Ventrillo, lifted from the boys' band and placed in the Band of Glory, an organization composed of Eastside musicians and headed by the stern and renowned Maestro Don Turo Volpe. In making the announcement at table one night, the Don sought to awaken Tony to the tremendous responsibility and honor that was now his; but to Tony it only meant that he would now have to rehearse three times weekly instead of once.

Tony found the rehearsals, which lasted three times longer than those of the boys' band, boring and painful. But the convivial Don Peppino, at first proudly attending each one with him, found there conditions which were supremely congenial to his views and ambitions.

There was first a now firmer association with Don Turo Volpe. This was desirable in many ways. He and Don Turo had a lot in common. Through their veins ran the same blue blood, and they were both men of stature on the Eastside. These bonds need not necessarily have brought the two together, but Don Turo was also an ardent pursuer of the illusive pot of gold at the end of the lottery rainbow, which made for the most cordial of relations between the dons.

Secondly, the members of the band went to rehearsals not only to play their instruments but to indulge their

need for heated argument and oratory. Often the evenings were spent wholly in listening to the impassioned speeches of frustrated patriots and philosophers. These usually embraced everything from Mussolini's march to glory to the then much debated theory of evolution and included socialism and repeated discussions on the merits of the La Scala Milan as opposed to those of the commercialistic Metropolitan, and Don Peppino, with his formidable reputation as an authority on almost any subject, was like a hunter in an unrestricted wilderness.

Most of these discussions, after either of the dons had had their uninterrupted says, were more or less thrown open, and it was then that every musician in the hall tried to get the floor at once. The explosive injections of personalities soon rode the arguments to a point where they teetered dangerously on the precipice of violence, and at these times not even Don Turo, rapping imperiously on the podium with his baton, was able to restore order.

Tony alone could achieve this end.

For whatever collisions of opinion the band members may have had on the many different subjects they debated, unanimity was achieved on one point. The son of Don Peppino, being only thirteen years of age, could not speak for *any* reason. This would have been tough for the voluble Tony under ordinary conditions, but to ask him to be silent when he heard flagrant misstatements concerning Columbus, Trieste, Italy's role in the World War and the double cross her allies had given her, imposed on him an obligation beyond human endurance. He would jump up and, in order to make himself heard, shout, "You're all wrong and I can prove it!"

At this all the men would shut up suddenly and turn to stare significantly at Don Peppino. In the eloquent silence, both father and son would turn pale, the one at the thought of the dishonor his son's disrespect had brought upon him, and the other, realizing his folly too late, at the thought of the punishment which would be his upon arrival at home.

The offense was committed so often that the Don, despairing of keeping his son silent, disposed of this irritating responsibility by taking the floor one evening and, in an opinion that was applauded for its logic, stated that he did not attempt to enforce the rules of correct behavior with his son because when Antonio entered the rehearsal



hall, he immediately became the charge of the maestro, and for the father to intrude upon this temporary but absolute custodianship would be highly insulting to Don Turo. Now this was only fair, for the Don, being on twenty-four hour duty call, was certainly entitled to an occasional minute between rounds.

He seldom got it however. There was, for instance, that night in early fall when he was patiently listening, in spite of the dinner table rules, to one of Tony's more impassioned attempts to free himself from the impending chore of helping to make the wine.

"I'm gettin' kinda sick of all this stuff," said son number two. "How come I have to help make the wine? Nicky should, that's who. He's the one drinks it, not me. It's always Tony do this and Tony do that. If I ain't rehearsing with the band I'm working on the lottery. Older or not, didn't Nicky have more time to play than me when he was my age? I can never catch up with him. He'll always be older than me."

Mrs. Fazzone's eyes lit up with pride. "He reasons like my brother Theo," she said.

Don Peppino went into deep thought. His wife's words were too alarmingly true. Still, it was a trying problem. As *primo nato*, Nicky should not be made to endure the indignity of having his duties selected by his younger brother. But more important still, if he acceded to his assistant's demands, it could well establish a dangerous precedent. Therefore, though the Don recognized Tony's claims as just, he was forced to judge them on the basis of whether they would help the one or the greater number. On that basis Tony never had a chance.

But a disinterested witness, viewing the Don shortly after as he chewed on a succulent piece of chicken *spez-zato nel forno*, would never guess that he had just sustained so serious an assault upon his sovereignty, for he continued eating with his customary relish and vigor. If the witness had known it, however, he would then have forgiven the slight frown that came to the Don's face when he heard his name being called hysterically from the bottom of the stair well. For the cries told the Capo Collettore that he would, without a decent respite, soon be in battle again.

"Don Peppino! Don Peppino!"

The Don had little time to conjecture on the reason

for the hysteria before Pietro, the grocer's son, burst, without knocking, into the flat.

"Don Peppino, Don Peppino, come quickly!" he cried.

Don Peppino put down the chicken breast, wiped his hands slowly, and, to the further anguish of the youth, took time out to clear his throat with a glass of wine before replying.

"What is the trouble, Pietro?" he said then.

"It's Mr. Rucci. He's going to call the police and make them arrest Papa."

At the mention of Rucci's name, Don Peppino snorted in disgust. "What has your father done?" he said.

"I don't know. I know only that he and Mr. Rucci are fighting and that there are a lot of people in the store. He would have gone long ago for the police except that they stop him every time he starts. My mother told me to hurry after you."

Don Peppino, as had Napoleon's army at Waterloo, saw his duty, but unlike Napoleon's army, he hastened to do something about it. Following the grocer's son he sped rapidly down the stairs, across the street, and toward the grocer's shop, in front of which there had gathered a large crowd.

"It is Don Peppino!" cried someone. "Let him through! Let Don Peppino enter the store!"

Don Peppino, looking like a doctor rushing to the side of an emergency case, brushed through a path that had been quickly opened for him. There he brought the confusion to an end by merely raising his hand. Then the shouts flared anew, but now they were in general agreement.

"It is Don Peppino! Let him settle this!"

"Yes, Donato, there is no need of the police here!"

"Don Peppino is fair and just!"

"And his wisdom exceeds that of Garibaldi at the Straits of Messina!"

The Don, accustomed to such praise, was naturally not too embarrassed by it. Paulo Gionfredo, the grocer, stood behind his counter wearing a look of dark determination while Donato Rucci launched excitedly into his complaint.

"Ah, Don Peppino," said Rucci, "it is well that you are here. Hear me then, and say if I am not justified in calling the police."

Again Don Peppino was given the satisfaction of seeing



one of his many moves vindicated, for the man's acceptance of him as a judge laid to rest whatever possibility there may have remained that he would avenge himself for the Don's labeling of him as a *cornuto contento* and more than justified the Capo Collettore's decision not to disabuse him of the notion that he was a maffiast. Now the Don, wishing to perpetuate the bull he had on Rucci, gave him a stern look, but, like the strictly impartial judge he was, he told himself to ignore for the moment the disgraceful inference that he would advise the police being called in for any reason.

"The other day," continued Rucci, "I came into the store and received my share of the delicate tissues used to wrap fruit. As a customer here, Don Peppino, I am entitled to my share of these tissues, you understand."

"He stole them from the counter when I wasn't looking," interrupted the grocer defiantly.

"*Per l' amore di Dio!*" exclaimed the Don. "How am I to get to the bottom of this if there will be interruptions? Let Donato speak his side first, Paulo, and then I will listen to yours."

As it happened, Rucci's words had already given Don Peppino an inkling of the issue at hand. Obviously, it was over the rationing of the scarce and luxuriously soft tissues used to wrap choice fruits and vegetables. On the Eastside there were no soft behinds which needed pampering, and for that reason nobody bought toilet tissue unless they were in the habit of indulging foolish luxuries or putting on airs. Each family had their own personal nails stuck in the wall of the community toilets located in the halls, and on these nails they pegged paper bags, wrapping paper, and discarded newspapers which were collected for that purpose. Since all these were readily available, it made little difference from which nail the various tenants plucked. But the few who were able to afford toilet paper or who happened to come by a little choice tissue used by the department stores to wrap clothes in, kept it locked in their flats and took it with them whenever the need arose. It therefore made good sense that people, in gathering paper for this use, should covet the choice fruit wrappers, and there wasn't a grocer in the neighborhood who did not save them and ration them out to his customers in accordance with their rating with him.

Because of this Don Peppino was at a loss to understand the situation further, for, judging from the grocer's statement, it seemed that he should be the one with the grievance. However, as Paulo Gionfredo took heed of the Don's pleas and clamped his lips shut, Rucci took up his account of the matter.

"At any rate, Don Peppino," he continued, "last night I unsuspectingly took these papers home. Not until late this morning, you understand, after I had been one hour on the job, did I ascertain them to be not what they were supposed to be."

"Aha!" said the Don portentously. "Continue."

"At that time I noticed an increasing itching at the place to which I had applied them, you understand. All the morning I could not stand still and had to constantly lay aside my shovel and pick to deploy my fingers to where they were more urgently needed. When it became apparent that the foreman was displeased by my too frequent interruptions of the work for which I was being paid, I attempted to get some relief by contracting and wriggling my buttocks."

Great shouts of laughter filled the store and Rucci turned red with anger. Don Peppino, conscious only of the dignity of his role, held up his hand for silence in the courtroom.

"Naturally," continued Rucci, "this constant contortioning of my body was noticed by my fellow workers, and by afternoon they were all laughing and calling me *culo al ponte*."

Again laughter filled the store, this time having an element of hysteria to it. But Don Peppino, seeing now the seriousness of Rucci's charges, blanched in horror. The term quoted him by the man was a highly disgraceful one and worse than the one which the Capo Collettore had hung upon him, for it meant literally, "behind poised for action." In that moment the compassionate Don could feel a twinge of sympathy for Donato Rucci; and when he raised his hand for silence again, there was a stern frown on his face.

"By late afternoon," sobbed Rucci, "the men had taken to asking me which one among them was the receiver of my favors."

Don Peppino shuddered.

"Naturally, Don Peppino," continued Rucci after he



had calmed himself, "as the day progressed I began to suspect the cause of my embarrassment, and when I got home I immediately took one of the tissues and ran my fingers over it. Don Peppino, this treacherous thief, this bootlegger, this infamous purveyor of poisoned food had given me the tissues used to wrap prickly pears!"

"*Dio!*" breathed the Don, arrived at last at the source of Rucci's irritation. But now there was such a commotion in the store that Don Peppino was forced to reach up for a large salami and rap on the counter with it to restore order.

Rucci in turn pounded hard on a barrel. "He purposely gave them to me! The physical anguish I am willing to overlook, but from now on the name *culo al ponte* will stick to me. For that reason I shall call the police and have this defiler of innocent people thrown in jail where he can do no more harm."

"*Culo al ponte!*" shouted someone.

"*Spione!*"

"*Sbirro!*"

"You are all against me!" cried Rucci. "May you all fall into the river and drown!"

Don Peppino clapped his hands sternly and silence descended once more in the overcrowded store. "We have not yet heard Paulo's side of the story," he reminded Rucci. "If you should be in the wrong and still go to the police, then these people are justified in labeling you a spy." He turned to the grocer. "Paulo, what have you to say?"

"Only," replied the grocer grimly, "that this thief was caught up in his own net. For years, *caro* Don Peppino, I have diligently discharged my duty by the most careful separation of the prickly pear wrappers from the others. The proof of this is that not once has a behind ever been the victim of my carelessness. Yesterday I had made two piles of the wrappers, but before I had a chance to dispose of the harmful ones, a customer demanded my attention and I left them on the fruit counter. Later in the day I discovered that both piles of the wrappers were gone. This did cause me some alarm until I reasoned that whoever took them did so without first asking me, and since other items here and there were often stolen, it struck me that this was a good way to learn the identity of the thief."

"I go!" screamed Rucci. "I go to call the police!"

"*Spione!*"

"*Sbirro!*"

"Let him go," said the butcher unconcernedly.

"Ah, *bestia*," snarled Rucci. "Think you that I go to that fat pig who swills wine in your back room? Ah, no, I go to the station itself, to talk to the *capitano!*"

"And they will detain you too," said Don Peppino.

"You are misinformed, Don Peppino. The police are there to protect honest men, you understand."

To go along with his accentuation of the word, Rucci gave the Don a steady glare which removed at once any doubt as to his meaning.

"*Trattatore!*"

"Ah, base man," righteously spoke another. "I am twenty years in this country and yet do not know where the police station is located."

Now, in view of the fact that the speaker was known by everyone to live in a flat which looked directly out upon the building in question, this was an amazing statement. But more amazing yet, it met with much cheering and no expressions of incredulity.

Rucci stared about him uneasily, then turned his eyes at the thoughtfully frowning Don Peppino.

"Paulo," said the Don after some deliberation and a final pursing of his lips to indicate that it was not of a light nature, "it is obvious that this man appropriated these tissues without your permission. I would advise neither of you to call the police, for it is well known that when they enter, money leaves. But if Rucci insists on doing so, then it is only fair that you have a charge of theft lodged against him."

"Ah, no, Don Peppino," cried Rucci. "Do not think you can intimidate me. This scoundrel left the papers there because he knew it was my turn to receive some and that I would take them. One cannot be said to steal when he takes worthless paper, you understand."

"The law," said the Capo Collettore sternly, "says only that no man has the right to take another's property. It does not define the property."

"Don Peppino has settled the matter fairly!" came a cry.

"*E' giusto!*"

"*Bravo Don Peppino!*"



"Don Peppino displays the wisdom for which he is noted!"

"He has earned a glass of wine at Paulo's table!"

Rucci, seeing he was overwhelmed, slunk out of the store, and after more remarks praising Don Peppino, some assuring the grocer of eternal allegiance and continued patronage, the crowd melted away. Don Peppino was then accordingly invited into the rear room, where not only a jug of wine was placed at his disposal but also some celery, a variety of olives, and a loaf of choice *provolone* cheese. This was only fair, for the Don had been interrupted in his dinner before he could progress to these items.

The Capo Collettore's disposition of the case was widely discussed and praised, and it was generally agreed that, discounting Rucci's disgrace—which, after all, he so strongly merited—the matter held only one tragic element. The rap for this, however, accrued to the editors of the *Smorfia*. For the people, in hurrying to translate the salient points of the affair into combinations of numbers, were dismayed to learn that it did not contain the dialectical term, *culo al ponte*.

## 13

The first graduation Mrs. Fazzone attended proved to be a triumphal step toward the possible culmination of her dreams for her children. Nicky had attained a scholarship mark of eighty-two out of a possible hundred, and had ranked first in his class. For this achievement he was to receive the annual five dollar gold piece award. Mrs. Fazzone was so choked with emotion that she missed most of the graduation speeches following the presentation.

To Tony, Nicky's graduation meant nothing. At first he'd thought that Nicky would give him one of the coveted tickets to the graduation dance, the gala social affair of the Eastside. Each member of the class received five tickets, and there was always a scramble to get them, for the pupils had older brothers and sisters and the music was supplied by a ten piece jazz orchestra. There was almost no chance to crash the gate, because the reception

hall was closely guarded by a cordon of police, who were needed later to break up the after-the-ball fights. At the regular dances on the Eastside, a normal complement of police could keep things under control, for the fights were staged as the need for them arose. But at the graduation reception, where it was traditional for all fights to be postponed until after the ball in order not to spoil it, there were too many taking place at one time.

Nicky didn't bring his tickets home. Tony heard from someone else that they'd already been distributed.

"Where's mine?" he demanded of Nicky.

"Your what?" said Nicky.

"My ticket for the graduation dance."

"Who said you're gettin' one?"

"For cryin' out loud! I'm your brother, ain't I?"

"That's right, and I don't want no kid brothers taggin' around me at no dance."

And that was that, for to Tony, Nicky represented as final a court of appeals as did their sire. Tony had to content himself with hanging around for the fights after the ball. But that was a show he could have seen anyway. His brother didn't have to be graduating.

As for Don Peppino, he did not attend the dance, for he disapproved of the selections played by the orchestra, claiming that the popular songs of the day were little more than the bleatings of a calf suffering from fever. But he was tremendously impressed with the luster that Nicky, in winning the coveted five dollar prize, had brought to the Fazzone name. Obviously, no high school was worthy of receiving so illustrious a student. Don Peppino announced that he intended to make inquiries about sending Nicky to college.

Mrs. Fazzone trembled in excitement. *College?* A child of hers go to college? Then and there the Don could have brought home a troupe of hula-hula dancers and been forgiven on the spot.

In the meantime Uncle Theo came to the house and announced that he was rewarding Nicky by taking him to live with him for the summer.

It was well for Tony that he still had many formative years to live through, for when he heard this it so embittered him that he might easily have become a misanthrope. It was almost more than he could bear. He had



heard Uncle Theo describe the place he was taking care of while its owner was in Europe. It had a swimming pool.

Uncle Theo and the owner of the estate, Mr. Winthrop, were good friends. Mr. Winthrop owned the factory in which Uncle Theo worked. Uncle Theo was such a good worker and so smart that he had been offered the post of foreman in his department. When Uncle Theo refused the post, all the executives talked about it so much that it finally got to Mr. Winthrop, and he sent for Uncle Theo because he wanted to meet a man who refused promotion. Uncle Theo told him that his heart was with the working people and that since this was so, it would not be fair to the company for him to take a position which was incompatible with his views. Mr. Winthrop was so struck by Uncle Theo's honesty that he came to visit with him now and then at his bench. When he decided to go to Europe for a summer and could find no reputable caretaker, he asked Uncle Theo to do him a favor and move into his house and look after it, granting him, for the purpose, a leave of absence from the factory.

And so Nicky went with Uncle Theo to live the life of a millionaire for the summer.

He'd been there a month before Don Peppino announced one day that the family would go to visit, for a summer was too long for the Don to be separated from his *primo nato*. They would go the next Sunday. On the eve of the visit Tony was so excited he didn't sleep all night.

They started out very early. West Hartford, in the middle twenties, was like another world. As yet for the most part undeveloped, it was more a rural area than a town. Even the trolley ride out took the better part of an hour.

Tony's first impression of the sprawling, country-style mansion and its surroundings was that it was unreal, like the houses he'd seen in the movies. The vista of gardens, brick walls, and the secretive, tremendous yews, almost suffocating him with wonder, was heaven leaping at him. He jumped on the veranda which girded the house and ran around it three times. Then he ventured inside, cautiously at first, until he saw Nicky.

Nicky was seated at a table in a long, low-ceilinged, oak-beamed kitchen, obviously having his breakfast. The room resembled magically the interior of the Spanish

house in the movie, *The Mark of Zorro*. Tony half expected to see the mustachio'd, swashbuckling Douglas Fairbanks come leaping off the mezzanine landing which led into the mysterious upper floors, perhaps into another wonderland. He walked eagerly to where Nicky was seated.

"Hi . . . Nicky," he said tentatively.

"Whaddya say?"

Tony examined what Nicky was eating. On a plate were two brown cupcakes with no frosting and a neat pat of butter.

"Nicky," whispered Tony, "give me a cupcake, willya?"

"Muffins, not cupcakes. And beat it. You wanta queer everything?"

Uncle Theo's wife came into the kitchen then. She was an American-born woman and nothing like anyone Tony had ever known. She was the only woman of her age that he knew, except for his teachers, who spoke English without an accent.

"Hi, dear," she said to Nicky. "Ready for your bacon and eggs yet?" Then she saw Tony and smiled at him. "Hello, there."

Aunt Helena was more or less a stranger to Tony. They never saw her too much, but he had always liked her. Now she flew around the kitchen humming happily to herself. Tony saw her put a pat of butter into a frying pan, and when it sizzled, she broke two eggs into it.

"Where's Mom and Pop and Fran?" said Nicky.

"Outside."

"Well, you better get back to 'em. You ain't supposed to be running all over the joint. Beat it."

Aunt Helena came to his rescue. She rumbled his hair and said, "Had breakfast yet, dear?"

Tony thought of the cocoa and stale bread he had eaten, gulped, and nodded his head feebly.

"How about a nice piece of cake, then?"

Tony nodded and, after a triumphant look at Nicky, sat at the table. Aunt Helena brought him a piece of luscious golden cake topped with a marshmallow cocoanut frosting. He looked from the cake to Nicky and back. Nicky wasn't saying anything.

Tony ate his cake before Nicky had finished his breakfast, and then went outside. Mrs. Fazzone and Fran were



sitting on a bench, obviously determined to keep their places and not disgrace Uncle Theo by destroying anything on the property. Don Peppino, hands in pocket, stood beside Uncle Theo and surveyed the rolling, beautifully landscaped grounds with a critical eye which said plainly that he was by no means impressed with it.

"Well, Theo, it is nice," he said as Tony came up to them. "But where is the home of the *signore*?"

Uncle Theo smiled softly, but said nothing.

Nicky and Aunt Helena came around the house. Aunt Helena had something which looked like a rolled blanket. When she unfurled it, it turned out to be a hammock swing which she connected between two trees.

"Now lie down, dear, and get your morning rest," she said to Nicky.

"Jeezus!" exclaimed Tony. "A *laying down* swing. Hey, Nicky, can I have a swing, can I?"

"I have to rest. Beat it."

"Antonio," called Don Peppino, "you are to help your Uncle Theo clean the cuttings out from under the bushes."

"Why can't I swing like Nicky!" It was a loud bawl, expelled on the wind of an outraged sense of fair play.

"Nicolo is ill," Don Peppino reminded him sternly.

And off he was sent, with a bushel basket and rake, to gather leaves and debris under the many shrubs. The sun was hot and the work back-breaking, but he had come upon the large swimming pool, half-filled with water, and he was sustained by the hope that Uncle Theo would let him go swimming in it after the wonderful dinner Aunt Helena must surely be cooking for them. Judging from Nicky's breakfast and the piece of cake she had given him, it promised to be something wonderful.

When he and Uncle Theo returned to the house, however, a rude shock awaited him. It seemed that his parents had decided to return home, for he heard Aunt Helena say to Uncle Theo, "I've done everything I could to get them to stay to dinner, Theo. But they insist on going home."

A dismayed look came over Tony's face, and he turned to his mother, figuring he had a better chance with her than with the Don. But her eyes warned him sternly, and his plea died aborning. On the trolley back, Tony had all to do to keep from sobbing aloud. All he could think of

was the cake he had eaten, the promise of the dinner it had held, and the swimming pool he had not gone swimming in.

"Why did we have to go home?" he asked for the hundredth time.

"Shhh," said his mother. "The people are watching us."

"But why, why?"

"Because these American women are not used to feeding so many people. They do not know how to cook. Did you want to embarrass her?"

Tony groaned and said no more.

Aunt Helena, as it turned out, not only knew how to cook, but was a genius at it. This fact was brought home to Mrs. Fazzone in the fall with the return of her son to her, spoiled almost beyond repair and inculcated with the most fanciful notions.

Mrs. Fazzone had learned to speak a workable English, for her children addressed her in that tongue. Now she learned some new words. These were rhubarb, gravy, tapioca pudding, bread pudding, pot roast, roast beef, jello, melted marshmallow, cocoanut and fudge cakes, Canadian bacon, whipped cream, beef pies—which confused her to the point of distraction—and her old enemy, custard pie. Custard was Nicky's favorite, and Mrs. Fazzone, in a frantic attempt to regain Nicky's allegiance, queried Aunt Helena on how to make it. When she learned the number of eggs and milk it took and that Nicky expected it as a daily item instead of a holiday treat, she decided it was much cheaper to give him a mild licking and admonish him never to mention it again. College, she reminded him sternly, should leave him no time to think of custard pies.

As it turned out, the only college accepting pupils fresh out of grammar school was a local business college which occupied a floor of one of the large Pearl Street buildings. But a college was a college, and the Don sent Nicky there. Mrs. Fazzone, when apprised of its curriculum, envisioned Nicky as a future giant of industry sitting behind a huge desk.

Other results of Nicky's college attendance were soon noted. For some time it had been driven home to Mrs. Fazzone that her older son had inherited his father's ability to make friends. With the Eastside children, whose



parents she knew, Mrs. Fazzone was never ill at ease, her only worry being to see that the house was always stocked with enough food to accommodate not only them but also the Don's friends. But now that Nicky went to a school which drew pupils from all sections of town, she found her home filled with boys awaiting Nicky in whose presence she felt uncomfortable.

They neither looked or acted like any of the boys she knew. Instead of the dark, swarthy complexions she was used to seeing, most of these boys had scrubbed pink faces and blond hair. Some of them still wore summer tans, but they were smooth, golden tans, not like the coarse tans acquired by the Eastside laborers. They were always dressed with clean white shirts and ties, and they continually startled her by doing things, such as standing when she stood, running to open closet doors for her, and hurrying to help her take the pots off the stove. Mrs. Fazzone would bear it until finally, flustered by it all, she would sit and wait desperately for Nicky to come home.

More than that, Mrs. Fazzone did not know what to offer them. She was afraid they wouldn't like what she had in the house, and Nicky could never convince her that they ate her *pizze*, *zuppa*, and *rigatoni* and *polpetti* and *braccioli* because it was like nothing they ever got at their own homes. She thought they ate it to be polite, and this always threw her into the tormenting dilemma of wondering whether to force more on them or risk the possibility of being thought inhospitable.

Quite often the boys came to ask Nicky to visit with them, and he spent many days and week ends in homes on the other side of town. The only benefit Tony got from all this action was the occasional luxury of being able to stretch out alone in the bed that he shared with Nicky, and plenty of room at the window if some entertainment took place during the night.

## 14

From time to time there arose in the Fazzone household a felicitous occasion where Don Peppino and Mrs. Fazzone saw eye to eye on a respective issue. One of these

was the approaching marriage of Teddie the Barber to Julia Quattropiani. The Don, whose activities were unhampered by marriage, and who saw no reason why Teddie's should be, did not object to it because it promised him a day of rousing entertainment. Mrs. Fazzone merely wanted Teddie out of circulation.

However, the Don did beef about one thing. This was the stern insistence by Teddie's fiancée that the limousine be traded in for a two passenger coupé. He did this for two reasons. Firstly, it was an alarming indication of who would form the policies in Teddie's domain, and secondly, it pointed the finger of guilt at Teddie and, by association, him.

As it turned out, the whole affair was run off badly, culminating with the degeneration of the Grand March into a shambles. But a certain statement that Don Peppino had caused this because he didn't get his own way was the vilest of untruths. As the Capo Collettore correctly stated in his defense, Alfonso Campobasso was the true villain of the piece.

Campobasso was a successful contractor, a sloppy, continually sweating man with a lot of unhealthy fat which evidenced a leaning to quantity rather than quality in foods, and his constant burping tended to bolster the claims of Don Peppino that Campobasso was a man who ingested with abandon, digested with difficulty, and eliminated only with the aid of avalanches of purgo.

There was little doubt that Campobasso was to blame for the enmity between them, for, as the Don once inferred, he needed the contractor as much as the Mediterranean needed the English Navy. In addition to this, their paths should never have collided, for the Don ran shudderingly from the very things which Campobasso so assiduously looked for.

Campobasso was one of those supposedly civic-minded busybodies who sought glory at the expense of others. He had a passion for chauvinistic speeches and was forever spearheading some fund-raising campaign on behalf of Mussolini's march to glory. Obviously, Uncle Theo could not stand idly by while all this was going on, and he once made a speech himself in which he reminded all that charity should begin at home, and that if Campobasso was looking for some cause to sponsor, he could well begin with his laborers, who, since they toiled in the



ditches for him at the miserly rate of twenty-five cents an hour, were in more need of help than Mussolini.

Campobasso retaliated with the charge that Theodoro Gallo was a dangerous radical and a traitor to his native land, and then, in a below-the-belt swipe at Uncle Theo's Achilles' heel, stated that if Gallo was so zealous in his intentions to reform the world, he should do as he preached and begin his reform at home with a certain brother-in-law.

It was when this remark reached the ears of the brother-in-law in question that the bulletin touching upon Campobasso's digestive processes was released. When the return salvo reached its objective, the enmity jelled. Campobasso hurled back the unoriginal charge that Don Peppino was a maffioso, and was in turn, from that day forward, contemptuously referred to either as "that ditch-digger" or "*quelle cafone*."

Now it so happened that the father of Teddie's intended was one of Mr. Campobasso's foremen. This gave Campobasso a formidable entree as a figure in the preparations for the coming wedding, and since Quattropiani was bearing a preponderance of the expenses, Campobasso had a great deal to say.

But there were some functions where Don Peppino, in assuming an equivalent role with Teddie, was allowed to initiate ceremonies without interference from the enemy camp. One of these was the cause of some of the severest criticisms directed at the Don.

On the eve of the wedding, Don Peppino organized a small orchestra. It goes without saying that it was composed firstly of his guitar and Nasodolce's trombone. In addition there was a clarinet player recruited by Nasodolce—Tony being passed by on account of his age and the violin of Orlando Perrucci. Orlando, since his disgraceful exposure as a lecher, was no longer the inaccessible figure he used to be, and Don Peppino, when one remembers his statement that Orlando struck an occasional false bow, is to be lauded for his generosity in allowing Orlando to fiddle where he guitared. At any rate, the orchestra, abetted by three jugs of wine that the Capo Collettore took along, went to Teddie's home and there proceeded to give him his last fling before he was submitted to a life of circumscription.

Two jugs and innumerable waltzes and carousing songs

later, Don Peppino decided that it would be a fitting thing if they repaired at once to the home of La Bella Julia and serenaded her in her lover's name. This met with enthusiastic approval, not one of those present raising a dissenting voice. Accordingly, the group proceeded to the streets and through the Eastside on their way to the Quattropani home. And so full of joy and irrepressible sentimentality were they, that the musical instruments were never stilled, and they wended their way serenading everyone with the most lusty abandon. As they passed the *pasticceria* they picked up Mr. Corrado and his accordion and a few other friends until, when they neared their objective, the aggregation had swelled to a fair size. Teddie the Barber swayed drunkenly in its midst.

At the head of an alley Don Peppino silenced the musicians and warned everybody that they must now proceed in complete silence. Then they turned into the alley and to the rear of the building, where they stole stealthily up three flights of stairs to the rear porch of Julia Quattropani. There Don Peppino struck a forceful chord, and the orchestra launched its serenade. The chorus behind the musicians joined in lustily with the words.

*"E la luna mezzo 'e mare,  
Mamma mia me maritari  
Figghia mia a cu te ddare?  
Mamma mia penzaci tu.*

*Si tu rugnu 'e pisciaolu,  
iddu va, iddu veni,  
sempe 'u pisci ne mani teni . . .  
Si ci pighia 'a antasia,  
ti pisciulia figghiuzza mia."*

It was a serenade to a bride in the finest tradition. Don Peppino, a happy grin splitting his face, strummed out the chords preparatory to playing the next chorus. The group, having asked La Bella Julia if she wanted a fisherman, would move along to the tailor, the carpenter, the grocer, and so on until they came to the barber, at which time Teddie would be brought to the front and hoisted upon their shoulders. Don Peppino came to the end of his introductory music and the rest of the band and the choir moved into the second chorus. They had hardly completed the third line of it when the door was flung



open. On its threshold stood a glaring Mr. Campobasso and a bewildered Mr. Quattropiani. The musicians and singers, inspired by the presence of their audience, played and sang on with growing fervor. Campobasso's eyes fastened on Don Peppino. His face grew ominous with anger, and he held up a hand.

"*Silenzio!*" he thundered.

The music stopped, the honor of playing the last note falling to Martello Nasodolce. It sounded like a howl of protest.

Campobasso turned to Quattropiani and said, "Order these men away!"

Before Quattropiani could speak, Don Peppino said, "Teddie, is this *cafone* to keep you from serenading your bride?"

Campobasso quivered with anger, but Teddie shouted, "No! I got my rights! Get the hell back where you belong!"

"Ingrate!" fumed the contractor. "Is this how you treat one who sacrifices his time to help with your wedding arrangements? How can we do all that with all this noise going on?"

Campobasso's use of the word "noise" was ill-advised, for it not only cast a slur on the band's ability but also on the singing of its followers. The good spirits of the men on the porch were immediately dampened, and now there was some angry mumbling among them. Campobasso and Quattropiani withdrew hastily into the house and shut the door. A moment later it was reopened, but there was no one in view.

"Teddie!" screeched the voice of La Bella Julia. "Get your drunken friends the hell out of here!"

Don Peppino, understanding at once how matters stood, shook his head sadly and, after a moment of deliberation, led the group of celebrators down the stairs. In the alley they congregated awhile, trying to decide what to do next. Don Peppino, remembering the tone of La Bella Julia's voice, wanted to advise his protégé to take the next train to California, but since Teddie was in no condition to absorb wisdom, and in the morning it would be too late, he salved his conscience by secretly promising to supervise Teddie's movements for the first six or eight months of the marriage, at which time La Bella Julia should be properly broken in. In the meantime, the Capo

Collettore could see no reason why the celebration should come to an end. While two men held Teddie upright, the Don went through his pockets and got the key to the barber shop. Then he waved his hand and the procession made its way to it.

There the celebration resumed in full swing, the Don leaving it only once to make a trip to his cellar for more wine. At midnight, Mr. Corrado, perhaps shamed by the Don's example, turned the key in the door to his store and returned with a huge platter of *pasticci*. The celebration gathered momentum, and about one o'clock in the morning, the neighbors, unable to sleep because of the clamor, descended to the streets. In no time the older people were dancing a *tarantella* and the younger couples were demanding that a few waltzes and fox trots be played. The musicians, oblivious to all but the joy at hand, accommodated them all.

More wives came down angrily after their husbands, only to be seized and tossed from one partner to another in the increasing groups of *tarantellas*. The Corsinis came down and, after cuffing Gina, who had followed them, and chasing her back upstairs, joined in the festivities. More wine, *salami*, *provolone*, *prosciutto*, cold *pizza*, and loaves of bread made miraculous appearances, and by two-thirty the celebration had taken on the dimensions of a block party. Children filled the windows everywhere, enjoying the show, and once Tony got so excited he almost fell out the window. Nicky had to hang on to him until he squirmed back to safety.

Donato Rucci flew about after Filomena, trying to get her back up into their flat. When Filomena threatened to take off her dress and dance around in the nude if he didn't stop pestering her, he went screaming after the police. Because he represented a threat to the party, Joe Corsini finally had to pick him up and throw him into an alley, where he went clattering against some ash cans. Don Peppino, who took his celebrating as seriously as he did his work, strummed proudly away on his guitar, and once in a while he even paid Orlando the tribute of bowing his head in praise as the violinist executed an inspired improvisation on the music of the *tarantella*.

At about three o'clock the guest of honor was seized and thrown upon his barber chair. A group of laughing



dancers ringed the chair and swirled it 'round and 'round as they hopped and pirouetted their *tarantellas*.

"Povero Teddie, you'll get him dizzy!"

"Wait until La Bella Julia gives him a whirl!"

"How can such a one be married this morning? He sleeps on the chair!"

"Awaken him! Awaken the groom! His wedding day soon will dawn!"

The music soared and soared and enthusiasm soared with it. The celebrants, losing control over their actions, took bottles of hair tonic and poured it over Teddie as he was spun around in his barber's chair, and in the morning it was feared by many that their contents had been used internally until it was learned that Teddie had later awakened smelling like the ladies in Ernestino's shuttered establishment not far from the Gas House.

The party broke up about five o'clock, at which time Slannigan was found secreted in the barber shop toilet with an empty bottle of whiskey by his side. He had to be taken to the river and sobered up before reporting off duty, for as cops went, he wasn't a bad fellow. As it turned out later, he drew a suspension anyhow, for no one had thought about seeing to it that he checked into the call boxes.

In the morning, Teddie was not only late for the wedding, but arrived in a still befuddled condition. Now if one leans to the belief that Don Peppino led Teddie astray on the eve of his wedding, it must be remembered that the Don took all aspirants into his celebration tours without any sworn testimony as to their ability to stand up; and further, it must be conceded that the Capo Colletto, shaved and looking his usual meticulous self, set Teddie a good example by showing up at the church on time. Certainly he was undeserving of the rap for Teddie's tardiness, for it was not his fault that the groom chose to follow the lesser example and ignore the nobler one.

Be that as it may, Don Peppino found Mr. Campobasso and Mr. Quattropiani, watches in hand, pacing the sidewalks in front of the church, peering anxiously up and down the street for a sight of Teddie and his best man and ushers. Parked a few feet away from the church was the car containing the bride and her attendants.

From it flew the hysterical cries of La Bella Julia and the frantic attempts of her attendants to calm her.

Teddie showed up fifteen minutes late. There was no time for reproaches, but as Teddie and his best man ran around to the side of the church on their way to the vestry, La Bella Julia's voice was plainly audible.

"Oh, the big bum! Oh, I'll fix him! Him and that other bum, Don Peppino! Leave *me* waiting at the altar! Oh, I'll fix him *tonight!* Just wait!"

Mr. Quattropani, concerned only with assembling the bridal group preparatory to the march down the aisle, finally calmed her. Don Peppino, shuddering at La Bella Julia's words, followed Campobasso, who had hurried into the church.

For the innocent Don, his entering the church was the beginning of a day of minor nightmares and skirmishes with Mr. Campobasso, and it is to his credit that he did not desert the wedding in midday. There was first his attempt to walk down the aisle to find himself a seat in the overcrowded church. Mr. Campobasso blocked his way and sought by a series of wild and supposedly discreet gestures to motion him to the rear among some standing people. When Don Peppino ignored him and walked by, Mr. Campobasso, gasping audibly, tiptoed angrily after him and, under the guise of trying to make the Don see that there were no seats left, tried to show up the Capo Collettore as one who was inconversant with church procedure by crossing himself at every one of the Don's remissions.

As Don Peppino wandered up and down the aisle as if it were a promenade in the park, Mr. Campobasso, with more audible gasps of horror, darted in and about and behind him like a bee, genuflecting to the right and left so as to accentuate the Don's failure to do so, until the Capo Collettore at last stood exposed to the whole congregation as an infrequent attender of Mass. When the organ launched into the bridal march and it was seen that Don Peppino still stood in the center of the aisle, the people in the pew nearest to him moved closer together and made a seat for him. As the Don seated himself, Mr. Campobasso, his stern eyes never once leaving the back of Don Peppino's head, genuflected himself back to the head of the aisle and out of the path of the oncoming and determined La Bella Julia.



It was only the beginning, for Mr. Campobasso seemed to have singled him out for a series of indignities which continued throughout the morning functions and the wedding dinner. Lesser men would have taken advantage of the hours between the dinner and the reception to invent a pretext for not returning. But Don Peppino was above all these petty considerations, and in the evening he and Nasodolce went to the reception hall, which was located almost directly across the street from the police station.

At the door of the reception hall, Mr. Campobasso had posted one of his own men to collect tickets. Don Peppino and Nasodolce had forgotten to bring theirs and were refused admission. When Don Peppino took exception to this, Campobasso was sent for. Though Campobasso knew that Don Peppino was an important guest, one who had been invited at table, he refused to let the Don and his equerry in, claiming as his reason that Don Peppino had no doubt passed his ticket on to some other undesirable who had not received an invitation. The Capo Collettore, displaying his first show of temper, demanded of the policeman who accompanied Campobasso to the door that the groom be immediately brought to him.

La Bella Julia came with her husband. After some heated argument in which La Bella Julia and Teddie slammed the word "divorce" around as if it were a ping pong ball, Don Peppino and Nasodolce were finally admitted.

During the evening's program, Don Peppino contented himself by standing with a group of cronies and criticizing Mr. Campobasso as the self-installed wedding manager selected groups for the *tarantella* and, during the playing of fox trots and waltzes, supervised the dispensing of liquor and soda. When the time came, he accompanied the bride and groom as they made the traditional round of the guests with the *guantiera*, a huge platter of exquisite pastry delicacies. This was a ceremonial tour in which the guests were allowed only one of the special cookies each, which they would then eat as a token of good luck for the happy pair. Mr. Campobasso hovered about the tray, holding up a restraining hand here and slapping youthful, eager fingers there as the guests sought to take more than their share.

Then the dancing resumed, with children skidding

across the hall between and through gliding figures, running about screaming and shrieking after companions whose trips to the refreshment stands had been more remunerative than theirs. Occasionally a fight broke out at the door as someone tried to crash the wedding. These fights and discussions usually took some time to resolve, for the crashers invariably demanded to see some guest with whom they were friendly. The guest naturally tried to get his friends in, seeking in turn, the assistance of other guests who were closer to the principals. And there were similar disturbances at the refreshment stands as dispensers recognized too frequent drawers at the well and were in turn accused of showing favoritism. Mr. Campobasso, scuttling from the door to the refreshment area, from the orchestra to guests, from the bridal couple to the policeman, was the busiest man in the hall.

The hour approached for the spectacular climax. This was the Grand March, during which the bride and groom were supposed to slip surreptitiously away. Don Peppino, because of his tremendous experience in this function, had already offered his services to Teddie, who had so informed his father-in-law, who in turn told his boss.

Again there arose the most strenuous objections from Mr. Campobasso, whose face grew livid when he received the news. The Don, however, refused to take any more lying down, and a heated discussion ensued between him and Mr. Campobasso. Participating were Mr. Quattropiani, Teddie, and Nasodolce, who expressed amazement that Mr. Campobasso sought to hoist himself to a par with Don Peppino.

"The services of this *gangisto* have not been requested!" roared Mr. Campobasso.

"Teddie," demanded Don Peppino, "is this ditchdigger to supervise matters in your honeymoon boudoir?"

Campobasso turned to Quattropiani. "Order this man out of the hall!"

La Bella Julia joined them. "That's right, Pop. Kick the bum the hell outa here!"

Nasodolce declared that they had overreached themselves and demanded that Teddie's desires in the matter be probed.

"If Don Peppino goes I go with him!" shouted Teddie.

La Bella Julia put her nose close to her husband's. "Ya big bum! Who's stoppin' ya?"



Dancing couples slowed down and gathered around. "Let me tell you something!" shouted Teddie to his wife. "No clodhopper is gonna tell me how to run my business! Maybe your old man needs fatty, but I don't! I'm a barber, not a ditchdigger like your old man!"

"I'll see a lawyer tomorrow!"

"See two, one for me! Broads are a dime a dozen!"

"I didn't ask ya to marry me!"

"Who you kiddin'? You practically got down on your knees!"

While Teddie and his wife were going at it, words were still flying among Campobasso, Quattropani, Don Peppino, and Nasodolce. In a matter of minutes the tumult had drawn all the guests. Mr. Campobasso, mistaking them for an audience, slid irresistibly into one of his more flaming speeches, and the reception hall resounded with his cries.

"*Per la gloria dell' Italia!* Our Mother Land! Heed me, Sons of Italy! The sacred soil which gave us birth should not be forgotten now and allowed to wallow uncherished, unloved, despoiled by the sacrilegious boots of aggressors—"

Don Peppino withdrew in awe.

Naturally the Capo Collettore did not join the Grand March. He stood on the side lines with Nasodolce as Mr. Campobasso ran up and down the marching flanks, separating couples, sending them off with other partners and then merging them in fours. The band played "Anchors Aweigh" over and over again, forcing Don Peppino to wonder aloud why Campobasso did not ask them if it were the only march in their repertoire. In addition, he was driven on more than one occasion to express an aside as the sweating contractor made mistake after mistake, sending couples astray and then running after them to stuff them back in line somewhere.

The march was about half over when the Don, looking up, saw coming through the door, Mr. Corrado, sweating under another tray load of *gelati*. *Gelati* were the most prized and sought after item at a wedding. There never seemed to be enough of the incomparable ices, and it was the custom for the battle-scarred Mr. Corrado, in order to spread them over the evening, to bring in the second batch some time after the first had been consumed. Upon spying the *gelati* the Capo Collettore's heart

went out to the army of children who would like some. "Ragazzi!" he cried. "Here is Mr. Corrado with more *gelati*!"

Shrieks of delight and excitement went up through the hall, and children raced across it, among and through the marchers. Mr. Corrado, seeing the horde bearing down upon him, tried to hold the tray aloft, out of reach of the eager young hands. But the children jumped around and up at him, and the tray teetered dangerously in Mr. Corrado's one hand while he tried to fend off his attackers with the other. One *gelato* slid off to the floor, and in the scramble for it Mr. Corrado was unfooted. The whole tray of *gelati* went flying among the marchers.

Pandemonium broke loose as the children flew after the scattered *gelati*. Guests were knocked down and as they attempted to get up they skidded on the *gelati* and went down again. The girls shrieked, the children started fighting and tussling, and Mr. Campobasso, sweating and puffing and pulling his hair in despair, ran up and down among his routed grand marchers, trying frantically to restore order. But the children, as it happened, had parents and older brothers and sisters present, and as they were cuffed and otherwise taken to task by the guests, these responsible parties took exception to the unauthorized disciplining and, while the children continued scrambling after the *gelati*, their elders took to fighting. The band, at a cry from Campobasso, had blared into the *Marcia Reale*, but the requested shift from wedding enthusiasm to patriotic immobility was too sudden to be accomplished smoothly. The fights took on the nature of a riot. Happily, because of the proximity of the police station, a squadron of policemen arrived before any serious harm could be done. When matters were put under control, it was seen that the reconciled bride and groom had made good their escape.

Don Peppino had also departed, leaving Nasodolce to inform all who were interested that he had done so as a sign of his disapproval of the way the Grand March was being conducted.

The next day Campobasso lost no time in making the charge that Don Peppino had purposely called the *gelati* to the attention of the children in order to sabotage the performance of the Grand March.

The matter immediately became a heated topic of dis-



cussion, and Don Peppino, forced to defend his honor, stated unequivocally that his only thought had been for the children, and further stated that had he been in charge, his experience would have enabled him to foresee and be prepared for all that happened. For, as everyone knew, weddings were never without their little fracas. Going even further, he said he would have *welcomed* obstacles being placed in his way, for the surmounting of them would have brought him added prestige.

In the end it was generally agreed that Campobasso should indeed have turned his talents to supervising matters in the honeymoon boudoir. There, as the Don gently insinuated, he could have done no harm, for Teddie, being not without some experience in *affari di amore*, would not have been hampered by his fumbings.

## 15

The month preceding his graduation from grammar school was an exciting one for Tony. There were the class photographs to be taken and the class rings to buy. But more than that there were the dancing lessons Miss Fenton gave to every graduating class, which were in themselves miniature proms. Tony had awakened to the fact that girls were more than just something to tease. He liked dancing with the pretty ones, especially Rosie, and she became the star of his dreams, in which he fought for her, rescued her from cliffs, and snatched her from the paths of onrushing trains.

He was definitely a grownup now. He was conscious of the respect of the lower grade pupils and the looks of awe they gave him. He was a member of the *graduating* class, somebody *important*. His mother had even promised him a pair of long pants for the graduation. An era was coming happily to an end, and he looked forward to a future which would no longer contain the despicable breeches and long black stockings he had worn all his life.

Shortly before graduating day, the results of the final exams were announced. Tony attained a scholarship mark of ninety-six—and ranked eleventh. When he tried to explain to his parents that he had actually got a higher

mark than Nicky and that it wasn't his fault if the kids in his class were smarter than the kids who had graduated with Nicky, Mrs. Fazzone said, "But why did Nicky get five dollars and you nothing? There must be something wrong. *Il Povero Vecchio* has grown too old perhaps."

Don Peppino pursed his lips in a frown. "You have disgraced your family again," he pronounced sternly.

It was a case of squeaking all over again.

The summer following his graduation, Tony moped about the house, pining disconsolately for Rosie. Instead of being loved and understood and sent to a child psychiatrist, he was scolded by his mother, became the principal of a lecture in which Don Peppino called upon Heaven to take notice of all the crosses he was made to bear, and told by Nicky to stay the hell out of his way. Fortunately, he developed no insidious psychoses.

Even the announcement by the Don one evening that they were moving into a larger flat failed to shake him out of his lethargy.

It was a six-room flat. There was to be a bedroom for Don Peppino and Mrs. Fazzone, one for Fran, one for Nicky and Tony, a dining room, and that undoubted mark of distinction, a parlor. The Fazzones, if not having already arrived, were on their way up.

Tony didn't snap out of it until his third day in high school. On that day he fell in love with a cute little blonde and completely forgot the cause of his summer's anguish. It made little difference that Regina knew nothing of the tremendous emotion she inspired in one of her classmates. It was enough that he could see her and talk to her, if only to give her the answer to some question. Regina, like many of her blonde sisters, was not very brainy.

High school was a brand new world for Tony. He was no longer addressed as Anthony, but as *Mr. Fazzone*. And since the school drew pupils from a third of the city, he was exposed to companions and a standard of living that were vastly different from the Eastside life. He met boys and girls whose fathers were executives in banks, factories, and insurance companies, people who inhabited a world beyond the imagination of the poor Italian immigrants. And from this seemingly innocuous glimpse of life on the other side of the fence there was insinuated in him, without his hardly knowing it, the am-



bition to make something of himself. Let his friends kid him about all the big words he used, and when he was with them uptown and happened to run across a classmate, let them ask him who the jerk was. He didn't care. They could hang around corners and horse around if they wanted to. He still liked to and did, but he wasn't going to quit school to do it. Besides, he loved reading, and whenever he'd started a book, getting back to it was more compelling than the fun of hanging around with the gang.

He had no time at home, however, for textbooks. Reading them was necessary and, as such, work. He arranged his schedule so that he did his required reading in the study periods he was allotted. Mr. Jason, his English teacher, was also his session room teacher, and he could not help but note that Tony always left school with his arms alarmingly unencumbered by books. He took Mr. Fazzone to task for it.

"I don't have no time to study home," Tony told him.

*"You don't have no time?"* Mr. Jason had the demoralizing habit of repeating a pupil's lesser statements and inbuing them with a disbelief that almost had the effect of snapping a whip across him.

Tony, who was still unsuccessfully trying to get Don Peppino's consent to abandon his musical career, had an inspiration. If he could convince Mr. Jason that his music was interfering with his studies, perhaps his teacher might ask Don Peppino, via a note, to allow Tony to quit music.

"Nope," he said, in reply to Mr. Jason's words.

Mr. Jason winced. "And why not?"

"On accounta my music practice. You oughta speak to my old man and let him let me quit it."

Mr. Jason groaned. "How far have you progressed with your musical career?"

"That's just it, Mr. Jason. I belong to a band and I have to attend rehearsals, play—"

"Will wonders never cease!" interrupted the amazed Mr. Jason. "You didn't tell me! Your modesty shames me, Mr. Fazzone. Actually, I think you should give freely of your talent. Now, really, Mr. Fazzone, would you have cared to tell—well, say Thomas Edison—that you have no time to pursue these beneficial activities? As a matter

of fact, I'd like you to get your father's permission to enroll in the school band. He must be enormously proud of you."

Tony's head reeled, wondering why his inspirations always seemed to backfire. On the heels of this self-pity came a vicious thought. He felt like telling Mr. Jason of his other duties. The look on Mr. Jason's face would more than have made up for the repercussions. Instead, he said mumblingly, "Yes, sir. I'll see what my old—I mean Dad—says about letting me join the school band."

Tony, however, knew better than to tell Don Peppino about Mr. Jason's request. When Mr. Jason asked him about it again, he told his teacher that his dad had refused permission because he did not approve of modern music and wished his son to play only the classics. And then he committed the sin of telling Mr. Jason he had agreed with his father.

"Indeed?" gasped Mr. Jason, and when he recovered he went into one of his more masterful tours of rhetoric. During the course of it he asked the cowering Mr. Fazzone if his dad had ever heard of Mendelssohn, Bach, Beethoven, Gounod, Strauss, and a few others, and wondered if perhaps history was at fault in judging their music immortal. He ended by requesting—if Mr. Fazzone could spare the time—that he attend the next three rehearsals of the school band, pick any four of the selections they played, and write a report on their composers. Then he was to submit a five page theme in which he was to outline his objections to the music being termed classical. Mr. Jason then added he would be glad to entertain any views *Dad* had on the subject, and to distinguish them from those of his son, they should be embraced by quotation marks.

But even so high school was wonderful, and Tony soon came to enjoy Mr. Jason's vinegary sense of humor. Someday, he vowed, he would tell Mr. Jason about his Assistant Collectorship and see, under the impetus of that horror, to what new heights of acidity Mr. Jason would soar. But the truth was that he feared Mr. Jason's ever finding out about it, for he knew that Mr. Jason wouldn't approve, and Mr. Jason's approval was important to him.

His embarkation upon his sophomore year brought him more rights and a stronger voice with Don Peppino. Tony had never ceased hoping that the Don would allow



him to terminate his musical career, and now and then he reminded his father that he could attain no true success if, as was always told him, he had no "ear." The dictum of silence imposed upon him during rehearsals, still in effect, embittered him more and more as he learned in school what it meant to be an American. Time after time frustration boiled inside him as he vainly attempted to invoke his constitutional rights. He was drowned out by fiery speeches extolling the virtues of Mussolini and Don Turo Volpe, and severely admonished to remain mindful of his age and the tremendous respect he owed his elders or they would *constuccio* him.

His big break came with the sudden termination of the cordiality between Don Turo and Don Peppino. No warning preceded the rupture. In fact, the only thing that disturbed the Don that Sunday morning as he hurried to answer the knock on the door was the sight of the beautifully colored chart which proclaimed his nobility to the world hanging slightly askew. He went to where it now hung on the dining room wall facing the entrance to the new Fazzone flat, straightened it, blew a little dust off its gilded frame, and went to answer the door. On the other side of it stood the redoubtable leader of the Band of Glory.

"Don Turo!" exclaimed Don Peppino in pleasure. "*Il Professore* honors my home."

The visitor smiled. "*Bon giorno*, Don Peppino."

"One must seat oneself immediately," said Don Peppino, hurrying to pull out a chair. "Wife, wife," he called, "the anisette, the coffee! Come, come, we have a visitor."

Mrs. Fazzone served them the liqueur and a pot of coffee and then retired to her kitchen, leaving the two men alone. Don Peppino turned a smiling face to his visitor.

"I am indebted to whatever brings Don Turo to my humble home," he said. "It is a happy wind that blows him here."

"It is indeed, Don Peppino," said the maestro of the Band of Glory. "When the Capo Collettore learns the reason for my visit I'm sure that the goodness of his heart will cause him to share my happiness. I have the good fortune to be the possessor of a ticket which holds a winning combination of numbers. I have come to place it in your honorable hands for collection."

"Indeed the news gives me pleasure." The Don smiled,

and since his earnings from the lottery were on a hot or cold commission basis and unaffected by the winnings, there can be little doubt that his words had their origin in his heart and not on the tip of his tongue. "Let us drink," he said further, "to the reoccurrence of this happy event."

"*A salute!*" toasted Don Turo who, in addition to the many other things he had in common with his fellow nobleman, seemed also disposed to brevity in toasts.

"And now," beamed the Capo Collettore, rubbing his hands in pleasure, "if Don Turo will give me the ticket I will in turn hand it over to the company for collection. Ah! I see it is for one hundred dollars. *Bona fortuna!* The money will be in Don Turo's hands tomorrow morning."

The matter disposed of for the moment, Don Turo turned to another subject. "The little one," he said, "displays remarkable genius. His presence in the band adds luster to it."

"Ah, Don Turo, what generosity! However, his teacher does assure me that he negotiates the most difficult passages with ease. But since I want him to be worthy of the illustrious maestro, I have ordered him to practice twice as hard from now on. One knows full well the high standards that Don Turo insists on and maintains in his glorious organization."

"Tut, tut," deprecated Don Turo. "I am not disappointed in the son of Don Peppino, whom everyone knows to be an excellent musician in his own right."

There was more small talk between them before the dons parted, one no doubt anticipating with pleasure the collection of his winnings, and the other blissfully contemplating a restored and strengthened image of a villa on Lake Como.

That evening Don Peppino received a shock for which he was pathetically unprepared. Earlier in the day he had telephoned *la compagnia* and given them the number of Don Turo's ticket to verify against their duplicates. Now they called back to report the ticket a counterfeit. The ticket did exist, but with one slight change. It contained the numbers 1-6-62. The ticket Don Turo had placed in Don Peppino's hands contained the numbers 4-6-62, which was the winning combination. It was obvious that the unimpeachable Don Turo had changed the numeral



one into a four. The temptation must have been too much for the great man. The act did not lack precedent. But for a man of Don Turo's standing to stoop—the implication and the pictures of distasteful duties it conjured up gave Don Peppino a headache.

But the situation could not be avoided. The company would not honor the ticket, and though the thought did occur to the Don to avoid all the unpleasantness by paying the money out of his own pocket, it lingered in his mind so briefly as to have not existed at all.

Accordingly, the next morning, when Don Turo called for the money, he collected nothing but evasions which were intended as tact, and an unnegotiable number of apologies.

The eminent maestro drew up his chest, the fires of outrage lit his eyes, and his words, measured and precise, had just the right amount of incredulity in them.

"Don Peppino, do you infer—" The ice in his tone froze the rest of the sentence.

"May the saints forbid!" cried Don Peppino. "No doubt there's been a mistake. Perhaps, Don Turo, unknown to you the ticket rubbed against something that would make a mark, leading you to believe—"

"Don Peppino, your explanations and attempts—"

"Attempts, Don Turo? What attempts? Do you in turn infer—?"

"May God strike my tongue dumb, Don Peppino! It is only that I have come to collect what is due me and am given instead—words. Come, let us forget this regrettable misunderstanding. Surely the illustrious Don Peppino does not doubt the word of Don Turo Volpe?"

"I would risk my life on the honor of Don Turo. But alas, the decision is not mine to make. I shall speak again to the company."

"And you will strongly urge that my ticket be honored?"

"Our friendship leaves me no alternative, Don Turo."

"I do not know these men who form this company, Don Peppino. I have relied always on your undoubted integrity."

And that ended the conversation, Don Turo leaving without having his departure greased by the usual amenities. Don Peppino, true to his word, again queried the company and was told that under no circumstances would

the ticket be honored. When he called upon Don Turo later that day, the maestro, after hearing the decision, had one word to say.

*"Ladrol!"*

Don Peppino paled. He was not used to being called a thief. Before he could think of an appropriate reply Don Turo had gone to the door, opened it, and spitting out the word once more, ushered Don Peppino out of his home.

In extenuation of Don Peppino's failure to discipline Don Turo for his base accusations, it must be stated that he was on the sidewalk before he was struck with the full force of his ignominious ejection. By that time it occurred to the Don that the matter, however distastefully, was now ended, and he could see no reason to deplore the means of its ending.

But the matter had not ended. Immediately after, reports drifted to Don Peppino that he and his company were nothing but a bunch of hoodlums organized for the express purpose of victimizing honest people. The Don, concerned with the blot the rumors put on his escutcheon, took immediate steps to remove it. He asked for and received the company's duplicate.

Its proof was incontrovertible. The numeral one was plainly written, and since it could be turned into a four very easily and not from a four to a one without showing traces of erasure, there could be little doubt that Don Turo was not all that his position implied he should be. Naturally Don Peppino received credit for exposing him.

Obviously, after that Tony could no longer stay in the Band of Glory. But his joy was short-lived, for one evening Don Peppino announced that Martello Nasodolce and a few other musicians who had keenly felt their commander's disgrace, had resigned and were attempting to form a rival band under a new maestro, who would be imported from New York. It went without saying, of course, that Antonio would be one of the clarinetists in the new band.

But Tony, gathering his courage, decided that it was now or never. He informed Don Peppino that he was quitting his music and no amount of recriminations would make him change his mind.

He had struck a blow for freedom.

It was a lethal one to Don Peppino's dream of a villa



on Lake Como. But from its ruins the Don did salvage the perverted pleasure of appearing hurt, and whenever he made his speech calling upon Heaven to witness the ingratitude of his children, he was cascaded with a shower of sympathy, which he received in the humble tradition of one who suffers nobly an undeserving fate.

But Tony had no time to feel sorry for his father. High school grew more and more fascinating with each succeeding day, each succeeding semester. Tony's school life seemed to revolve around Mr. Jason. He had him for a session room teacher again and again, had him for his first two years of algebra, had him for English 1, 2, and 3, skipped him a semester, and at the beginning of his junior year found he had drawn him for English 5. Tony was delighted. He did not fear Mr. Jason, had in fact come to look upon him more as a friend, and if the truth were known, delighted in baiting Mr. Jason with acts and recounting of deeds he knew would shock the poor man out of his pedagogic pants. And he suspected that Mr. Jason knew all this and often pretended shock just to please his young pupil, for whom, in many ways, he showed a liking.

A certain December Friday of Tony's junior year was to prove an important one. But as he sat in his English class that afternoon, he was obsessed only with gloom at the prospect of the evening's chores. And though he knew there was no escape, he tried desperately to think of some excuse to get out of them. Face cupped in one hand, he stared dismally out the window, his eyes focused unseeingly on the lone tree that adorned the landscape in the line of vision from the classroom, paying no attention to Mr. Jason's lecture.

"Mr. Fazzone—" Mr. Jason always drew his students back from the land of dreams with a voice that was ominously gentle.

Tony snapped to. "Yes, sir," he said quickly.

"Please repeat my last question."

Gloom—silence, deep and self-accusatory, was the only response from Mr. Fazzone.

Mr. Jason pursed his lips in a frown and turned, with tortured eyes and twisting lips, to contemplate the outdoors. A few snickers and a giggle went up and Mr. Jason wheeled suddenly, sprayed the class with a silencing look, and turned once more to the window. Tony's eyes glued

themselves fascinatedly to Mr. Jason's fingers as they were knotted and unknotted behind his back.

"Of course, Mr. Fazzone," said Mr. Jason as if he were talking to someone outside the window, "it perhaps means little to you that the taxpayers are paying out a hundred and sixteen dollars a year to educate you. Now, far be it from me to maltreat you by forcing you to listen to my boring comments, for I realize your time could be put to better use than listening to the works of immortal men of letters. I can, in fact, even sympathize with you. I experience the same sensation whenever I am, through no fault of mine, forced to listen to a radio program." Mr. Jason turned his tortured eyes to the object of his discourse. "You do have a favorite radio program, do you not, Mr. Fazzone? Yes, of course." He turned back to the window. "Now I have the intelligence—" he turned briefly to Mr. Fazzone again "—you will grant me that, Mr. Fazzone?" Tony nodded respectfully. "Thank you. Now I have the intelligence to understand that a great deal of effort and money go into producing these radio programs, and sometimes I have a feeling of guilt when they fall on my unappreciative ears. But I justify my indifference with the knowledge that I did not ask them to put the program on. I did not imply, in any sense, that I was willing to submit myself to listening. Now, Mr. Fazzone, you are at an age where your attending school is a purely voluntary act. You are free to leave. No truant officer will race after you and drag you back to my horror chambers: Am I correct?" He paused and turned to stare at the squirming Mr. Fazzone. When he received no reply he said, "Yes, of course. Am I incorrect, then, in assuming that your presence here in my classroom is voluntary?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Jason pursed his lips, seemed to consider the answer, finally accepted it. "Now then, since that is so, don't you think it is a bit unfair to the taxpayers to ask them to educate you and then let their money go to waste? Or, perhaps, is it your opinion that it is wasted when they pay me?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Thank you, Mr. Fazzone. The quickness with which you responded to my last question is most heartening. I am relieved. I am even encouraged to hope for you. Per-



haps you are not beyond redemption after all. In that case I shall extend you the charity of thinking that your distraction was momentary and not attributable to a lack of interest. Is something troubling you, Mr. Fazzone?"

"No, sir," lied Tony.

"Ah, then, permit me to share with you for a moment, your interest in that tree."

"Which tree, sir?"

"There is only one in my line of vision, Mr. Fazzone. How many do you see?"

"One," confessed Tony lamely.

Mr. Jason sighed, as if he were tired, very tired. "Examine the tree. See how the snow has clothed it with pristine beauty. Do you not agree?"

"Well— What does pristine mean, sir?"

"Pure, Mr. Fazzone, pure," again sighed Mr. Jason. "The use of the word was unintentional on my part, Mr. Fazzone. I assure you I did not entertain the sinister motive of tripping you up. I had assumed that a student of English who has—'plodded' would be the word in view of your marks—through more than four semesters would know the meaning of the word pristine."

"Well, sir, you're always telling us never to let a strange word pass unchallenged."

"Your courage makes Horatio at the bridge appear timid by comparison, Mr. Fazzone," said Mr. Jason dryly. "But is the meaning of the word clear in your mind now?"

"Yes, sir. I'll remember, sir."

"The taxpayers will doubtlessly be gratified to hear that you have learned something in this classroom, Mr. Fazzone, even if it is only the meaning of a simple word. But to the tree, Mr. Fazzone. Contemplate it. You do know the meaning of the word contemplate, Mr. Fazzone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now then, contemplate."

"I am, sir."

"What do you see?"

"A tree, sir."

"Ah, a tree! Do you see nothing else?"

"Only a tree, sir," said Tony anxiously.

"Only a tree, Mr. Fazzone?" How Mr. Jason managed those mock sobs of his, Tony never knew.

"That's all, sir."

"Very well, then. Have you ever seen a thing as lovely as a tree?"

The words struck a warning bell in Tony's mind. He knew that all the foregoing and what was yet to come was Mr. Jason's way of punishing him for his lack of attention, and knew further that his failure now to grasp astutely at Mr. Jason's obscure clues would prolong the punishment. He tried desperately to connect the words, and didn't make it. "I—don't know, sir," he said, frustrated.

Mr. Jason turned a deeply pitying look on him. "You do not see its hungry mouth, its leafy arms?"

"Leafy, sir? You just mentioned the snow on it, sir," protested Tony.

"Couldn't you possibly imagine what it looks like in the summer, Mr. Fazzone?"

"Yes—yes, sir."

"Have you never thought of its branches as arms, Mr. Fazzone?"

"Well—frankly, sir, no."

"You don't agree with Kilmer then?"

"Kilmer!" cried Tony, triumphant too late.

"*Dei gratia!*" exclaimed Mr. Jason. He also taught Latin. "It is truly gratifying, Mr. Fazzone, that Kilmer's name strikes a responsive chord in your mind. It is better than nothing. I had not dared to hope that you might also have recognized the beautiful poem that is familiar to every primary grade student in the world. But perhaps if I recited the first stanza you might, just possibly might, recall it."

Mr. Jason seemed to go into a sort of a trance and, addressing the tree outside the window, recited. While he did, Tony glanced uneasily around the room. He was sure that at any minute the other students would all burst out laughing, and then Mr. Jason would never forgive him for having started it all. Fortunately, the class controlled itself, and once Mr. Jason was done and had turned around again, laughing was out of the question.

Mr. Jason allowed a contemplative moment to grind its way to eternity before speaking. Then, "What do you think of the poem, Mr. Fazzone?"

"It's lovely, sir," said Tony, certain that Mr. Jason would be pleased.

"Does it not inspire you, Mr. Fazzone?"

"Oh, yes, sir."



"It *does*?" said Mr. Jason, obviously thrown off balance by the answer. But not for long. He came bounding back. "I had not thought it possible, Mr. Fazzone," he gasped, managing to impregnate the gasp with so much sarcasm that it was a tribute to his mastery of the art. "Your unprecedented admission invites further inquiry, Mr. Fazzone. Just how does it inspire you? On what threshold do you stand poised, Mr. Fazzone? Is your soul bursting with the desire to create? Are you perhaps about to emulate Kilmer? Come, Mr. Fazzone, to what heights of inspiration has the sight of that lovely tree caused you to soar?"

The temptation was too much for Tony. To his credit, he did hesitate before replying, but then the imps of hell prancing around in his mind could no longer be denied.

"Well, sir, it inspires me with a desire to skip the rest of the class and get outdoors," he said.

Mr. Jason paled and his hand groped unsteadily for the support of his desk. Then he recovered and it was Tony's turn to pale as he saw the storm of rebuke gathering in Mr. Jason's quivering body and manifest itself in the stern eye, the curling lip, the withering stare. Now it would start all over again, thought Tony in awe. The taxpayers, the hard, unrewarding work of the teachers, the whole works served up in one scalding dish.

Mercifully, before Mr. Jason could marshal his forces to the attack again, the bell rang, ending the period. As Tony hurried out of the room he silently gave thanks that the day was Friday. Mr. Jason would have until Monday to cool off. By that time he would forget it.

But then he remembered that Friday was his particular day of misery, and he withdrew his thanks.

## 16

It was eleven-thirty P.M. of the day that Mr. Jason had impressed on Tony's mind for all time the beauty of the tree. He had one more stop to make on his route. This was on Kilbourn Street, at the flat of Emillio Zacco. Being a little early he had stopped for a cup of coffee at Longely's lunch room, on the corner of State and Market, a block south of the police station. The gang used the

place as a hangout, and there he had met Tokie, who offered to go along with him.

Now it was no disgrace to Tony that he saw nothing strange in the appearance of the Eastside as he and Tokie made their way to Zacco's home, for his soul and mind were filled with gloom at the lack of trees in those dismal labyrinths of brick, concrete, broken windows, and rubbish-strewn alleys. Tokie, however, had not been exposed to Mr. Jason's enchanting panegyrics on the tree, and it was he who took exception to conditions.

"Sometin' screwy," he said.

"What?"

"There's no action aroun'."

"So?"

"It's too quiet."

"It's cold. Everybody's inside."

"Naw, it ain't that."

They came to the tenement block. "Wait outside," said Tony. "I'll be right back."

He opened a door set in the middle of the building between two stores. He had barely taken a step into the dim corridor before he was grasped roughly by the arm.

"C'mon in, pal, c'mon in."

As Tony's eyes grew accustomed to the light of the corridor, his stomach hollowed sickeningly. The day of retribution had come at last! For the man who held him by the arm was none other than Detective Sergeant Peter Durkin, and Tony's pockets were crammed with lottery slips!

"Well, well!" boomed Durkin. "If it ain't my pal from the lunchroom! I ain't caught that murderer yet, but I got *you*, sonny."

Tony's buttocks trembled a cushioned tattoo against each other. As Durkin's words revealed, he knew Tony, for all the cops, because it was nearby, also stopped in Longely's. Not only was Durkin a cruel cop, but he had a special grudge against Tony. A short time ago, Durkin, who often worked in conjunction with the district attorney's office, had been placed in charge of a case where a woman had been found strangled in a clump of bushes on the outskirts of town. When two weeks went by and Durkin had not solved the case, the fellows ribbed him mercilessly over his failure to catch the murderer. Tony was among the wittier of the tormentors.



"So I couldn't find cow-crap in the Chicago stockyards, eh?"

Tony shuddered. Durkin had just quoted him his particular contribution to the ribbing. "Aw, Pete, can't you take a joke?" said Tony desperately. "Let me go, willya? I'm running an errand for my mother, and if I don't get home soon, she'll worry."

Durkin guffawed heartily. "Wait till I tell that one to the boys," he gasped. "Your mother'll worry, eh? You little bastard! How many times I see you in that lunch-room till three, four in the morning?"

He pushed Tony along the dim corridor. It wasn't until he'd gone about ten feet that Tony realized he was being pushed into the building instead of being taken out of it. Then they were at the foot of the stairs leading up into the building, and he thought he knew the reason for it. Durkin was going to take him upstairs and arrest poor Mr. Zacco also.

But instead, Durkin opened a door to his right and gave him a shove which catapulted him into a store.

"Hey, Tony!" shouted a voice. "What the hell are *you* doin' here?"

"Whadda doin' with the kid, Durkin?"

"Hey, kidney feet! Where'd ya leave his cradle?"

Tony's head swam. As he straightened up he saw that the store was filled with men who had been lined up against the walls, out of the vision of anyone who might happen by on the sidewalks. At the door through which he had been flung was a uniformed policeman, at the front door another. As Durkin pushed him against a wall he caught sight of Tokie leaning casually against a lamp post. Then he looked around the room. He knew almost everyone in it, with the exception of three or four well-dressed men who were obviously from the other side of town.

Tony found himself next to a young man named Crabby. Crabby was one of the older gang, a classy, sharply dressed gambler.

"What goes, Crabby?" he said, after he had caught his breath.

"A knock-off," whispered Crabby. "All over the East-side."

"Knock-off?" said Tony. "How come? What is it, a double cross?"

"I don't think so. Durkin's working with Barker on this romance. They—"

"Jim Barker?" said Tony, aghast. Barker was the nationally famous county detective.

"That's right," said Crabby grimly. "They musta knocked off everything in one stroke. There just was a state copper in here. I think they didn't tell the vice squad about it. How did Durkin get you?"

"In the hall. I was on my way up to Zacco's house. I thought he pinched me on account of the lottery."

"Christ, yes. I almost forgot. It's Friday night."

"Crabby, I'm loaded with slips. Do they search you when they bring you up?"

"I don't know—this time. Usually the VQ just tells you to show in court. But this looks like a big grab. I don't know how they're goin' to work it."

"I'm loaded with slips," whispered Tony, still sick with fear.

"You gotta dump them," said Crabby firmly.

Tony looked from Durkin to the cop on the rear door and then to the one guarding the front. "How?" he trembled.

Just then, Tokie, apparently looking to warm himself, started for the door. Tony waved his hands frantically, trying to warn him off. But Tokie couldn't see him. He opened the door and walked in. He took a startled look around and said, "I must be gettin' jerky. I thought this was the grocery store."

He turned to leave. Durkin stepped in front of him. "Against the wall, pal, against the wall."

"For what? I ain't done nuttin'."

"Against the wall!" roared Durkin.

Tokie's face grew grim. "You and me," he said, clenching his fists, "let's go to the wall together."

The two policemen stirred. "Over here, Tokie!" cried Tony, afraid that Tokie was going to start a fight and get them all up to the station before he could dump his slips. Tokie, catching the plea in Tony's voice, resigned himself to the pinch and went to stand next to him. Tony told him how Durkin had caught him in the hall.

"I told ya somethin' was screwy. Gimme the slips. I'll take the rap."

"Listen," said Crabby, "nobody has to take a rap. See that coat on the wall there? The brown one. Some guy



got drunk about two weeks ago and walked out without it. He ain't claimed it yet. While we cause a rumpus, you slip the lottery action in the coat. Don't worry about it. This Durkin's a stupid son of a bitch. He won't get wise."

"All right," whispered Tony shakily. He was a little worried about getting caught. The alternative was to leave them in the patrol wagon, but then they would be found and a lot of questions would be asked. "I'll holler when I'm clean," he told Crabby.

"We'll tumble him good," said Tokio.

"Let me handle it," said Crabby. "I can burn that Durkin without goin' for a two-bit fine for abusing or attacking a cop. I had a little education, you know," he added, not without some pride.

Tony nodded his head and, as Crabby stepped out in the middle of the store, started edging his way toward the brown coat.

"Back against the wall!" roared Durkin to Crabby.

Before Crabby could speak, someone gave Durkin the raspberry. He whirled around.

"Where'd that come from?" he said, glaring at the lined up men.

"It didn't come from no perfume bottle," said a voice behind him.

"All right, wise guys," said Durkin grimly. "The wagon's pretty busy tonight. I can keep you guys here all night. All I gotta do is to pass it up when our turn comes. Just keep it up, that's all. Just keep it up."

"What, no crap wagons?" said another voice.

"We got 'em all workin'. There's a lotta booze to take up, boys." Durkin grinned, did a jig, and to the tune of "The Farmer In The Dell" sang a little ditty:

"Oh, the town is goin' dry,  
the town is goin' dry—  
Get your tonsils good and wet,  
the town is goin' dry."

"Mr. Durkin," said Crabby peremptorily, holding up a hand.

The grin disappeared from Durkin's face. "I thought I told you to get back to that wall."

"I'm goin' to do you a big favor," said Crabby. "I'm goin' to give you a chance to let me go. I know my constitutional rights, and after I get through suing the city for

false arrest, they'll have you pickin' up horse crap where the farmers hold their market every week."

"Get back against that wall!"

"I'm walkin' out, Durkin. Just for the record. I want witnesses to see in case you try to stop me."

Crabby turned and made for the door. Durkin grabbed at his sleeve and Crabby shook his arm free. Then the policemen at the doors started for him. As the cop left the rear door, some of the men made for it.

"Guard the doors!" roared Durkin.

The action started then. Tokie jumped into it, and as the other men tugged and wrestled with the cops as they were caught attempting to escape, there almost was a riot. Durkin took out a gun and started waving it. Tony yelled out to Crabby, and Crabby grabbed Tokie and pushed him back against the wall. Durkin didn't put away his gun until he had bulled everyone back into line.

When the commotion had died down and everything was under control, Durkin went to Crabby and stood nose to nose with him.

"Wise guy," he snarled.

Tony, free now of the incriminating lottery slips, became acutely conscious of his innocence, and the more he thought about the manner of his arrest, the more outraged he grew.

"Why don't you go and catch that murderer instead of bothering innocent people," he said to Durkin. "He must be back in town since he heard you were on the case."

Durkin's face grew red with anger. "Watch your step, sonny," he said menacingly. "You ain't up in that lunch-room now. I'll kick the crap outa you if they bust me for it."

"Everybody hear that?" said Crabby calmly.

Durkin roared with laughter. "I never see so many lawyers in my life," he sneered. "Everybody I pinch is a lawyer." He glowered at Crabby and Tony. "But I ain't seen one of 'em win a case yet," he growled.

In the meanwhile, more customers kept coming into the place. As they stepped in they were placed under arrest and ordered against the wall, out of sight from the door. Before another hour had passed the speak-easy was filled with people representing almost every walk of life.



There were sports from the other side of town, the hanger-arounders, clerks, and even an alderman who kept uttering dire threats to Durkin, among which was the over-used one about Keney Park and the birds.

At about one-thirty the wagon got around to them. Tokie and Tony already had an agreement. Since Tokie had taken a few falls and Tony none, it was likely that Tony would be immediately released, and upon his release he was to see about getting Tokie out.

The cops backed the wagon flush against the door of the speak-easy and started funneling the frequenters into it. A few of the men tried crawling on their hands and knees among the surging prisoners and through the feet of the guarding policemen. Though the arrest was not a serious one, it did provide its inconveniences, and the men could not be blamed for trying to duck them.

For Mr. Jason's sake, Tony gave it a try. There was always the chance that the names would be in the newspaper, and the shock, he was sure, would be more than the poor man could stand. He got down on his knees and started working his way through the shuffling pairs of feet. Durkin spotted him, picked him up, and with the help of another policeman, threw him into the wagon as if he were a sack of potatoes.

At the police station Tony saw a sight he never forgot. The lobby was swarming with state policemen and city policemen and the usual mob waving bank books over their heads and clamoring to bond out relatives and friends. In addition to this, the dump trucks kept coming in with loads of confiscated whiskey and alcohol, gin, beer, and the apparatus needed to dispense it. Stacked from floor to ceiling were five gallon cans of alcohol, miniature bars, stools, booths, beer pumps, cases of beer, kegs of beer, and here and there, barrels of sawdust. It was an awesome sight, and as Tony became aware of the disaster that had hit the Eastside, he shuddered. Without realizing it, he was moved along in line toward the bench behind which sat the sweating desk sergeant. At the foot of the bench stood Durkin, directing the charges as each culprit approached the desk.

Tokie and Crabby were in front of Tony in the line. When Crabby's turn came, he was ordered to give his name and address.

"John Smith," he snapped.

The sergeant winked at him. "Where's Pocahontas? Okay, tomorrow morning, nine o'clock."

"Wait a minute," growled Durkin. "Not with that map of Italy, he's no John Smith. Search him for identification."

Tony grinned. It was a good thing that he had men of experience with him on his first pinch. Mr. Jason would never read his name in the paper. Everyone who had any identifying papers on them had torn them up and left the pieces in the patrol wagon. In the morning they would be swept out by some grease monkey.

"All right, all right," surrendered Crabby. "I was lying. My real name's Joe Russo." Joe Russo was the Italian equivalent of John Smith.

"That's better," said Durkin. "You ain't kiddin' me."

Tokie was next. The sergeant said, "Look, kid, no more Joe Russos, eh? I got too many of 'em now."

But Tokie had a different name ready and he was told to appear in court the next morning. Tony breathed a sigh of relief. He would be out in a minute, and with an alias they would never catch up with him. As far as he was concerned it would be all over, because Malipento, who owned the speak-easy he'd been caught in, would gather some bums and send them to court to plea to the aliases when the names were called out by the clerk. When his turn came, he said, "Tony Lombardo." Durkin knew his first name, but Lombardo was another Italian Smith.

"Charged with the operation of a speak-easy," growled Durkin. "One hundred dollar bond."

"Hey, wait a minute!" protested Tony. "You nuts? *Me* own a booze joint? For cryin' out loud, I still go to high school!"

"Yeh, Pete," said the desk sergeant dubiously. "He's only a kid. Ain't you a little off base?"

"Like hell. Don't let these kids fool you. They all help their old man run these joints. I know this wise bastard. When he called his joint I answered the phone and made out I was his helper. He told me he heard the town was hot and to ditch the stuff. Then he haid he'd be right down, but to get goin' in the meantime. I was waitin' for him when he tried to sneak into the back room where we found the stuff."



The sergeant scratched his head in perplexity. Tony screamed that he wasn't the owner of the booze joint and that he had come in the front door of the building on an errand for his mother. Durkin said, "Book him!" Tokie, who was waiting for him and had heard the name Tony had given, said, "Don't worry, Lombardo. I'll get in touch with yer old man."

The desk sergeant was still dubious, however, and he went into a whispered huddle with Durkin, during which the latter's face grew ominously red with anger. Then the sergeant turned and, shaking his head and muttering to himself, wrote on the blotter.

The whole place was a riot of activity. As Tony was led away from the desk, the Testadura speak-easy contingent was brought in, Joe and Frankie Corsini in the custody of three husky state troopers. Tony, escorted by a policeman, was pushed through the mob so speedily that he had no chance to look the troopers over for bruises. This was a shame, because he was curious to see how the Corsinis went against the state coppers, who were supposed to be tougher than the locals. On the other side of the fence of bars, Tony was started up on the iron stairs leading to the tiers of cells. The policeman searched vainly for an empty one.

Drunks booed and shouted at them, and women inmates—there was no sectional segregation of sexes in the overnight lockup—harlots, dope fiends, and others, screamed obscenities that made Tony blush. He had heard the words many times and they were common enough to him, but he had never in his life heard them mouthed in English by women. Their Italian equivalents somehow never sounded so pornographic.

There was no alternative for the cop but to put Tony in with some other men. The cell was dark and, having no ventilation, stank horribly. To pass time, Tony paced an area about a foot wide by three feet long. Every once in a while a name was called and a prisoner released as bond was posted for him. Along about three in the morning he was alone in the cell.

He lay down on the iron, padless cot and, ever ready to dramatize things, his thoughts went to Edmond Dantes in the dungeons of the Chateau d'If. Was he, too, destined to lie in a cell, forgotten and bereft of all hope? The association of thoughts led him to the school library, where

he had got the Dumas classic, and from there to Mr. Jason. Mr. Jason would hear about his arrest for sure now. His real name would be exposed in the trial, because unlike the five dollar fine charge of frequenting, you could go to jail for operating a speak-easy. Tony knew just what his English teacher would say. "*Wh-at? One of my pupils in-car-cer-ated?*" He visualized the poor man shuddering himself into an uncartilaginous, amorphous mass of flesh.

Tony groaned. But there was hope. Certainly a man of Mr. Jason's tastes—didn't he scorn the radio?—would spurn the police news and turn only to the editorial page and the poets' corner. The thought heartened him and, being young, healthy, and tired, the modern-day Dantes soon was off in a deep sleep, iron cot notwithstanding.

He awoke to a searchlight blinding him. A policeman stood over him shaking him roughly about the shoulders. Behind the cop was Tokie.

"Wake up, goddam you!"

Tony rubbed his eyes sleepily.

"You Lombardo?"

Tony started to shake his head. "That's him," said Tokie firmly.

"Goddam it!" cried the cop. "You deaf or something? They forgot what number they put you in and we've been hollering your name up and down these goddam tiers till we're blue in the face. Hey, Joe!" he shouted across to another policeman, "go down and tell the old lady we found him before she wrecks the joint. Goddam it!"

Tony jumped up, wide awake. The old lady! His grandmother! He turned pale. "What time is it?" he said.

"Four o'clock," said the cop. "How the hell could you sleep like that?" he added resentfully. "Oh, nuts," he sighed, probably remembering when he was able to do the same.

"Tony," grinned Tokie, "your grandmother's wreckin' the joint."

"God!" breathed Tony. Zia Maria in the police station was like a kid with a BB gun in a bottle factory. He leaped out of the cell.

When he was brought down to the lobby, Zia Maria was standing in the center of it, brandishing her bank book over her head. From her lips streamed an unbroken flame of the most beautiful invective Tony had ever



heard. Everytime a policeman came near her she slapped him with the bank book. A great many of them knew her and they passed the slaps off with a grin. Then she took to kicking over the gallons and the cans filled with alcohol. Some of the cops tried to stop her, but she kicked them in the shins and they retreated with yelps of pain.

"Thieves!" she screamed. "*Briganti! Marioli! Figli di puttane!* You shall not drink it or sell it! Ah, thieves, I know what you will do! *Bestia! Animali!* What have you done with my innocent little one!"

Tony wanted to run back to his cell.

Right then and there, come what may, he decided to quit his post as Assistant Head Collector. Of all the people Don Peppino could have sent to bail him out, he had to send Zia Maria. Tony knew what was coming. He would be disgraced before all the cops, his friends, and the people who knew him. And it seemed that all the East-side was in that lobby for one reason or another.

"Zia Maria!" cried someone. "*Ecco il vostro pronipote!*"

Tony tried to efface himself against the wall, but his grandmother had spotted him, and now, pushing aside the policemen in her way, she strode determinedly across the lobby to where he stood. Tony died twenty times before she reached him.

"Little one! Little one!" she cried dramatically, and flung her arms around him. She kissed him and sobbed, kissed him and hugged him and sobbed the harder, uttering hysterical phrases of relief. Then she shut up abruptly, backed away from him, and cocked her glinting eyes at him.

"Have these animals harmed you?" she said.

"No, Mammavecchia," whispered Tony pleadingly. "It's all right. Don't say anything more to them."

"This way," said a cop peremptorily, trying to move them in the direction of the desk, over which presided a new sergeant.

Zia Maria reached out and slapped him hard across the cheek with the bank book. An angry look came into the policeman's eyes. "Oh, Christ," moaned Tony softly. "They'll have to pinch her for sure now."

But apparently Zia Maria had caused so much trouble in the police station that now the whole force seemed to have one purpose in mind only—getting her and her grandson out of the place.

The desk sergeant had found Tony's name in the register, examined the charge, and was now staring at him incredulously. While Tony whisperingly told his grandmother that they were getting out and to please cause no more trouble, the desk sergeant called a policeman over and whispered something into his ear. The policeman disappeared through a door, and a minute later he came out with a short, stocky, bull-faced man. Tony recognized him from his newspaper pictures. It was the famous Jim Barker. Barker took one look at him, and broke into a smile. Ten more seconds it was a huge grin and he was shaking his head unbelievably. He said something to the policeman, and the man climbed the stairs to an upper floor. Two minutes later he was back with Peter Durkin. Durkin, Barker, and the desk sergeant held a whispered conference. Tony could see Durkin's face getting red, and it was obvious that Barker was reprimanding him. Then the desk sergeant called down to Tony.

"We're removing the charges against you, kid. Get the hell out of here, and take *her* with you."

Tony got a break then. Zia Maria went quietly, though she did pause a minute or two here and there to weep with the wives of some bootlegger friends whose establishments had been raided.

Outside Tokie was waiting for them. He handed Tony a package. "The lottery slips," he whispered. "I snuk back into Malipento's joint and got 'em."

"Boy, that's a relief," said Tony. "I won't have to go around now and pick up the duplicates. Tell you what, Tokie. I'll tell the company how you helped me and saved the play. I'll tell them to give you twenty bucks. We'll split it. Okay?"

"Boy, Tony," said Tokie admiringly, "yer wastin' yer time goin' to school. It's a deal."

Tony turned to escort his grandmother home, really unprepared for what followed, for he was now a junior in high school and they *did* address him as *Mr.* Fazzone. But to Zia Maria, apparently, he was still her little one, and now, having rescued him from the jaws of the police, she was bound that he was not to go unpunished. Right there, on the hallowed cement surrounding the police station, she started to slap him and scold him for the bad-conduct that had earned him a few hours in jail. Tony warded off most of the blows, laughing as he did so. This seemed to



infuriate his grandmother more, for she increased the attack and he was forced to pinion her arms to her sides under the pretense that he was hugging her. He finally got her home and then made his way to his own flat.

There he found a silent Don Peppino and his red-eyed mother waiting for him. Uncle Theo, he learned later, finally triumphant, had departed about an hour before he returned home. When Tony produced the lottery slips and told his parents that all had ended well, Mrs. Fazzone became hysterically happy, for at no cost now, she had finally been provided with the excuse she had wanted all these years. It had all been decided. Don Peppino could continue his activity in the lottery if he chose to. But no more would Antonio have anything to do with it. All that had been decided.

When he finally got to bed, Tony was in deeper communion with Edmond Dantes and almost could feel the joy that was Dantes' when he rose to the surface after his plunge into the icy waters of the Chateau d'If and took his first breath of clean air after years of confinement. With his music chores a thing of the past and the onerous duties of the lottery now banished, there loomed before him only a life busied with acquiring learning. He thought of Mr. Jason and a feeling of warmth came over him.

He carried the feeling over with him into Mr. Jason's class on Monday. The room was pleasantly sunny. It had snowed again the night before and the new blanket of white on the school grounds outside the window was still pure. Pristine, thought Tony, unconsciously paying Mr. Jason's methods of teaching a strong tribute. Then Mr. Jason himself came into the room. Apparently he had forgotten all about Friday, for he gave Tony a warm smile.

It was another world, a world of sun and clean smells, of books and scrubbed faces and rosy cheeked girls, a word of poets and great deeds and imaginary journeys to all the corners of the earth; it was a world far from the sordid lobby of the police station with its dust and spit-toons, its drunks and screaming harlots, and its faces aged by the devastation of disillusionment. Inevitably, Mr. Jason was compared to Peter Durkin, and Tony knew he wouldn't trade what little chalk dust there was under one of Mr. Jason's fingernails for all the Durkins in the world.

As the class progressed, Tony, in spite of the fact that

he had secretly pledged an unswerving allegiance to Mr. Jason and everything he would have to say from then on, began to think of his arrest. In a way, he had been disappointed not to have been brought into court. Oh, he would have told them all a thing or two and would have subjected Peter Durkin to the most grueling cross-examination, during which he would trap the red-faced detective into admitting that he had forced Fazzone into the speak-easy. Mr. Jason's voice faded into the background, became a hum that was and wasn't there.

"Not the tree *again*," said the hum.

Tony *was* staring out the window at the tree, but again with unseeing eyes. He did not know that Mr. Jason's voice had left its lecture track and was directed at him. His mind was preoccupied with the courtroom scene. Durkin was cringing and had just admitted, shamefacedly, that he had violated Fazzone's rights, and that if the court would allow it, he wished to make a public apology.

"Does that tree hold a special fascination for you, Mr. Fazzone?" said the ominously gentle voice of Mr. Jason.

Yes, it was a time to display a bigness of soul. There would be no petty grudges. Tony informed the judge that he was interested only in seeing justice done. He was not concerned about himself. He didn't matter. He was merely the physical representative of a principle at stake, and through his person, the ideals and rights for which their forefathers had fought stood defended. If Sergeant Durkin's apology were offered in all sincerity, he would be pleased to accept it, providing all the men who had been abused with him were instantly set free. Tony visualized the headlines emblazoned across the front page of the *Hartford Times*.

## YOUTH SHAMES COURT INTO REMEMBERING BILL OF RIGHTS

"Mr. Fazzone—" Mr. Jason's voice, fortified by outraged patience, succeeded in penetrating to his pupil.

Tony, startled, jumped to his feet. His hour had come! The passion of a Jacobin lit his eyes, and in his blood flamed the fire of the men who had drawn up the Magna Carta; the innocence of a Dreyfus distorted his face with a martyr's fervor, and the courage of Patrick Henry made his voice ring out true and clear!



"Not guilty, your honor!" he cried.

"*Mr. Faz-zone!*" gasped Mr. Jason, reeling against a wall.

## 17

When the son of Josephine Puglese, the widowed sister of Don Peppino, proposed marriage to the daughter of Barber Gennaro Pomposo, the widow naturally had every reason to expect able representation in the forthcoming negotiations.

It was not the widow's fault that Mr. Pomposo found himself arrayed against so formidable an opponent as Don Peppino. Mr. Pomposo had no one to blame but himself, for the widow, being, unlike her brother, a timid and retiring person, would much rather have settled the details as unobtrusively as possible. Gennaro Pomposo, however, being a man who stood mightily on ceremony, and who had a definite opinion of the woman's role in life, would not have it so. When circumstances suggested that he call upon the widow to settle the arrangements, he did, but only to inform her arbitrarily that he would not injure his dignity—nor cloud his reputation—by descending to the level of negotiating a piece of business with a woman. True, he stood ready to give credit where credit was due. He understood, for instance, that women were human beings; but it must be also understood that they had certain functions in life, as had men, and she, as far as he was concerned, having given birth to his prospective son-in-law, should not presume upon that happy coincidence to intrude where only men walked. Having made that point clear—the widow was not one to argue—he ordered her to appoint a representative with whom he could then, honorably and without loss of pride, deal.

The Widow Puglese, far from being slighted by Mr. Pomposo's attitude, relievedly asked her brother to negotiate in her place, and the Don accepted the responsibility with a nonchalant shrug of his shoulders. To the Capo Collettore, it was just another affair to be discharged with his usual wisdom and unerring good judgment. He therefore asked his sister to find out if Mr. Pomposo would call on him or preferred being called upon.

Now it is possible that Mr. Pomposo did not know that the widow was the sister of the invincible Don Peppino, or knowing it, overconfidently gave the matter insufficient thought. It is certain, however, that when he learned it he was not appalled, for certain derogatory remarks came drifting unerringly to the sensitive ears of the Don. And Mr. Pomposo's lack of awe for Don Peppino's known prowess was entirely in keeping with his character. Little more than five feet tall, the barber seemed to possess the supreme ego which is inherent in most little men, and even his iron gray hair, which stood on end like the bristles of a brush, seemed to add to his aggressiveness.

As it turned out, the two men did not meet immediately, for the widow, after informing Mr. Pomposo of her brother's words, had been told that the meeting would take place in good time. And then Mr. Pomposo, obviously finding it distasteful to discuss even such a small point with a woman, had abruptly changed the subject.

It was immediately after this that the raps came drifting back to Don Peppino. Mr. Pomposo had gone to the trouble of freely and loudly letting it be known that he considered *Mr.*—and it was in that very tone that it was repeated to the Don by Martello Nasodolce—Fazzone definitely beneath his station, and in addition to the old tag of *maffioso*, he appended those of buffoon and philanderer to the Don. Since the two men had never met, it must be that Mr. Pomposo's steady barrage of defamatory remarks, just as a bombing of a fortification is a prelude to attack, was a sort of calculated campaign designed to beat Don Peppino into a properly submissive attitude. At any rate he publicly deplored the proposed alliance between his family and that of Don Peppino.

Now Don Peppino's years of public life had inured him to all manner of censure, and he was able to shrug off most of Mr. Pomposo's remarks. But the insult that stuck in his craw was Mr. Pomposo's repeated and accentuated omission of his title. However, he bade his time and soothed his sister who, hearing of Mr. Pomposo's vile remarks, had taken to wringing her hands every time she thought of the coming meeting between the two. When the meeting would take place Don Peppino did not venture to predict, nor did he venture to make any further contribution to its materialization. When it did come



about, it came unexpectedly and, for the Don, at a very unpropitious time.

It was Saturday evening, and the Fazzone flat, never at a loss for action, was jumping. Nicky and Tony were preparing to attend a dance, and of course Don Peppino was also preparing himself for the evening's activities. The knock on the door was peremptory and, being such, had an ominous, *this-is-the-law!* sound to it. The Don almost jumped out of his skin, but when he remembered it was Saturday, and not Friday, he was able to approach the door with some equanimity.

The little man who stood on the threshold could have been no one but Mr. Pomposo, and as light flooded the gloomy corridor, he parted his lips in a toothy, artificial smile that indicated nothing but a routine observance of the amenities. At least, that was the Don's impression. Immediately behind him stood his wife, almost effaced by the shadows and dwarfed by the dominant personality of her husband. The Don stared at and past her, and received his second shock. Ranged behind her was a seemingly endless line of progeny who appeared to have been placed in chronological order. Don Peppino could not see them all, for the stairs curved and the line continued past the curve and perhaps into the street. The Don was completely overwhelmed by it all, for later, when a technical point on the issue of hospitality was raised in argument with Mrs. Fazzone, he claimed not to remember raising his hand in a gesture for Mr. Pomposo to enter.

However, it seems that Mr. Pomposo must have interpreted some sign on the Capo Collettore's part as an invitation to enter. It may have been a helpless flapping of the Don's hands, but at any rate, Mr. Pomposo, assuming that he had received his *entrante*, now also assumed all the rights inherently implied in that invitation. The Don persists to this day that all he recalls was a blur of motion as Mr. Pomposo stepped into the room and then, as imperiously and efficiently as a policeman directing traffic, ordered his wife and each of his children, as they filed past him, to various places in the room.

And then the mettle of the man with whom Don Peppino had to deal came rapidly to the fore. Though the Don recalls only chaos and an enervating confusion, Mr. Pomposo quickly set about restoring order. With curt,

almost guttural commands, he went about seating his family.

Now the table was a large one, but as the smoke of confusion began to lift, a grim gleam of satisfaction came into its owner's eyes. Surely, the Don was thinking, the cocky little man would be stymied. A rapid count, the accuracy of which could not be vouched to under the circumstances, had revealed to the Don that there were at least thirteen children. Counting their genitors would make if fifteen. Though large, the table was not large enough to accommodate them all, to say nothing of Don Peppino, though Mr. Pomposo had not as yet given any indication that he would allow the Don to sit at the table. But as the pattern of orderliness formed, the shifting humanity revealed Mr. Pomposo, as cool as any truly great general is, calmly concluding the maneuvers.

When he had done and silence and order had descended once more upon the Fazzone dining room, it was at once seen that most of the children stood at attention behind their chairs, and running counterclockwise from the chair behind which stood their more important parent, were again ranged chronologically, the first-born Pomposo being at his redoubtable father's right. The rest of them he had ranged, as obscurely as possible, against a wall.

Mr. Pomposo's eyes swept over his family in one final look to make certain that all was well. Then, insofar as a man could make a ceremony out of simply seating himself, he sat at table. It appeared to be a signal. There ensued a scraping of chairs and a moving of feet as the Pomposos seated themselves at the table. Another withering look from their commander again brought complete and sudden silence. To his amazement, the Don saw that a chair had been left open for him. He did not sit in it, however, for consternation had immobilized him. This was not an invasion; it was stark naked conquest.

Mr. Pomposo cleared his throat. "As you see, *Mr. Fazzone*," he announced, "I have come to pay you a visit. Come, let us enjoy the fruits of family life together." He cleared his throat again and smiled a smirking smile. "One hears that you are devoted to your family and never stray from its bosom."

Don Peppino did not answer. He didn't know what to say, and he dared not risk speech in the fear that it would



inadvertently express his thoughts. Don Peppino's thoughts at the moment were better unexpressed.

While Mr. Pomposo had been busily arranging his family, Nicky and Tony, completely indifferent to the commotion in the dining room—the place was like a convention hall—had been putting the final touches to their Saturday night sharpening-up. They had finished and were passing through the dining room on their way out just as their father was finding the necessity of replying to Mr. Pomposo being forced upon him. This took the form of an automatic and gutless phrase of welcome. The eyes of the young sports swept the room unconcernedly as they made their way to the door. Nicky had already opened it when an astonished look came into Mr. Pomposo's eyes. One would have thought he was witnessing the descent of the moon to the earth.

*"Un' momentol!"* he barked.

Nicky and Tony halted at the command. And well they might have, for the words and the tone in which they were spoken could easily have frozen dashing surf. Mr. Pomposo transfixed the Fazzone hopes with a terrible stare. Then, as if certain that they would not move until he felt disposed to release them, he turned his attention to Don Peppino. Now the anger rose from deep down inside him and flooded his features; his underlip curled in expressive protest, his nostrils dilated, his cheeks quivered uncontrollably, and his hair bristled militantly. The Pomposo brood turned pale and lowered their heads. Mr. Pomposo allowed a pregnant minute to crawl by while his face ran the gamut of every conceivable visage of humanity outraged. When he finally did speak, it was with a whisper so full of venomous incredulity that the words not only reached their objective—which, of course, was Don Peppino—but seemed to pierce him like flying darts.

*"How, Mr. Fazzone? You dare grant your children permission to leave the home when it is honored by visitors?"*

The Don, though momentarily overwhelmed by disaster, had now bravely fought himself back to his senses, and he chose the only method left to him of escaping the certain evening of boredom that was looming up before him. He reached for his hat where it lay handily on the buffet and, prodding his sons ahead of him through the door, took time only to say to his unexpected guest, "As it so happens, Mr. Pomposo, I was going out myself."

The flight of the three sports down the stairs was precipitous. As Nicky and Tony piled into the car of a friend who awaited them, Don Peppino scrambled in after them. Nicky turned to give him a dirty look, but Tony quickly assured his brother that the Don was only escaping and not, as it appeared, trying to cut himself a piece of their Saturday night action. The Don descended from the car two blocks away and, after relieving himself of a shuddering sigh, went his way.

The repercussions were both dreadful and immediate. The scene with his wife Don Peppino endured as one who waits patiently for a storm to subside, secure in the knowledge that the sun would once again come forth to shed its warmth. At first the Don had attempted to make light of the whole affair, but this had only increased his wife's bitterness, for, as was pointed out to him, it was she who had been left behind to cope with the awkward situation. Mr. Pomposo, she kept repeating, had delivered a diatribe which, though in reality had lasted little more than five minutes, had appeared to go on for hours and hours and which, she insisted, had resembled one of Mussolini's more fiery speeches. His exit soon after, instead of relieving her, had left her in a greater state of agitation, for it seemed that the house was full of little electric currents that made the air uneasy to breath. She would not repeat the things he had said or the names he had called Don Peppino. It was only certain that she could never show her face outside the house again. She stood disgraced for all time. She now agreed with Mr. Pomposo that her husband was a *maffioso*, and more, that he was a man who took no pride in his home and family, and of course, a *cafone* who did not know how to exercise the simplest rules of hospitality. It was the Don's exception to this statement that brought up the technicality of whether or not he had granted Mr. Pomposo permission to enter his home.

Mrs. Fazzone's bitterness was the immediate part of the repercussions. The dreadful part was not long in following. Almost immediately Don Peppino found himself the target of a greatly increased and intensified verbal bombardment from the enemy camp. Mr. Pomposo, apparently finding it difficult to place Don Peppino outside the law—the point being a highly debatable one among people who viewed the lottery in the same light as its head



collector—now abandoned that course and concentrated his guns on the lofty ramparts of Don Peppino's alleged nobility. He stated that in Italy Don Peppino had been a herder of goats and, moreover, insisted that he could prove it. Then, in a slander unparalleled for viciousness, he took to claiming that when Don Peppino came to market in the old country the tradesmen would have to wash off the coins he left behind, for they were invariably incrustated in dirt and—worst blow of all!—smelled highly of goat manure.

When this last statement probed its way into the Don's ears, he blanched. Now the severity of Mr. Pomposo's offensive must extenuate Don Peppino's action in retaliation, for he betrayed the trust that went hand in hand with his position as a *capo*. For years he had stood in the opinionated arenas and given his decisions honestly and as he saw them. Now, for the first time, he prostituted his office. But the temptation, to say nothing of the provocation, was great.

The Don's revenge, to report the facts harshly, was a premeditated one. As a beginning he took to referring contemptuously to Mr. Pomposo as "that barber." Then, when he was satisfied that Mr. Pomposo was properly identified with his trade, he joined a group of men one evening and, subtly insinuating the subject, pointed out with his usual authoritativeness that a barber's trade was filthier than that of a plumber. Plumbers, he reminded his listeners, put their hands only to the pipes that carried filth, while barbers exposed theirs to all manner of diseases by rubbing infected scalps and skins. This eventually earned him the enmity of Teddie, but since Teddie no longer possessed the limousine, and La Bella Julia had him like wine in a barrel, letting him out only when she chose to turn the spigot, that didn't matter too much.

Mr. Pomposo's reaction to this haymaker is not known; nor could his continued bombardment be used as a barometer. He had set a pace that could not have been increased, and of course there was no way of knowing how long he would have kept it up even had Don Peppino not relegated his trade to an inferior list.

But now the Don, hearing his latest decision largely quoted and cited for its amazing incisiveness, hearing of cases where customers were forcing Mr. Pomposo to wash his hands before applying them to their person, was able

to endure the insults with a becoming tolerance. But not so his widowed sister. Kept informed of every communiqué that came out of the enemy camp, she continued to wring her hands, and then, being able to stand the pressure no longer, begged her son to relinquish his courtship of the Pomposo girl.

Young Puglese, however, did not so easily relinquish his courtship. Upon arrival at home for supper one evening, Don Peppino found his nephew awaiting him. With him was his fiancée. The nephew was well acquainted with his uncle's habits and knew that if he must catch Don Peppino at home when his fiancée could accompany him with propriety, it had to be at supper time.

"Zio Peppino," said the nephew, "I have brought my intended to meet you. She would say a few words to you."

Don Peppino gave his potential niece-in-law a casual scrutiny, and while he would never have judged her capable of representing Italy in a beauty contest, he had to admit that she was passably good-looking and appeared to have none of the offensive characteristics of her father. In short, he was forced to a reluctant, though tentative, approval of the girl as a wife.

"Oh, Don Peppino," cried the girl, "you must go to my father and apologize to him or else he will never give his consent to my marriage. I don't want my life ruined like Concettina's."

The Don controlled an almost involuntary shuddering. Apologize to that upstart of a barber? He let it pass and said, "Concettina?"

"She is my older sister," the girl said almost sobbing, and from there went on to quote the Don some interesting facts.

It seemed that five years ago Concettina had a chance to get married, but her father made the terms so harsh her intended could not meet them. Concettina, who had worked all her life and handed her wages over to her father upon his assurance that he was saving it for her, demanded her money in order that she could bear the expenses herself. But Mr. Pomposo refused to give it to her and expressly forbade her to marry a man who would not assume the expenses of getting her for a wife. The man had soon found another, but poor Concettina, it seemed, was now an old maid and spent her nights in her room weeping. Mr. Pomposo's unaccountable behavior in the



matter took on method when the Don heard that all the children worked and that there were nine envelopes now coming into his hands every week, besides what he himself earned. And in the tobacco season Mrs. Pomposo also earned a good salary, which of course she also had to hand in.

"*Corpo Diavolo!*" exclaimed the Don. "Your father must be a wealthy man."

"Nobody sees the accounts but himself, not even Mama. She never has any money. She charges at the grocer and the butcher and he pays the bills."

"Umph," grunted Don Peppino. "I must have time to consider this matter fully. Perhaps I will think of something."

With that the girl appeared to be content, though she did not receive a promise from Don Peppino that he would apologize to her father. After declining the Don's invitation to join him at table, the imperiled lovers left the house.

In the course of the lottery operations, a curious fact came to light. For many reasons, Don Peppino did not like to take large bets. It was a relatively simple matter to detect any of these, and for three weeks now he had been on the trail of one Widow Sponzielle, who had played three dollars a week for three successive weeks. It was an unusually excessive play.

The Friday following the couple's visit to the house, the agent collecting the widow's play reported that the woman, instead of decreasing her gamble, had increased it by one dollar. The sum, relatively speaking, was fantastically large. The following Monday Don Peppino called upon the reckless widow.

As he mounted the stairs leading to her flat, the Capo Collettore, innocently unaware of any sacrilege in the comparison, thought himself not unlike the parish priest who goes to call upon one of his erring flock. He knocked discreetly on the door and it opened to reveal a plumpish woman of about forty-five whose hair had just begun to gray. A polite look of inquiry gave way to a welcome smile as she saw the handsome, well-dressed man poised on her threshold.

"I am Don Peppino Fazzone, *Il Capo Collettore Del Gioco Del Lotto*," announced the visitor, using his full-dress title.

"Ah, *si, si.*" The widow smiled more expansively. "One has heard of the Capo Collettore."

"Ah!" said the Don, warmed by her welcome. "Has one permission to enter?"

"Indeed, one would be honored," giggled the widow.

Don Peppino crossed the threshold and seated himself in a chair which the widow had quickly dusted and placed at his disposal.

"One begs to be excused for a moment," she said then.

The Don nodded and she disappeared into another room. When she reappeared it was apparent that she had spiced herself up a bit. In one hand she held a decanter filled with wine, and in the other, two glasses. She placed the glasses on the table, filled them, and handed one to her guest.

"*A salute!*" toasted the Don, raising the glass to her, and they both drank. The Capo Collettore smacked his lips in contemplative evaluation of the wine. It was customary, when drinking a wine for the first time, to pass judgment on it.

"It is good," pronounced the Don. As a matter of fact he found the wine excellent, but it would have been unwise for him to say so. That might have placed his own ranking as a vintner in jeopardy.

"Ah, *si,*" sighed the widow. "I take it out only on rare occasions. It is the last wine made by my late husband and already the one remaining cask is more than half drawn. But then it is not every day that one receives a call from the Capo Collettore."

"Your words honor me," said the Don. He looked about the small flat. It contained nothing that he had not seen in the countless number of flats he had visited. Certainly it did not look like the flat of a person who could afford to gamble three, four dollars a week. Don Peppino cleared his throat.

"You must not take insult from what I am about to say," he took the plunge. "But it has come to my attention that you gamble heavily on the lottery. It is my duty to inquire into these matters. It saddens me to think that people deprive themselves of other things in order to play the lottery."

The widow registered first surprise at Don Peppino's words, then anger, and lastly a smiling and forgiving understanding.



"The Capo Collettore is kind," she said. "But he need not concern himself on my account."

"Ah! The signora's husband has left her well provided for?"

"That half a fever?" The widow snorted contemptuously. "He did not leave enough to pay for the dirt that conceals him from my sight. But one is not without enterprise. One gets along quite comfortably. There are ways," she added enigmatically.

"Then the signora does not leave herself without bread in order to play the lottery?"

"Poo! It is of small matter."

Don Peppino, his mind set at ease, sampled one or two more glasses of the widow's wine and left.

The following Friday the widow's play was conspicuous by its absence. When Don Peppino queried the agent about it, he received a strange tale. It seemed that the man had stopped as usual at the widow's house to pick up her numbers. The widow had given him the numbers but not the money for the play. When the agent had insisted on being paid the widow suggested that he take the play and then stop by Mr. Pomposo's shop to get the money from him. Though the agent doubted her words—the widow appeared to have been drinking—he agreed to do as she said.

At the mention of Mr. Pomposo's name Don Peppino's ears had of course pricked up and he listened in close attention to the rest of the story. It seemed that Mr. Pomposo had indignantly refused to pay, voicing at the same time a heated verbal wonder that the widow had even suggested such a thing. He did not know the woman except as a casual nodding acquaintance, Mr. Pomposo exclaimed. It was a prank, a jest, a calumny designed to destroy the name of one who led the life of a saint. The agent could only retreat in confusion before this unexpected declaration of innocence. He went forthrightly to the widow and returned her play. Strangely enough she had not protested. And that, the man concluded, was why there was no play from the widow.

The next night, Saturday, found Don Peppino tapping once again on the widow's door. Again he was made welcome and again the precious wine was put at his disposal. Insisting that his call this time was purely a social one, the Don immediately set about proving it. This of course

meant nothing less than diminishing the precious supply of the only tangible asset left the widow by her late husband. Don Peppino had not lied about the quality of the wine, and now he thanked the gods that looked after him that he was able to discharge his duty with a modicum of pleasure.

The evening wore on and, as the widow's legacy was steadily dissipated, Don Peppino—now one must bear in mind that he was there for the noblest of purposes—and she had come to the stage of exchanging ribaldries. It was along about midnight that the Don was in complete possession of the facts in search of which he had sacrificed one of his precious Saturday evenings. At that point he extricated himself from the company of the widow, who had grown frankly amorous, and, his mind poisoned with the falseness of men and the hypocrisy of all mankind—all this in spite of the roseate glow of the wine in him—he left her and emerged once more on the streets to breathe the antidote of pure air.

It was a suspect hour to be seen coming from the widow's flat, but the unsteadiness of his legs showed that the Don's lack of discretion was to be blamed on his condition and was not a congenital fault. Unluckily, he was seen by many women who were still at their windows and who lost little time flinging the news into the winds of gossip to perpetuate and strengthen the Don's undeserved reputation for philandering.

The following Monday, Mr. Pomposo, upon lifting his head, which was at the time bent over the face of a customer he was shaving, was surprised to see walking into his shop none other than his bitterest enemy, the Capo Collettore. Don Peppino was not a customer of his, having of course been, until his brilliant opinion on barbers versus plumbers, Teddie's star patron. The surprise on Mr. Pomposo's face progressed to an expression of distaste. He ignored Don Peppino and went on shaving his customer. The Don seated himself in one of the chairs and, after a few casual remarks upon the weather which evoked no reaction whatsoever from Mr. Pomposo, picked up a copy of *Il Progresso* and, with a series of audibly important grunts and exclamations, began to absorb the news of the day.

After Mr. Pomposo's customer was shaved and departed the barber was further surprised to see Don Pep-



pino divest himself of tie and collar. This was unmistakable proof that Don Peppino tended to seat himself in the chair, and Mr. Pomposo stared at him in disbelief. However, probably thinking that Don Peppino had come to kill two birds with one stone, that is, get his hair cut and use that excuse to apologize, he remained silent and began to adjust the apron around Don Peppino's neck.

Several times the Capo Collettore appeared to be on the verge of speaking, but Mr. Pomposo, who waited for the words of apology with scissors and comb poised in midair, heard only thunderous sighs. As the sighs continued to issue from Don Peppino's bosom, Mr. Pomposo's face took on more and more the aspects of a man who is irritated. The sighs grew to such proportions and became so portentous that Mr. Pomposo, revealing his first human failing, was driven to ask Don Peppino why he sighed.

"Ah," ah'd Don Peppino with the fullness of a half-minute's breath, "I sigh for all the wickedness that exists in the world."

Mr. Pomposo stopped and gave him a meaningful stare. "There are some," he said, "who add to it."

"*Si, si,*" agreed the Don, unperturbed, and from there went on to quote the tale that had brought him to his present state of disillusionment. It was, he assured Mr. Pomposo, a purely hypothetical one, for he wished to point the finger of guilt at no one. But as the Don recited and the barber clipped, Mr. Pomposo must have been struck by the similarity between himself and the central character in the Don's tale, for at times he trembled, and the delicate shades of pink and white made rapid appearances on the stage of his face. And then, when identification was no longer escapable a look of sullen anger settled on it.

Don Peppino, during his recitation, had taken no notice of the expressional changes on the barber's face. It was only when Mr. Pomposo put the razor to the Don's skin that its slight quivering awoke the incautious Capo Collettore to his danger. From out of the corner of a now alarmed eye, Don Peppino saw that the barber's hand did not have the steadiness that is reasonably expected from one wielding so dangerous an implement. To his credit, Don Peppino did not surrender to panic. However, it is

not to his shame that his body did go taut a little and that he henceforth held his tongue.

In due time he emerged from the barber shop physically unscathed, the only visible evidence of his narrow escape being the erratic part in his hair. It was not nearly so meticulously straight as the Don was wont to wear it.

Three days later, there having returned to the Don the courage of his resolutions, he summoned his nephew to his home and told him to inform his prospective father-in-law that he would sit with him the following Sunday morning to discuss the terms of the coming marriage. The nephew gave vent to a resentful skepticism which, though pardonable in view of what had already happened, the uncle smothered before it could gain momentum. The nephew could do nothing but comply with his uncle's wishes, for the Don, though not his legal guardian, was, nevertheless, his real and absolute one.

Sunday morning Don Peppino heard a discreet knock on his door. He opened it to find a meek and respectful Mr. Pomposo hesitating on the other side of the threshold. The barber's hat was doffed and placed respectfully over the region of his heart. The Don attached no great significance to this, for it was Sunday, and that fact could have accounted for Mr. Pomposo's uncharacteristic behavior. It was generally conceded on the Eastside that Sunday behavior, like Sunday clothes, should be of the best.

"Ah!" boomed Don Peppino in welcome, for he was famous for his hospitality. "It is Mr. Pomposo! *Entrate! Entrate!*"

"One has permission?" wavered Mr. Pomposo. He seemed unsure of himself.

"Permission?" echoed Don Peppino, aghast. "You do my home honor."

Mr. Pomposo stepped in. Mrs. Fazzone entered the room and flusteringly wiped her hands on her apron as she smiled uncertainly in welcome.

"I have come," said Mr. Pomposo, "to discuss the marriage terms."

"Ah," smiled the Don, "I had almost forgotten that I was to negotiate on my sister's behalf."

"It is better that you did, Don Peppino," replied Mr. Pomposo, "for women know little of these matters and I do not wish to take advantage—"



"You have a heart that exudes only kindness," said the Don, not failing to note, at the same time, Mr. Pomposo's belated recognition of his title.

"I aim only to be just, Don Peppino."

"Who can do more?" philosophized the Don.

"Has one permission to be seated?"

Don Peppino smote his forehead. "You will think me a peasant!" he exclaimed contritely. "Please do not stand on ceremony. You must consider yourself in your own home."

"If the signora will do me the honor to seat herself first—"

Mrs. Fazzone, knowing full well Mr. Pomposo's views on the subject of women's rights, stared at him bewilderedly and then slowly seated herself. Mr. Pomposo and Don Peppino followed suit.

"I wish to say first of all," began Mr. Pomposo, opening up matters, "that I am fully conscious of the great honor that comes to my family with this alliance. There can be no doubting that Don Peppino is an illustrious person, and to be associated with him is to reap dignity and honor."

Don Peppino acknowledged this accolade with a modest nod of his head, and, as was customary, gave answer to it. "You go too far," he deprecated, but not too firmly. "It is true, however, that the alliance is pleasing to me and that I too must acknowledge the honor that falls to me with this association."

"Your words bring joy to this humble heart. It is now my duty to ask you what custom is followed among the people of your native village."

"*Per la Madonna!*" The Don again smote his forehead. "You will think me a herder of goats! Here you are ready to discuss terms and I have not yet offered you a little something. Wife! Glass and liqueur!"

Mrs. Fazzone quickly went into the kitchen and soon reappeared with glasses and a decanter filled with anisette. Don Peppino poured a generous portion for Mr. Pomposo and himself. The two men raised and clicked their glasses.

"*'A salute!*" said the Don.

Mr. Pomposo, however, did not believe in brief toasts, and the Don was forced into an irritating delay. "Our beginning friendship," said the barber, "is forged in the

fires of blood, for yours as well as mine will flow in the veins of my grandchildren. Thus I drink to the glory of this coming fusion. May it prosper and grow stronger with the coming years; may the happiness of the betrothed pair be as eternal as the stars, and their love as fierce as the smoldering fires of Vesuvius. I drink also to the happy prospects that come to me with the friendship of so illustrious a person as Don Peppino."

Don Peppino listened gravely, for Mr. Pomposo's words moved him. Then the two men gulped their drinks and made ready for the discussion. The drink, or perhaps what the taking of it represented, almost restored Mr. Pomposo to his old self, and he seemed to take on confidence as he prepared once again to resume negotiations.

"Now then," he said, "to return once more to the business at hand. I believe I had asked you what custom was followed in your village."

"Ah, *si, si*," said the Don. "In the village where I was born there are no set rules. One does the best one can."

"Is it so? *Nel paese mio*, there are certain things which are paid for by the family of the bride, and certain things which are paid for by the family of the groom."

"And what are these things?"

"We will take them one by one. There comes first the expenses of the church. In my village it is customary for the groom to pay for the white carpet upon which they march to the altar."

"Alas," sighed the Don, "as I have pointed out, in my village these arrangements depend on circumstances. Now, my poor widowed sister is in no position to indulge this luxury."

"Luxury?"

"The white carpet is not necessary."

Mr. Pomposo grew red with anger. "And if my daughter walks not on the white carpet, which is the symbol of her purity, do you know what people will say?"

Don Peppino knew full well. But society had for ages decreed that this particular type of onus should accrue to women and to those responsible for them. Consequently, the disgrace would fall on Mr. Pomposo's house and not on his. And since this was so, he was disinclined to give it much thought.

"True," he admitted. "But—yet, if you wish to—"



"Don Peppino, are you suggesting that I bear this expense?"

Don Peppino shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"Very well," surrendered Mr. Pomposo. "It may appear to be a small thing, but where the reputation of my children—"

Don Peppino, perceiving that the man was about to launch a time consuming stream of self-laudation, interrupted him and asked him to go on to the next phase.

"The expense of the church decorations—"

"Alas, Mr. Pomposo, here again circumstances intrude to upset the order of things. My poor widowed sister—"

Mr. Pomposo set his lips. "Is she not willing even to—"

Don Peppino interrupted him again, this time with a gesture that articulated hopelessness.

Mr. Pomposo's face started to form an expression of protest, but then it collapsed. "I am being called upon to bear more than my lot," he said with the air of a martyr. "However, it is not the first time that these shoulders have borne a heavy load. Let all bear testimony to the self-denial of a father who places the joy of his children above all other things on earth."

Don Peppino nodded his head in tribute.

"And now," continued Mr. Pomposo in the manner of a chairman determined to get on with the meeting, "there is the matter of the wedding dinner. It goes without saying that I shall supply the wine, as is the custom. As is also the custom, the expenses of the banquet and the catering will be borne equally by both parties."

"Mr. Pomposo, it grieves me to make this confession, but my poor widowed sister—"

"Don Peppino," interrupted Mr. Pomposo with a show of his old fire, "am I to hear about your widowed sister at every turn?"

"The sad truth is that she cannot afford to lay out a penny in this matter."

"Am I to bear the expenses alone, then? There are yet several matters to be determined. The reception, the flowers for the girls, the gifts which the bride and groom give their attendants, the photographer, the limousines, the orchestra, the *guantiera d' pasticci*, the thousand other details—"

Again Mr. Pomposo was treated to that eloquent gesture of hopelessness, and now his underlip curled in dis-

may. He turned to Mrs. Fazzone in a silent plea for mercy, but found in her face only an amazed bewilderment. He appeared to think for a long while, and it is not improbable that during this time his mind went over the story which Don Peppino had recited to him in his shop. Then he spoke.

"It is a charity that God calls upon me to perform. It is well for your widowed sister that the tale of her plight falls on a heart that is easily susceptible to sympathy. You may inform her that the father of her son's intended is not a harsh man, but one of soul so noble in proportion that he cannot remain unmoved. It is well. All shall be as you say, Don Peppino."

"You are a just man, Mr. Pomposo. It lightens a little the painful task I must now perform."

"Task, Don Peppino? What task?"

"I must ask you to proceed to the next phase of our negotiations."

"The next phase?"

"Yes. My nephew tells me of an apartment he could have. However, there is no furniture in the apartment."

"No furniture in the apartment? They will do as other young couples do. They will buy the furniture on the installment plan."

"In ordinary circumstances I would agree with you, but—"

"What are you driving at, Don Peppino?"

"My poor widowed sister—"

"Must every sentence you utter contain those words?"

"Alas, Mr. Pomposo, consider the circumstances."

"The circumstances! I ask for nothing but justice, and all I hear about are circumstances and your poor widowed sister. You stretch your point too far, Don Peppino. Even Christ on the cross could endure only so much."

"And all I ask is justice for my sister," spoke Don Peppino. "Since she lost her husband ten years ago she has had a difficult time of it keeping herself and her children alive. Now that the older boys are working and help her a little, it is time for one of them to marry."

"That is her affair, not mine."

"I have informed my sister and my nephew that I cannot give my consent to this marriage for at least one more year, at which time another of her sons will be in a posi-



tion to help support the family. That is, I will withhold my consent unless he does a certain thing."

"Which is?"

"That he contribute the sum of five dollars a week to the support of his mother and his brothers and sisters for the term of one year."

"That is a matter that he and my daughter can decide between them."

"How can he give his mother five dollars a week and still meet the installments on the furniture?"

"Don Peppino—"

"Mr. Pomposo—"

"Don Peppino!"

"I am sorry, Mr. Pomposo, but I must insist that you buy them three rooms of furniture before I can allow the marriage to take place. Of course—"

Mr. Pomposo had leaped to his feet, his face set in a silent expression of explosive protest. His forehead quivered and his eyes almost popped out of their sockets with rage. And then, seemingly expelled in one blast, came a screaming tirade of protestations, pleading, self-justification, and oratory the likes of which might well have righted the leaning tower of Pisa. Mrs. Fazzone trembled and mumbling a vague excuse, fled to the sanctuary of her kitchen. But Don Peppino, whose endurance had been toughened in the gales generated by Uncle Theo, waited patiently and unmoved until Mr. Pomposo, weakened by the force of his emotions, as inevitably he must be, sat down, produced a handkerchief, and wiped his perspiring brow.

It was perhaps unsporting of Don Peppino to take advantage of a weakened enemy, but he chose that moment to begin counting off on his fingers the various items of furniture needed to fill a three-room apartment. Mr. Pomposo said nothing. In fact, he appeared to have bankrupted himself of words. He sat at the table, his face filled with suffering and the sweat flowing freely from his brow down his cheeks. He looked for all the world like a man being burned at the stake, and had Don Peppino lit a cigarette at that moment and blown some smoke around the whipped man, it would have completed the illusion. Then his shoulders sagged and, in true martyr fashion, his head fell to his chest. Don Peppino rained blow after blow upon it.

At last the relentless Don was done, and Mr. Pomposo, wounded beyond measure, placed his hands on the table for support as he bravely brought himself to his feet. Continuing to hold his head bowed he made for the door. There he paused to raise tear-filled eyes to Don Peppino.

"Never," he whispered hoarsely. "Never. You ask too much."

"I know I ask a lot, but let your noble heart be the judge of whether I ask unfairly. If I do not hear from you by the end of the week I will summon my nephew and your daughter and tell them why the wedding cannot take place."

On that note the two bargainers parted. Mr. Pomposo, however, did not allow the week to run out. It was only two days later that Don Peppino, arriving home for supper, found Mr. Pomposo's first-born awaiting him. The younger Pomposo told Don Peppino that his father was ill and that he had been sent in his place to acquaint Don Peppino of a certain decision. His father, after taking the sad plight of the widow into consideration, had, out of the not-to-be-denied goodness of his heart, fallen prey to all of Don Peppino's pleas. The date of the wedding would be set by the bride and the groom, after which Don Peppino could submit a list of the people he wished invited. It would, the emissary assured him, receive every courtesy:

The wedding took place in good time, and the ceremonies followed the usual routine. It was at the reception that Don Peppino administered the *coup de grâce* to an already badly beaten adversary.

The Don was standing with Martello Nasodolce and a group of cronies enjoying the festivities, when out of the corner of his eye he saw Mr. Pomposo come within range of his voice. Don Peppino raised the glass he held in his hand. He sipped the wine and then let it play around his tongue and lips as he seemed to go into deep thought. His cronies, knowing that they were to receive an opinion from the foremost wine connoisseur in the world, respectfully gave him their attention.

"My friends," said the Don in a voice that must have carried to every corner of the hall, "it would be highly disrespectful of me not to drink at my nephew's wedding. But I tell you, this wine has the acid quality of vinegar."



Don Peppino turned and once again was given the opportunity of seeing Mr. Pomposo's shoulders sag and his head drop to his chest under this new blow. There are some Italians who would much rather have the characters of their wives impugned than the quality of their wine.

Of course, most of the details of Don Peppino's latest triumph got around, for Nasodolce, in declaring the Don's acumen to be on a par with that of those unknown thieves who had stolen America from Italy, opened the case to discussion. Mrs. Puglese, who adored her brother and, unlike her sister-in-law, could see none of his faults, claimed that she had known all along that his charm would have enslaved Mr. Pomposo and bowed him to his will. The grateful couple had insisted that Zio Peppino honor them by leading the Grand March, which he did—and without incident. Mrs. Fazzone's only comment was a cryptic grunt which, with amazing articulateness, seemed to say, "If only the truth were known—" And of course there were always those few who took the vengeful attitude that Don Peppino might have been more chivalrous to a fallen foe and, instead of publicly condemning his wine, could either have praised it or remained silent.

But if one remembers how wine loosened the Widow Sponzielle's tongue, and if one knew that Don Peppino had considered for many days placing her on the list of people he wished invited to the wedding, it must be conceded in the end that the Don, in discarding the idea, had acted with a magnanimity that is found only in the truly noble.

## 18

In 1931, Antonio Fazzone graduated high school. In the final exams he received the highest interscholastic mark in solid geometry. He did not know about it until Uncle Theo, who kept a close eye on such matters, picked his name out of the fine newspaper print and came to the house to commend him. Mrs. Fazzone was inordinately proud of him, and because of this great achievement, Don Peppino announced that he would honor him by attend-

ing the graduation exercises. It went without saying, of course, that Mrs. Fazzone would also attend.

Throughout the ceremonies, graduating pupils went to the stage to receive money prizes for marks in English, History, Latin, and a few other subjects. Then Tony's name was read in passing, with a few others, there being no prize for geometry, civics, and art.

Don Peppino, reflecting later on this, gave out the opinion at table that Antonio seemed to excel only in things which brought no financial reward, and since the world rewarded only the deserving, Antonio, it would seem, had gone to gather water with the spaghetti colander. Tony, who had finally got used to the Don's censorious remarks, grinned and let it pass, but Mrs. Fazzone, who listened faithfully to the radio soap operas, the conflicts of which always deprecated the value placed on money, took indignant exception to her husband's words, driving the Don to adjure heaven to take notice of the suffering of a *padre di famiglia* who was subjected to debate during the consuming of his dinner.

However, Tony *had* accomplished something. Nicky had quit college, leaving the coast clear for him to bring home the first diploma from a higher school. Mrs. Fazzone had it framed and hung in the parlor, away from the Don's genealogical chart.

The diploma was only part of Mrs. Fazzone's dreams. The other part never materialized. In 1931, a high school diploma was about as impressive as a lock of sheared hair on the floor of Teddie's barber shop. Instead of going to work in an office, Tony was lucky to get a job in a greenhouse. When he entered his first greenhouse and saw the profusion of flowers, breathed their fragrance, and thrilled to the celestial silence, he told himself he would never work anywhere else. He had found his life's work. The boss then led him outside to a manure pile, threw a pitchfork at him, and told him to start loading a truck. Five minutes later he quit. Depression or no depression, he didn't go to school to shovel manure. From then on it was one odd job after another.

One of the more remunerative of these was his job on Election Day. For chauffeuring voters from their homes to the polls and back he received five dollars. Unfortunately, he worked at this only once a year.

But now it was late in October of 1932. New hopes



were surging in the breasts of those who had for many years been denied seats at the festive board of dispensing political plums. Democracy was on the rise, the chickens which were supposed to be in the pots were cackling impudently in the barnyards, and the lumbering, decadent elephant was staggering to a crumbling end. The East-side, overwhelmingly Democratic, prepared to move in for the kill.

Elections were no trivial things to the Eastsiders. It was a time when all men were asked to step out and be counted as friend or foe. Before the polls closed, new enmities would be formed, new reputations would topple the old ones, untold perfidies would be exposed, and new arrests would infuse old and jaded records with new life.

To the Eastsiders, Franklin D. Roosevelt was just a guy who happened to be on their ticket. They didn't care about the national level. The only candidates who counted were the ones who lived in the city and were judged according to how much guts they had when it came to squaring a rap and how available they were to a little oil money; the only other important thing was the showings made in the various wards, for that would dictate the degree of attention the ward chairman would get for the favors that were requested of him.

Don Peppino cared little about elections. But if he had been able to foresee how Roosevelt's election was to affect him, there is little doubt that he would have thrown his tremendous support to Hoover. As it was, the Don had more than once gone on record as condemning politics and politicians categorically, saying that since a voter was given only a choice of thieves, he had no intention of compounding the wholesale villainy by voting.

Be that as it may, as Election Day neared, the various candidates blared on and on with their speeches, forcing Mrs. Fazzone into one of those rare agreements with her husband, for they moved most of her favorite programs off the air. The incumbents reiterated over and over that they were standing on their records; the new blood demanded over and over that these very same records be examined, though no one, least of all the candidates, knew what they were or where they could be found. All expressed their confidence in the judgment of the voters, appealing to their finer instincts and their

desire for honest government. In resounding speeches they pledged themselves to keep inviolate the sacred right of every American to vote as his conscience dictated.

On Election Eve all this unadulterated *bull* was stilled, and the professionals moved in.

One of the more important phases of an election was the gathering of balkies. Angelo Testadura was in charge of this operation, and for three days now the bums had been lifted from their benches in the park, dragged out of boxcars in the freight yards, kicked out of the alleys into the arms of waiting captors, and imprisoned in the back room of Testadura's speak-easy. There they were tapered off into sobriety and fed just enough booze to keep them that way. On Election Day they would be put through the polls under the names of dead voters. After they had voted once, Teddie the Barber, who always closed shop for the day, would shave them and, disguised in cleanliness, they would be put through again. Then they would be given a quart of raw wine and set free. Two hours later a reincarnated Spanish Inquisitor wouldn't have been able to get a hello out of them.

The busters had been working out for a week under the watchful eyes of a professional fight trainer. These were the men who would go from precinct to precinct starting fights with the Republican workers and decommissioning them for the rest of the day. It is a tribute to their skill and thoughtfulness that very seldom did their victims require more than a day or two to recuperate, rarely beyond a week.

The ice-pick crew had already been selected, equipped, and briefed. These were the men who would go about the city puncturing the tires of the Opposition's cars.

The springers had been equipped with cash. These were the men who would sit in the police station all day long, ready to post bond for their colleagues and return them to action with a minimum loss of time.

The pointers had been at work for almost two weeks. These were the people who had been handed lists of down-the-liners, voters who polled a straight Democratic ticket even if their enemies were running. The pointers visited the down-the-liners and asked them to call up Republican Headquarters and request that they be chauffeured to the polls, where they would then vote



Democratic. And of course there was the small group of telephoners. They would call Republican Headquarters all day long, requesting rides and giving fictitious addresses.

To protect themselves against any unethical acts by the Opposition, there were the peekers. This was a highly specialized job, and only the most skillful were selected. It was the duty of the peeker, acting officially in the guise of a moderator or challenger, to peek, as unobtrusively as possible, through the balloting machine curtains to ascertain how the voter had polled. In cases where the vote had been paid for, this action was more than justified. It was the peeker, also, who exposed the double-crossers. And if there were an especially good one on the job, he could give an almost accurate count from hour to hour as to how the polling was going.

Now it was only natural that these powerful forces be deployable to wherever they were needed, for the East-side, being so overwhelmingly Democratic, could afford to release them to the disaster areas, which were mostly west of Main Street.

The polls opened at six in the morning. At six-thirty the arrests started coming in. The Corsini brothers, who were on the buster squad, were arrested three times each, and there were at least thirty accidents to report as rival cars vied for parking spaces at the precinct curbs. One of the ice-pick crew was caught with his pick inside a tire, and two cops made him jack the car up, remove the tire and carry it, with the pick still in it, all the way to the police station. His attorney later likened the arresting officers to the sadistic Roman soldiers who had forced Christ to carry His own cross, and then pointed out that if it was unconstitutional to force a man to testify against himself, it was doubly so to force him to *carry* evidence against himself. The Judge, a Democratic appointee, was so moved by this ingenious plea that he found the defendant not guilty and gave the arresting officers a stern rebuke and a lengthy lecture on the Bill of Rights. In the meantime, the party workers who had been on the persecuted man's line of march with the tire, were inspired by his travail to carry on with new fervor, and to impart this fervor to the rest of the organization. Word was flashed out to all the precincts of the unprecedented suffering of one of their fellow men. Out of the gigantic

struggle new heroes emerged, new reputations for toughness were established, and much honor was garnered.

When it was over the losing candidates made the usual sour-grapes speech congratulating their rivals, commending them for conducting the election in the best of American traditions, and invoking God's help for them in their coming trials. The winners proclaimed their deep consciousness of the honor conferred upon them and, in an amazing turnabout, cloaked their erstwhile adversaries in all the seven virtues; in moving speeches they publicly dedicated themselves to principles which Christ Himself could not have lived up to, and with becoming magnanimity they thanked the people who had worked for them, thanked the electorate for its confidence in them, and in general distributed credits with the prodigality of a seed sower.

Not one of them touched upon the men who made the greatest sacrifices. These were the bootleggers. Though Roosevelt had vowed to repeal prohibition, they gave their unstinting effort to his election with no regard to the loss that would be theirs.

Now there is little doubt that Roosevelt was a great President. But he was callously indifferent to the plight of the bootleggers he threw out of business. There was no law passed to compensate them for their losses, and they were expected to make the difficult adjustment from illegal to legal status without the help of government rehabilitation centers staffed with competent psychiatrists. They were, in fact, rudely given the choice of going to work or directing their genius to channels in which they were not without some experience. Since the former was too horrible to contemplate and the gambling rackets a new lode for them to mine, one cannot, in all honesty, blame them for deciding on the latter.

In surveying the situation they saw that Don Peppino's lottery empire was ready made for them. A group of the more enterprising of them accordingly approached the Capo Collettore, and, after praising him profusely for the work he had accomplished in the field, lauding him for the reputation he had achieved, they told him they were to attempt to place their insignificant footsteps on the path he had so gloriously blazed. For this purpose they had formed a *compagnia* of their own, complete with a squad of assistant collectors who, for a nominal



fee, would do sundry services for him, such as escorting him about and seeing that he was not robbed or otherwise molested. This new company, in all generosity, did not have it in mind to take over the *whole* lottery. The old company would be allowed to stay in as a partner for as long as it "worked out." Don Peppino was to present the proposal to his superiors. They would return in three days for the "decision."

Throughout the pleasant meeting, Don Peppino gave the men his gravest attention, and it was obvious that he was conscious of the great honor they were conferring upon him. After they left, his features grew graver and he meditated in silence, and more than once, when his eyes strayed to the vivid chart on the wall they misted suspiciously with tears. All that day and part of the next he was seen about the Eastside with the same unchanging expression, and it became obvious to all that Don Peppino was wrestling with a tremendous decision. Late that afternoon he telephoned the members of *la compagnia* and told them he had to see them on a matter of importance.

They came that evening, and Don Peppino, after they had had some black coffee and anisette, gave them the sad news. After the many years of pleasant association, he told them, he was regretfully resigning his post, and why. It took the simple-hearted small businessmen about twenty words, which they whispered among themselves, to accept his resignation and to go on from there to give him their last instructions. He was to inform these men that they too were withdrawing from the lottery. In a word, it was theirs.

When Mrs. Fazzone received the news she was so overjoyed she could hardly speak. After she had hugged Francesca—the boys, like their father, were never home—she ran to the kitchen and in no time the large table was set with olives, roast peppers, preserved *sazizza*, *prosciutto*, *provolone* cheese, celery, and a gallon of the Capo Collettore's celebrated wine. Don Peppino, gravitating irresistibly into a festive mood, took telephone in hand, called an old neighbor in the canyon, and asked him to deliver a message to Martello Nasodolce. Nasodolce was to come immediately to the house of Don Peppino, and he was to bring his trombone. On the way he was to pick up Orlando and his violin.

A half-hour later the party was in full swing, and the house was filled with laughing friends and neighbors who, upon hearing the music, which always constituted an automatic invitation, had come running into the flat. Mrs. Fazzone sat at table with her hands out of view, twisting a handkerchief that was wet with tears of joy.

A new era had begun for the Fazzones.

## 19

Don Peppino, immediately following his resignation from the lottery, retired into the role of elder statesman. His title of Capo Collettore he naturally retained, just as retired senators, governors, judges, and commissioners retain their titles for life. As for his donship, that was an hereditary title and had nothing to do with his office. And quite fittingly, the Don, as he stepped into this new role, looked the part. His ruddy complexion reflected the years of his discrimination in food and his insistence on only the finest wines and liquore; and his hair, in the best tradition of retiring judges, was turning a becoming gray. His opinions were still sought and heeded, and that love of life which had always brought him herds of friends and the involvements that came with them, kept him from becoming decadent and astigmatic in his point of view.

For a few years his children, in giving him a well-earned rest, had turned breadwinners. But as they married off one by one, Don Peppino was forced again into action. In looking about for something to do it was only natural that he should scorn returning to head the lottery, for he had stated that the lottery had been dragged to the level formerly occupied by bootleggers and, as such, was now illegal. It was Tony who suggested that since he spent his days in a tavern that he buy one and thus combine business with pleasure. The Don was at once struck by the admirableness of the suggestion and even went so far as to wonder verbally that it had come from son number two instead of number one, for, after all, it was Nicky who had brought home the prize for brilliance.



And the move was a desirable one in more ways than one. Nicky already owned a fifty percent interest in a restaurant, and Tony had gone to work for him and his partner. Don Peppino, contemplating his entry into the business, saw himself not as a rival to his son but controller of a string of restaurants that would stretch across the country. Significantly enough, he made no mention of establishing one on the shores of Lake Como, and it could be inferred from this that he had come to tolerate America and would end his days here.

The Italian population of the city had started moving toward the southern end of the city. Franklin Avenue, in the heart of it, became, in a mild way, what Front Street was to the Eastside, and it was there that Don Peppino located his tavern.

In no time the Don was back in action, and just as his love of life and companionship had brought him success in the lottery, his talents were also peculiarly suited to the operations of a tavern. In it was found always the most congenial of company, and customers lacking a third or fourth for a game of *bosse e' sotto* always found the fun-loving proprietor more than willing to oblige. Not only that, but the patrons received the undoubted benefit of the Don's experience in cooking and his highly selective palate, and on his menu could be found dishes to delight the most fanatic of gourmets. He soon became a quoted authority on the various lagers and ales and the cooling and dispensing of them.

The tavern was a model of operation, both from the point of view of cleanliness and circumspection, for the Don, from his post behind the bar, pontificated loud and long on the virtues of the law. Even the clock on the wall, by which he closed his tavern, was set a half-hour ahead to be certain he did not dispense beyond the legal hour. Nasodolce, who had forsaken his shoemaker's last to go to work for the Capo Collettore, was given daily briefings on what was and what was not the law.

As the tavern thrived, Don Peppino, thinking that Tony would be better off with him, called him down one evening and suggested that he come into the tavern with him as a partner. They would obtain a full liquor license, enlarge, and go into the restaurant business full scale. Tony, who had had a lifetime of being the Don's assistant, threw up his hands in horror and ran for the exits,

driving the Don, shortly after, to comment to a group of cronies leaning on his bar, "'Twere better if I had raised a pig, for it at least could have been eaten."

But the Capo Collettore, undaunted, continued to run his tavern. From time to time he received a visit from Nicky who, though employing the fanciest and highest paid chefs, had, when he wanted to eat *good*, to go to his father's place. On these occasions the two restauranters would sit in one of the booths and abandon themselves to the various Italian triumphs. It was the Don's habit, during these gastronomical *tête à têtes*, to apologize to Nicky for the absence of wine on his table. But the law said he could dispense only beer, and that was all Nicky could have. He need not have shed any tears, however, for son number one, in addition to a love of food, shared with his father a variety of drinking preferences, and the beer was more than adequate.

Of course, it was only natural that the Don should reciprocate these little visits. This he did on Sundays, the day his tavern was closed. Now the Don did this purely out of courtesy, for he was on record as stating that he did not enjoy his dinner at the Hearthstone Restaurant. In the first place, Nicky had once quoted him some silly law which made it impossible for the Don to put his own wine, which he had judiciously brought with him for the occasion, on the table. All this in spite of the fact that Nicky well knew that his father had more than once condemned all commercial wines on the grounds that chemicals were used in them. When Nicky went on to assure his father that he would serve him a fine imported wine, Don Peppino, after having it forcibly pointed out to him that they could not afford chemicals in Italy, had, after some criticism of the wine, proceeded to demolish not only the bottle but a companion one as well. He consumed course after course of food with sad shakes of his head, commenting in a voice that carried to every corner of the quiet dining room that cooking was an unknown art in America. The clams on the half shell were succulent, but instead of a strong vinegar sauce impregnated with red pepper, he was given some abominable concoction which used catsup—that travesty on Italian sauces—as a base; the soup he passed on the grounds that it was only a mixture of flour and water; the broiled stuffed lobster was eatable, but to be truly appreciated, a lobster



must be cooked in tomato sauce. When Nicky suggested that they serve it to him a la *Fra Diavolo*, the Don demanded the name of the cook who would perform this charity, and when it was obviously not Italian, he let out a snort which allowed of only one interpretation. The Capo Collettore deplored apple pie, but after making it palatable with slabs of cheese, consumed two helpings of it not to be offensive. The imported Italian coffee itself was excellent, but his waiter did not know how to brew it. The imported anisette that went with it was endurable, but not to be mentioned in the same breath with that he made of yore.

Nicky and Tony, waiting for the day when the Don would start to slow down a little, saw instead, that as the years slipped away from him, the Capo Collettore moved at a pace that showed a determination to make up for anything he might have missed. And it was true, for Nasodolce, in a masterful summing up one evening of the Don's many admirable qualities and accomplishments, had pointed out a fact which everyone had overlooked. In all the years he had known Don Peppino, he had never heard, or ever knew where anyone else had ever heard, of an instance where the Don had said, "*Ragazzi*, let us take the way for home."

But then one day Tony received a telephone call from Nicky. "Tony," said Nicky, "Pop's in the hospital. He's had a bad heart attack."

"So they finally caught up with him," said Tony grimly. "What hospital?"

"St Francis. You better call Fran and tell her. I'm on my way up there now."

Tony called Fran. She said, "Oh, my God! With all those nuns?"

The doctor gave the venerable former head of the lottery some severe warnings and advice. But the Don was not so ignorant as the doctor supposed. He knew what a heart attack was and what it did to people, for he had reached an age where he was occasionally seeing friends depart on their last voyage. He needed no second warning.

When he was released from the hospital the Don rearranged his working schedule at the tavern. He hired another bartender, promoted Nasodolce to the managership, and contented himself with more or less supervising mat-

ters, in the nature of an honorary chairman of the board. He curtailed his social activity, steered clear of entangling himself in controversial issues, took his two hour nap every afternoon, and retired faithfully at ten o'clock every night.

It wasn't long before he became a quoted authority on heart diseases and the cures thereof. He never lacked an audience, for he was now living in an age that spawned hypochondriacs by the flocks, and almost any sunny afternoon he could be seen sitting in a chair before his tavern expounding virtuously to a group of worried and attentive listeners the benefits of leading the good, clean life.

For, he insisted, it was the fact he himself had led that type of life, which had brought him victory over the most dangerous foe he had ever faced.

## 20

Big things were happening at the Hearthstone Restaurant. Nicky had acquired full ownership of the business and he immediately gave Tony a twenty-five percent interest in it.

It was a shame that Tony, like his father, was not interested in politics, for the political bigwigs of both parties patronized the restaurant, and any interest in that direction would indeed have made him Don Peppino's proverbial pig loose in the apple orchard. But they did discuss one topic which was close to his heart. This was the redevelopment of the Eastside.

For some time there had been talk of tearing it down and erecting beautiful new buildings on its site. Then it stopped being talk and became an inevitable reality. Federal funds for the project were finally allocated, and the newspapers called for swift local action. Plans were brought out, architects' drawings of what the new Eastside would be like filled the papers, and the editorials took up the cry.

"A city must go forward or die!"

"Beautify the ugliness!"

"Erase the eyesore!"

Hartford would have to bear a negligible part of the



cost, and the City Council was prepared to adopt unanimously an ordinance placing the issue before the voters in the next election. There was little doubt that it would be overwhelmingly approved.

Tony followed the news accounts closely, and though he knew that nothing could halt the inexorable march of progress, he could not help but feel a little bitter when he heard the Eastside referred to as an eyesore.

But eyesore or not, the Eastside was coming down, and with that deplorable human failing which endears a thing to one only when one is about to lose it, he guiltily realized that he had never cared, until then, to see again the little three-room flat of his childhood. He saw, too, that on his infrequent shopping trips to the Eastside, he had never bothered to really look at it. His senses had automatically absorbed the subtle changes through the years which, taken in the aggregate, were quite formidable.

His mother was gone, and many of his memories of her were inextricably associated with the Eastside. He had promised himself that he would one day go to visit the village of her birth in Italy. Many of her *paesani* had been back, and they told him that the house in which she was born was still standing. There had always been that sentimental urge in him to see the patch of earth over which his mother had romped as a little girl. But what about the three-room flat, soon to disappear, but still close at hand, which she had entered as a bride?

He went on his next night off. He parked his car on Front Street and got out, acutely aware of the fact that he was looking at it differently than he had in the past few years. Now he noted that most of the stores, instead of being predominantly grocery stores or meat markets, were dead-storage stalls, grimy and dusty, stagnating from the lack of human traffic. Instead of pushcarts, cars, parked bumper to bumper, lined the gutters. Through-traffic filled the street with roars of motors and the noxious stink of carbon monoxide. Well, thought Tony, with all the slums and the eyesores, I never had to breathe that stuff when I was a kid. But that, he knew, would never be done away with, for it thrived under the banner of progress.

He walked through the alley leading into his old back yard. He didn't realize until he saw the yard jam-packed with cars that the alley was no longer an alley but a drive-

way. He squeezed around and between cars to a spot facing the old canyon.

It was still there, physically unchanged. He tried to bridge the years back, tried to tell himself it was the same in every way. Why shouldn't it be? What made him sense that it was different? He knew that the Eastside was constantly absorbing new Italian immigrants and that they were undoubtedly like those who had preceded them. He had often seen them in the stores, speaking Italian to the shopkeepers, not comprehending the inadvertent slips into English. They appeared to have the same mannerisms, the same outlooks, and the same temperament.

And then he knew what the difference was. Things changed with the years. Scenes viewed through the magical eyes of youth were never the same when viewed through the disenchanted eyes of age. Perhaps the very spot he stood on was still a magical playground for the kids in the neighborhood, and the cars parked around him perhaps held the same delight for them as the broken down ice wagons, the disused pushcarts, and the many sheds had held for him and his playmates. A heavy sadness settled over him and he quickly made his way out of the yard. He shouldn't have stayed away from it so long. He felt as if he had met an ugly woman whom he had last seen as a beautiful child.

Back on the street he hesitated, trying to gather the courage to climb the stairs to the old flat. After all, he didn't know the people who lived there. What could he say to them? "I'm Tony Fazzone. I used to live here years ago. May I come into your home and look around?" They would probably send for the men in the white coats.

He glanced up the street. On the corner of Talcott and Front stood a group of men. Tony smiled as he watched them. One of them was orating quite authoritatively, gesticulating dramatically as he spoke. Well, well, he thought, there but for the passage of time is Don Peppino. He edged closer to listen in. The man was speaking in Italian.

"They are all thieyes!" he exclaimed heatedly. "Have we forgotten what these same people said when Mussolini sent our professors to Ethiopia to make Christians out of the savages? Who lived in more filth and ignorance than these savages? But, when we tried to help them, as



they claim to be helping us now, they said that the Italians were rapists and bandits bent on depriving innocent people of their land and homes. But now that they attempt the same they call it *pasta rigatoni* instead of *pasta zita*. Is it not all *pasta* and is it not all boiled in the same water? Where will we live? Who will assume the expense of our moving? They will chase us from our homes to make room for the new buildings and businesses which will enrich them more."

"*Si, e' giusto. Lorenzo ragione giusta.*"

"*Pe' certamente.* And where shall we make our wine? It is said that one cannot make wine in these housing projects they wish to send us to. Are we then to be denied food for our very blood?"

"*Sono tutti banditti!*"

Tony laughed and walked to the doorway leading up to his old flat. Hell, he was home, what was he afraid of? He spoke Italian and that fact alone would have gained him access to any Italian home in the world.

The hallway was dingy and filthy and looked as if it hadn't been painted in years, and dust smoked up from the worn wooden stairs as he climbed them. His heart was beating excitedly as he came to stand before the old door. Before knocking on it, he searched the walls intently. As a child he must have written something on those walls. Would it still be there? But though there were traces of pencil marks having been scrubbed off, those had doubtlessly been made on a coat of paint that had long covered any he might have written. It just wasn't conceivable that the halls had not been painted since he had lived there. He knocked on the door.

It opened and a girl, with an infant in her arms, looked at him expectantly. Instinctively he knew that she had not been long in America and that she did not speak a word of English.

"Good evening, signora," he said in Italian. "Is your husband home?"

"No, no, what thing can I do for you?"

"I—it will be better if I come back when your husband is home. When is he expected back?"

"He is but gone to run an errand and will return soon. The signor must come in and seat himself."

He entered the flat and an overpowering wave of nostalgia flooded over him. Had the kitchen changed? There

was a new, inexpensive but enameled sink and tub instead of the old iron sink, and a gleaming gas range stood in the corner where the old black stove had stood. By a wall stood a baby carriage. He sat at the table, and the girl, still holding her baby, sat opposite him on the other end. Tony studied her casually. She couldn't be more than twenty-two or three at the most.

And suddenly he was shocked into an heretofore un-creatable image. Before him stood his own mother, and the baby in her arms could have been himself. Somehow he had never been able to envision his mother as a young girl, a young girl with all the dreams and hopes of a young girl, a girl other than the woman in whose apron he had often buried his tear-stained face. How could he see his mother as a young girl when his last memories of her were a tired, gray-haired woman who rocked his infant son in her unprotesting arms? And yet she must have once been just like this girl, holding him or Nicky or Fran just as this girl held her baby.

*"Che cosa cerca?"*

Tony was jerked back into the present. Of course the girl must have been wondering what he sought.

"It is difficult for me to say," he said, "and the signora must not think me crazy. As a little boy I lived in these rooms. I have read in the papers that soon all these buildings will be torn down. Before they are I wished to see once more the home of my childhood."

A look of pleasure lit the girl's eyes. "Ah, *si, si*," she said quickly. Italians, thought Tony, have little trouble understanding sentimentality.

"I was seeing in you, signora, my own mother holding me in her arms. Life for your *bambino* is beginning where it began for me."

The girl looked down at her baby and smiled softly. "*Si*, signor. Perhaps the signor would like to see the other rooms?"

"*Pe piacere*." Tony felt a tremor of excitement as he left the table and approached the threshold to his old room. He crossed it and halted in shock. It was a parlor!

He shook his head unbelievably as he took in the television set in a corner. His eyes went to the window. He stepped over to it and looked out. There was nothing down there but cars streaming by. What was there of interest to see from his window now? Nothing. Where



were the people who once filled the street with the noise of life? Were they in their homes viewing television?

He walked out of the room and back into the kitchen. The girl waved a hand in the direction of the other room and Tony went into it. A modern, blond-colored, Hollywood style double bed took up most of the room, and the little bassinet and matching bureau took up the rest. On the bureau was a telephone, that now indisputable necessity. As Tony stood there taking it all in and comparing it to how his parents' furniture had looked, he heard the door to the flat open. That would be the husband. He turned to enter the kitchen. Before he reached it the girl had excitedly launched into explaining his presence in their home to her husband.

The husband, Tony saw at once, was no immigrant, and that made the girl either an Italian war bride or the result of some international matchmaking. What was more, there was a belligerent look on the young man's face as he turned to Tony and jerked a thumb in the direction of the door.

"Out!" he said.

The girl started screaming rebuke at her husband, telling him he had no right to be discourteous to a visitor. The husband told her to shut up and mind her own business.

"Look, fella," said Tony. "I used to live here. I told your wife. I just wanted to look around. There's nothing to get hot about."

"Live, shmive—beat it!"

The girl's eyes flashed in rage and her words flew at her husband. They were soon nose to nose arguing in Italian.

"How many times have I told you?" her husband shouted to her, "not to let any strangers in here? This man could have attacked you! They take advantage of girls who can't speak English!"

"Hey, wait a minute, fella—"

"Maybe he's an inspector," the husband continued, ignoring Tony. "He probably works for the people who want to tear down our home. Now he will go back and report to them that this place is not fit to live in—"

"It is a lie, a lie! He looks like a nice gentleman!"

"They all look like gentlemen! It is lucky I came home! You listen to me. Do you want somebody—"

The words flew, and Tony, enthralled, did not attempt to interrupt the husband. They've forgotten me, he thought. It was just like the old days when he sat in the kitchens on his collection rounds, forgotten, as family arguments seared his youthful ears. Now the young couple had come to the screaming stage and a thrill shot through Tony as he heard windows in the canyon being raised and doors in the tenements being opened. Then came the old familiar demands for information being shouted through the halls from floor to floor, and across window to window. For crying out loud, he thought in amazement. Has nothing changed? Is it really the same?

The young mother had placed the baby in the carriage and now stood facing her husband with her arms clenched at her hips.

"Is it possible?" she screamed. "Cannot some animal ever enter this home without your making such a disturbance? In Italy such a thing is never known!"

"This is not Italy!"

"How true! It is indeed true! It is just as my mother and father warned me! In America there are nothing but savages! How then could I have expected not to marry one?"

The canyon reverberated with shouts. Tony was enjoying it too much to attempt to stop it now.

"There's an inspector down there!"

*"Trattatore!"*

*"Spione!"*

"Where? Where is this inspector?"

"There's some rat from the Development Commission in the flat on the second floor!"

"Kill the bastard!"

"Throw the bum in the toilet and flush him down so he can see that the plumbing still works!"

Tony almost laughed out loud. The door to the flat had opened and a stream of neighbors began to fill it. One woman waved a fist in his face.

"Hey, whaddya you wanta here, hey?"

*"Inspectore!"*

"He looks like an inspector of toilets!"

"Such an animal they send!"

More people kept coming into the flat. They came through the front door and up from the canyon and through the rear door. The baby had started squalling



and the young mother was forced to abandon the argument and pick it up. Then, with a look of sullen defiance on her face, she stood rocking the baby in her arms while the neighbors plied her husband with questions. Tony found himself surrounded by people angrily demanding that he leave the flat, but nobody was moving aside to make a path to the door for him. He suddenly awoke to the unamusing fact that if things got out of hand he could possibly get mauled around. He started shouting explanations, but his words were lost in the tornado of screams and people all talking at once. The situation was getting serious when he spied an old but still robust woman trying to elbow her way in through the rear door.

"Mrs. Santangelo!" he shouted above the uproar. "Hey, Mrs. Santangelo!"

The old woman turned her head in his direction. "Mrs. Santangelo knows me!" screamed Tony. "She'll tell you who I am!"

"*Silenzio, silenzio!*" cried the old woman. "Who is it that calls my name?" At her angry glances most of the people quieted down and made room for her to get closer to Tony.

"Don't you remember me, Mrs. Santangelo?" said Tony.

"Ah, *si, si, M'paro—m'paro—*"

"I am Antonio Fazzone. You remember I lived here when I was a little boy."

"*Dio benedetto! Dio, Dio mio! U' figlio d' Don Peppino! Antonio! Carissimo ragazzo!* Is it you indeed?"

The old woman flung her arms around him and Tony impulsively returned the embrace and kissed her. Now the people excitedly began to discuss this new turn of affairs, and the old woman turned on them.

"Animals!" she spat at them. "Is this the way you treat an old friend?"

"An old friend? Is he not a spy then?"

"Is he not an inspector?"

"*Che te pozzene tutti sciatta' u' sangue!* Stupid animals! Did Don Peppino raise his sons to be policemen? Does such a one look like a policeman?"

And now the air was again filled with noise as the babble of apologies and eternal benedictions flew around Tony's head. The husband came over to him and held out his hand.

"I'm sorry, bud, but—"

"It's okay." Tony grinned in relief. "I don't blame you."

"You wanta look around some more, it's all right," he added sheepishly.

Tony declined with thanks, and as the people started melting away, the young wife, triumphantly vindicated, began giving her husband an oral lashing. Tony hastily put his arm around Mrs. Santangelo and led her out to the rear porch and down to the roof. There he learned that she had moved down to the old Perrucci flat, next to the roof, which made it easier for her to get around. He helped her back through the window and at her insistence followed her in, where she gave him a glass of wine and wept as she recalled his grandmother, his poor mother, and asked him questions about Nicky, Fran, and Don Peppino.

When Tony descended to the street again, he looked gloomily around him. It was dead. Deader than it knew, he thought. It would soon come down, all of it. Nothing could stop it. He knew suddenly that he didn't care one way or the other. There was no turning back. A man had to progress from birth to death and that was the way life went, he supposed. The Eastside would always be a happy memory to him, they could never tear that down.

He got into his car, drove to the corner of Temple and Front and turned right, up Temple. At the intersection of Temple and Market he had to wait for a red light. He glanced idly across the street to the parking lot where, until a few years ago, the police station had grimly done sentinel duty. The new one was located on Morgan Street, on the site of the old Brown School.

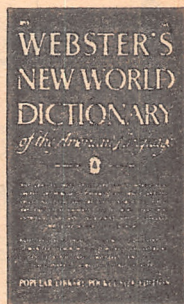
As Tony stared at the lot it was suddenly and dramatically brought home to him that things had really changed, and a big grin split his face. For it had just occurred to him that he had never seen the outside, let alone the inside, of the new police station.

THE END



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