

PAESANO

Bettina Baggetta

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**To all the Italian immigrants who crossed the Ocean
and brought us to where we are today
I dedicate this with love and devotion.**

PAESANO, literal translation = Villager

To Italians, Paesano means Countryman or Friend

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Prologue

At the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries Southern Italy was devastated. It was a hard time for peasant families, who became known as the poor of the poorest of Europe.

Farming land had become overworked and little was done to make it productive; the soil was poor, yielding little. Droughts and parasites ravaged the wine crops until they were gone.

Some families, in an attempt to overcome starvation, moved to the seashore and became fishermen. The fish provided food for the families but, as a livelihood, it provided very little income.

Conditions worsened with landslides and earthquakes. When malaria and other diseases spread causing many deaths, men started leaving Italy for America. They left with hopes of returning with enough money to purchase their own land and to establish a higher standard of living for themselves and their families. A small percentage returned, especially those disillusioned with the poor results they achieved in the new country.

Others were more resourceful and found a better life in America. They would save enough money to bring their families who would leave Italy with bundles and baggage packed with their meager possessions and big hopes in their hearts for “The American Dream”.

This is the story of Pietro Romeo, a poor Italian boy who wanted to be an American.

Paesano to all how knew him.

Chapter One

Their names were Marcello and Pietro Romeo, the two youngest sons of a very large Italian family. At thirteen years of age, Marcello was handsome, very tall and sensible; a little careless about his appearance with a shirt tail always hanging out and his black hair falling over his forehead. His brother, Pietro, at ten was small for his age and a rascal with a twinkle in his green eyes, but always kept his shirt tucked in and his dark brown hair combed even when he put a cap on his head. Everyone loved to be around these young boys with their lively personalities and smiles that could light up a room. They had a very close relationship and enjoyed working, playing and teasing with each other.

The Romeo family lived in the village of Siderno Marina and they had a better life than most Southern Italians. Living on the coast that was settled ages ago by ancient Greeks, the livelihood of the villagers came from the sea. The village consisted of small stone houses built near the shore and up the slopes of the hillsides. Most of the men were fishermen, however some men worked small farms and even others were shepherds. To exist they would raise, grow and catch the necessities of life. After bringing food home to their families, the husbands would have their wives bring the excess fish and harvest to trade, barter or sell in the fountain square which was the hub of the village.

The square was alive, every morning, with the sound of voices as the younger women and girls would come carrying their water jugs to the fountain; they would call out to greet their friends as if they hadn't seen each other in a year. As peasants, they were all dressed similarly in their

plain dark skirts with aprons and white blouses with a vest or shawl crossed over their bodice, a small scarf tied around their heads to hold back their long hair. The square was where they socialized, asking about the well-being of each family and passing along the latest gossip. They could also be seen climbing the hillside to gather wood for cooking and heating the small houses. Everyone had daily chores that were necessary for their meager existence. That is, except for the old men who could be seen sitting on rustic wooden benches, smoking their pipes just watching the daily routine, while the smoke from their pipes circled in the air mixing with the smell of the sweet flowers growing from the vines on the old walls. Most were widowers who lived with their daughters or sons who would chase them out of the house for the day to go and be with their friends. Once in a while one would offer something to say and the others would nod their heads in agreement. Just sitting in the sun next to their life-long friends was satisfying to the old men - it meant they were not alone.

The fishermen of the village loved being on the beautiful Ionian Sea; the azure waters that hold ancient historical secrets long forgotten. The warm southern Italian sun tanned the back of the necks and arms of the older men and the bare backs of the shirtless young men as they worked. Each day was very long and the work was hard but always with the hope that their nets would yield a good catch. On days when there was no catch, they stayed busy mending and weaving their nets, repairing their long poles or painting and repairing their boats the bright colors of red, white and green, representing their loyalty to their Italian flag and country. One of these fishermen was Marco Romeo, the head of the Romeo family.

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There were very few schools available for the children. Many were so far away that the children couldn't attend; working their chores was far more important. Their learning experience came from their parents - the boys from their fathers and the "*compare*" of the village and the girls from their mothers and "*comare*". The nuns from the local Catholic Church would come once a month to teach the children to read and write, but very few would attend the class, leaving them illiterate and the nuns would feel frustrated.

There was camaraderie among the villagers of the small town; they all knew each other and many families were related in some way. Brothers and sisters from one family would marry brothers and sisters of another. And if they weren't related, they were all "*paesani*". All would help each other with whatever crises they had to face. If a house caught fire, all the men of the village would turn out as make-shift firemen. The occupants were taken in by family or friends and the women would bring household items to replace those that were lost.

Marcello and Pietro, without any formal schooling, were both very intelligent and quick learners. They were free-spirits, without a worry in their heads, always looking for adventure. On days when their Mama would need vegetables, they were sent up the hillside to work with their brothers, Michele and Giuseppe in the fields owned by the family. But the days they loved the most were when they could go to the seashore to be with their father to mend nets or paint boats. The old, sun-tanned fishermen with their curved pipes held between their teeth, were always happy to see the young boys. They would tease them by grabbing their feet as they walked by, laughing as they fell landing in the sand. The boys knew how to tease back as well by hiding the fisherman's shuttle or knife, but it was always

done in a respectful manner, their father would have it no other way. They watched their father use his shuttle to mend and weave his nets and before long Marcello and Pietro could do the same. They found pieces of driftwood on the beach which they hand carved into shuttles using the knives they used for cleaning fish; they liked having their own mending tool. The boys could compete with the older men, when it came to weaving nets since their young hands could move so quickly. Marco, while working on his own nets, secretly watched his sons with pride and nodded his head in approval.

Marco was a very kind man and respected by his family and all who knew him. He was a small man, as most Italian men were. His full head of dark hair was graying but his deep blue eyes still sparkled with life. His hands were gnarled and his skin was like leather from the sun; wearing the signs of a true fisherman. His shoulders and forearms were strong from rowing his boat out to sea and pulling nets over the years. He spoke with a soft, deep, reassuring voice, but when he spoke it was with authority. Whenever he had something to say to his sons they listened intently knowing they would learn something useful. He taught them all he knew about fishing and told them as long as they knew how to fish they would never go hungry.

Francesco, the oldest son, was married and owned his fishing boat with one of their cousins, Guido Bartoli. The other brothers, Michele and Giuseppe, both had families of their own but did not like to fish – they did not even like the smell of fish, so they farmed, taught to them by their mother's father, Michele Bartoli.

The fathers of young boys determined when they were ready to become fishermen. It was not a matter of just throwing out a net - they had to know how to handle a boat

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in a sudden storm, how to apply first aid to a cut caused by the slip of a knife or how to bind up a broken finger that had been caught in a net full of fish.

One day, when Marco, Marcello and Pietro were walking home from the seashore, Marco said, without looking at either of his sons, “Marcello, *domani* you gonna fish inna my boat.”

Pietro grabbed his father’s arm, “*E mi*, Papa,” he said excitedly, “Ima go too?”

“No!” Marco shook his finger, “No yet, but soon. You go with you *fratelli* to the field. Dey need you help.”

“Oh, no. . .No field.” He whined. “A fisherman! Datsa me!” he stood chest out and hands on his hips.

“I tella you no, Pietro. *Basta!*” Marco said sternly and motioned with his hand for his son to be quiet.

Pietro hung his head, kicked at the dirt and knew better than to argue with his father.

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Two years later, when Pietro had just turned twelve and the family was gathered around the table eating supper Marco, without looking up from his *minestrone*, said, “Pietro, we go fish *domani*.” The boy was so excited; he jumped up and spilled his soup all over the table. “*Scusi! Mama, scusi*. Papa, Ima go with you?” he asked exuberantly.

“*Si, domani* we alla go. But now, clean uppa you mess,” motioning to the spilled soup and overturned glasses on the table, “you no make a you Mama do it.”

Pietro grabbed his Mama and started twirling her around the room, “*Io sono un peccatore. I am a fisherman!*”

His mother shook off his hands and stood with her hands on her hips. “I say no to Papa, but he say *si!* You be a good *peccatorini.*” She said, shaking a finger at him. “Now clean da mess.”

Everyone laughed and Marcello teased, “Pietro, *pescatorini* – little fisherman”.

Pietro could hardly contain himself he dreamed of this day and went to his room and took a net from under his bed; one he had made himself in anticipation of this eventful day. He would show his Papa he was a good fisherman. Early the next morning, when Marco opened the door to the room shared by his sons, Pietro was up and dressed, shaking Marcello to waken him. “*Marcello, andiamo. Get up! We go!*” Marco smiled when he saw his son dressed in one of his shirts, with his pants pushed into a pair of fishing boots that were too big for him; a scarf around his waist that his mother had given to him to hold up the oversized pants and a knitted cap on his head - his attire emulating that of his father and the other fishermen. Marco shook his head and knew his son would do well.

Seeing Pietro with his net draped over his shoulder, the older fishermen along with his brother Francesco and their cousin Guido, laughed and called out to him “Look, Pietro, *pescatorini, pescatorini*”. Pietro was determined to show them he would be the best fisherman in the village. He may be a little fisherman now, but he would show them. He listened to his father and the other men every day and heard them talking about what they did to keep their boats sea worthy by applying pitch into the cracks and holes in the boat bottom; he applied this knowledge to his father’s

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boat to show that he was a natural and he knew how to take care of the “tools of his trade”.

When Marco would rise, early in the morning, and see it was a good day weather-wise, he and his sons would go to their boat; each knowing their chores for the day. Marco would climb in, take his position at the oars while the boys pushed it into the water and as it cleared the beach and floated, the boys would jump in while Marco started to row. The boys would prepare the nets or poles, getting ready for a day of fishing. When Marco saw swarming birds and churning water ahead of them, he pointed and told the boys, “Today we go for da little fish.” Sardines, anchovy and smelt were a very low priced catch and would not bring much income; but they fished for whatever was available.

Another day they would go to the rocks for rock cod or set out their long pole riggings to fish for whitefish. When these fish were available, it was a good product for them to catch. They would clean the fish as soon as it was caught and keep it in the cool salt water. When they would bring it home, Rosa and Maria would salt it, hang the fish on poles and dry it in the sun - turning it into “*baccala*”, a much sought after product in southern Italy. When they had a good supply, they would load it into a wagon and take it to Locri to sell to the fish mongers. The other fishermen marveled at how the Romeos worked in such harmony and how Marco always knew if it was a good day to fish.

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Two more years passed as Marcello and Pietro worked alongside their father and they were becoming strong young men. Their backs, shoulders and forearms developing muscles of strength. The boys loved being on the water, smelling the clean salt air and feeling the warm

sun on their bodies. Their skills could be classified as the best, they always used caution, never having an accident and their Papa was very proud of their performance.

One night, after bartering with another fisherman who brought in a catch of crab, they brought home two crabs and some fish to Rosa. When she looked into the buckets, she nodded her head in approval and took out a large pot and started making a *marinara*. After washing up, Pietro came into the kitchen and stood by his mother watching everything she was doing. She turned to him and asked “*Che fai?* What you do?”

“I wanna see how you make da *zuppa di pesce*”.

“Cooking is for da Mama and Maria.” She scolded.

“No, Mama. I cook too”. She knew her inquisitive son and she couldn’t say “no” to him, so he watched as she chopped and simmered onions, garlic, oregano and *basilica*; she also added a large spoon of *conservata*, the tomato paste she made and preserved in her large clay crock. She told him to mix everything to blend it together; the fragrance of those first ingredients made his stomach growl with hunger. She then chopped fresh tomatoes and added them to the pot along with some crushed red pepper and salt. She told him one of her secrets was to stir the pot frequently so the sauce would not stick to the bottom and use the wooden spoon to scrape it from the sides of the pot and mix it back into the sauce. She placed her fingers together, placed them to her lips and kissed them then threw them open; a gesture of approval. Everything was simmering and blending together and the aromas permeated throughout the house. Pietro knew wherever life took him he would always remember the smell of Mama’s cooking.

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Rosa scooped some of the sauce into her wooden spoon then offered it to Pietro to sample; he dipped a finger to take a taste then kissed his fingers in that gesture of approval. She picked up the cleaned and prepared fish and crab that was sitting on the counter, and placed all of it into the pot of sauce. The *zuppa di pesce* placed on the table that night was so delicious. Rosa cut crusty bread and placed it on the table then filled each bowl with the savory soup that contained chunks of crab and fish. Marco picked up a large crab claw from his bowl, crushed the shell open and pulled out the fresh sweet crab meat and relished the flavor. Everyone used the crusty bread to wipe up every bit of the sauce from their bowls. Pietro was happy to have had a hand in making the *zuppa* and remembered everything he saw his mother do and knew he would know how to make this delicious meal one day, all on his own. He looked at his mother across the table and smiled, his green eyes twinkling at her then he winked; she waved a hand at him and tried to hide the smile of pride.

Chapter Two

Marco received word that his brother, Antonio Romeo, was coming to visit. Antonio was returning from America where he had been living for the past four years. Rosa sent for all of her children to come pay respects to their uncle. The house was soon filled with the entire family, all talking at once; the men debating issues, the women “cooing” over the babies; children were running and playing together outside under the trees. The family was always happy to gather together and bring each other up on the latest news.

Everyone was so please to see and welcome their *Zio* Antonio, especially Pietro; Antonio was his godfather and he always loved the man who paid extra attention to him on his visits. He was so proud to see his uncle looking very handsome and prosperous in his fancy suit and fedora. Pietro had never seen such fine clothing. When Antonio took off his hat and handed it to Pietro, the boy asked if he could try it on. “*Si, va bene*”, his uncle said. Pietro put the hat on his head, tilted it to the side and ran his right hand along the edge and winked at his Mama with a smile and that twinkle in his eye. All the children thought he was so silly, but he strutted around feeling like his uncle – handsome and prosperous.

Antonio was younger and taller than Marco; he carried himself very dignified but with an air of arrogance, rolling his handlebar mustache between his fingers as he talked to family members; looking at them through heavy lidded eyes almost with a look of contempt.

He brought little gifts for the women; the children squealed with delight when he gave them each a coin from America and the men relished the *Avanti Toscani* cigars, the American made small dark cigars Italian men enjoyed so much and that hard-working Calabrese men could not

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afford. He handed picture postcards of New York City to both Marcello and Pietro; one showed Central Park with many people dressed in fine clothing on a Sunday afternoon. Another showed a picture of 5th Avenue and 57th Street with automobiles on wide paved streets in front of large magnificent mansions. Everyone marveled at these pictures and started asking all sorts of questions, as they gathered around to have a look. Antonio asked them to wait and he would answer all their questions and tell them all about New York.

It was a beautiful, warm afternoon, so everyone gathered outside in the shade of the trees. Rosa placed goat cheese, sausage and crusty bread on the table for all to enjoy; while Marco poured wine for the men. The questions were coming from all directions as everyone wanted to hear about the country so far away. Antonio raised his hands and said, "*Basta, basta*". He sat at the table, with his glass of wine, lit his cigar and started telling his stories of how the people lived in America and the opportunities that were available to any young man eager to work hard. Everyone was engrossed, especially Marcello and Pietro. Antonio spoke for a long while, painting a picture of a delightful way of life; telling of people riding in automobiles, streetcars and trains. He failed to tell the truth of the crowded tenements and the sea of humanity that was known as "Little Italy" in New York City. When speaking of employment opportunities he failed to tell them that the jobs that were available were not easy. Uneducated Italian men were discriminated against and given the dirtiest jobs no one else wanted. They were relegated to collecting garbage, digging tunnels under the rivers and building skyscrapers and bridges - they were laborers who worked long, hard hours for a meager wage. This was not the picture Antonio was describing.

Marco and the rest of the men in the family, listened intently to the stories Antonio was telling; but Francesco, the oldest son was a very skeptical man, asked to look at the pictures then shook his head at his uncle and said, “No! I no like America. In Locri last month I see two men who com’ from Australia. Australia is good.”

Antonio disagreed with him and after a heated discussion and questions among the men, Francesco still emphasized his point. “Ima go soon to Australia. Da men dey tella me Ima go with dem, get good work an’ live good; no more fish for me.”

Antonio swore, “*Mannagia*, go! Go to Australia. You don’ know nothing”, he waved his hand at his nephew as if to dismiss him, then said, “But, Marcello and Pietro”, he pointed at the two younger boys, “you com’ America with *Zio*. You make lotsa money. Send to you Mama and Papa.”

Marcello and Pietro looked at their uncle in amazement and were excited to think about a new adventure; could it be true? Could they really go and walk these beautiful streets and get good work there? Marcello wanted to know more, but he had questions for his older brother and asked, “Francesco, when a you go to Australia?”

“In *due mesi*,” he responded holding up two fingers. “I sella my boat den I go inna two months.”

“An’ Guido and Lena dey go?”

“Guido, he gonna stay an’ fish. Da man who I sella my boat he gonna fish with Guido.” He paused, “Lena, No! *Mia moglie*, she stay *a qui*, Ima send for her when I get da money.”

“Why you go to Australia and no go to America?”

“Da men dey tella me America has lotsa da people, but in Australia lotsa da land.” Francesco replied. “Dey grow

wheat an' sheep an' da wool sell for lotsa money. I wan' lotsa money."

"You got da money to buy da sheep?" Marcello asked.

"Ima gonna get it! You think I don' know what to do? Ima no *stupido!*" He looked at his brother indignantly.

Marcello thought about this and shook his head, then turned and looked at his uncle Antonio in his fancy clothes, and said, "I no wanna raise sheep. I wanna make lotsa money just like Zio Antonio."

"*Va bene!* Dassa good, Marcello." Antonio said as he sneered at Francesco and raised his hand to hide the smile on his face.

Through all the stories Antonio told the family, the most important one he failed to tell, and they failed to ask, was how he made his money; they didn't ask what kind of work he did. Antonio did not work as a laborer; he had led American company owners to believe that he could lead the laborers. He spoke enough English to convince them that he could be an interpreter and supply as many laborers as they would need. Antonio's arrogant manner satisfied them that he could do the job as an "overseer", they agreed to pay him a commission for each young laborer he brought to them. He made himself a "*Padrone*" and told young Italian men he would be their sponsor in America; provide living quarters and help them get work with good wages. He did not tell them, until they arrived in America and were working at menial jobs, that he would take a percentage of their wages. He was then collecting a commission from the companies and a percentage from the workers. Because of the discrimination against Italian workers, the wages earned were not what the young men expected; but what they received was far more than what they could earn in their impoverished villages in Southern Italy. It turned out Antonio Romeo was a very unscrupulous man and found an

easy way to make money in America. He was making money off the blood and sweat of his countrymen.

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Rosa suddenly cried out, “Oh, *mama mia*, no! I no wanna my sons go to America. I no see dem no more. I no wanna da money, I wan’ my sons to stay here.”

Marcello said, “Mama, please, we go make lotsa money and come back to Italy; we be rich. Look, look at Zio Antonio; see he looks good, no? Your sons will be rich and look good too.”

Marco listened to everything being said and was very hesitant, he turned to his brother, “Antonio, you go to America for four years, an’ dat wassa good for you. But you were older. You do good an’ Ima happy for you. But my sons dey are boys, dey stay here.”

Antonio turned to Marco and said, “*Si*, Marco, dey are boys; dey good boys an’ you let dem com’ with me I show dem how dey get rich in America. Den, dey com’ back to Italy. I take care a you sons, dey my family too; nothing gonna happen to dem.”

Marco shook his head, “For four years you leave I worry, now you wan’ me to worry about my sons? No!” He said emphatically then turned and looked at the sadness in the faces of his two sons.

Marcello was listening to his father and uncle, seriously considering all that was being discussed, then said, “Please, Papa, it be good for da family. Letta me go to America with Zio.”

Marco was so torn he looked at his brother then at the pleading look coming from his son; he took a deep breath and let it out slowly. He saw the look of anguish on his wife’s face; whatever decision he made, someone was going to be unhappy. He placed his head in his hands and

shook his head. He hesitated for several minutes then said, “Marcello can go, but no Pietro. He too much a boy.”

“But all da boys com’ America when dey are young, dey learn quick how to be men.” Antonio said sarcastically.

“No, not Pietro, not now.” Marco stood up to his brother and was emphatic with his decision.

“Papa, please” Pietro pleaded. “Please Papa!”

“No! No Pietro, Ima say not now”. Marco was adamant. He placed his hand on his youngest sons shoulder and looked at him, “You stay fish with Papa; Ima need you.” Pietro hung his head, but sadly nodded in agreement. His mother went to him and put her arm around his shoulders, holding him close.

“When a we go?” A jubilant Marcello asked his uncle.

“You have a to save money for da trip. It issa 35 American dollars an’ you need more money to spend, so I say you need \$50. I sponsor you and’ you come live with me in New York. Den I show you where to fine da work.”

“I can do it, it take me some time, maybe one year, but I do it.” Marcello was so happy about going, but he was also sad thinking it would take so long to save the money he needed.

Antonio sat stroking his chin and twirling his mustache looked at his nephew then after some consideration said, “No, one year is too long to wait, you go with me when I go. Ima pay da ticket den you Mama an’ Papa no worry, you com’ with me.”

Marcello was ecstatic, “Oh, Zio, Ima so happy. Yes, Ima go with you.” Marco nodded in agreement; he felt better knowing Marcello would be with his uncle. But Rosa had reservations; she felt in her heart that Antonio was hiding something and she was worried.

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Marcello embraced his father, then seeing the tears streaming down his mother's face, placed his arms around her and said, "No cry Mama, I com' back, I promise." She turned away sobbing, shaking her head and lifting her apron to her face to cover her sadness and concern.

Marcello left southern Italy one month later with his uncle, Antonio Romeo.

Chapter Three

For two years, Pietro fished with his father. He would sing as they pulled in their nets or when placing their long pole riggings and his father was pleased to see his son happy in his work. He was now sixteen and developing into a handsome, hard-working young man and finally filled the pants and boots that had been too large for him. He was becoming as weathered and sun-tanned as all the other fishermen.

Each night, Marco and Rosa would speak to each other about their concern for Marcello. They had not received any word about him since he left for America two years before. Surely someone could have written a letter for him. Why didn't they receive any word? Then one day, while Marco and Pietro were sitting on the sand mending the nets that lay across their laps, they heard someone calling and waving. From the distance, they could not recognize the young man walking towards them. He seemed out of place all dressed in a suit and hat on the beach. But as he came closer Pietro jumped up, "Marcello! Marcello, *mio fratello!*"

"Marcello?" Marco asked. "Is dat Marcello?" He squinted his eyes trying to see the young man's face.

"*Si, si*, it is him, Papa. Look, it issa Marcello!" He ran toward his brother; Marcello dropped his valise and they grabbed each other and embraced, laughing and hugging. Marcello knocked Pietro's cap off and started rubbing his head and messing his hair, as he did so many times in the past. Marco was right behind Pietro and grabbed both of his sons and he cried with happiness to see his son was safely home.

“We no hear from you for da long time.” Marco admonished his son. “You are good?”

“*Si*, Ima fine. Look my nice suit an’ hat.” He strutted around, his fingers under his lapels. “I look good, no? I make da money in America. I work inna da mines in Pennsylvania. It is hard work but I save da money to bring to you like I promise. Now I stay in Italy,” he looked at his father and said, “I go fish with you Papa.” Marco smiled at his son who had grown into a handsome young man. “Ima stay now, but one day I go back to America. When I go, you com’ too, Pietro.” He said to his brother. “Together we make da money faster.”

Marco put his hands to his head exasperated, “Oh, *mama mia*. What you say.” He let out a huge sigh, “Com’ we go see Mama an’ Maria. Den we talk.”

Pietro picked up the valise, exaggerating how heavy it was and said, “Look at dis *valigia!* You got lotsa *vestiti?*” Marcello laughed and put his arm over his brother’s shoulder and the three men walked together. “You grow big, little brother. You can wear my *vestiti!*”

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As they walked to the house, Marcello told his father the devastation he saw in Naples, “Papa when I com’ back I see da *montagna* Vesuvius is no more; only half da mountain an’ da beautiful green land is all gray.”

“*Si*, in *Aprile* for many days, Vesuvius verry bad blow up, kill lotsa people. Here in da village feel da ground move for two days. Den da people dey com’ from Naples an’ look for da place to stay and dey tell us what happen. Dey see alla da bad blow up from da *montagna*, da smoke and da ash all over an’ in da sky for many days. Verry, verry bad!”

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“Dey make da port good, da ship it come in to anchor dere when I come. I see dey do lotsa work in Naples, dey make it better.” Marcello said.

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Pietro called to the house, “Mama, Maria, look! Look it is Marcello!” Rosa and Maria squealed in joy as they came running from the house. “*Bambino mio*. Marcello”, his mother called. She and Maria hugged him then Rosa holding his face in her two hands kept kissing him.

“Mama, please, *basta*. I promise I com’ back. See Ima here. Com’, sit Ima have something for you.”

Rosa sat on the nearest chair but was so overcome, she kept rocking back and forth and repeating, “*Oh, mama mia. Figlio mio. Grazia Dio.*”

Marcello opened his valise and took out the presents he had for his family. He handed his mother a little Statue of Liberty which calmed and delighted her. Maria was excited to receive a necklace with a charm of America on a chain. He brought *Avanti* cigars for his father which he knew he would enjoy and he gave a pocketknife to Pietro, who was in awe at this amazing knife he could fold and carry in his pocket. “Oh, Marcello, *grazie, tanti grazie.*”

Then Marcello reached into his pocket and took out a handful of money and laid it on the table, “Look, Mama, look, for you an’ Papa.”

“*Oh, Madonna*, how you get alla dis?” His parents were overcome at what they saw on the table.

“I work hard for it, Mama. Verry hard.”

“What you do alla dis time; we no hear from you for so long. Why you no stay with Zio Antonio? He say you gonna stay with him.” His parents wanted some answers.

Marcello nodded and said, “*Aspetto*, I tella you everything”.

When Rosa had calmed after the excitement of seeing her son, she and Maria prepared sausage and *rape*, Marcello’s favorite. When they sat at the table to eat, they waited to hear Marcello describe his adventures with Antonio. He told them that when they left Siderno, Antonio had hired a driver and wagon, two other young men from the village left with them; Felice Manzano and Lorenzo Bruno. He asked his father if he knew who they were. His father confirmed with a nod of his head. He continued how they went north to Catanzaro where four more men waited for them. Then the driver took them west to Nicastro where they picked up five more. Their wagon was full of Calabrese *paesani* and it took several days to get to Naples. Marcello couldn’t believe how far it was.

“So, twelve men dey go with Antonio to America?” Marco asked.

“*Si*, twelve. He talk to dem before he com’ here. Dey all wait for him to go; he tell dem he be their ‘*Padrone*’.

“Tell us about *Napoli*, is it beautiful?”

He told them how beautiful Naples and its bay was when he left and how devastated the area was when he returned. But he wanted them to know what he remembered seeing the first time he saw the lovely bay.

He told them of riding in the wagon with the monstrous Mount Vesuvius off to their left; the huge mountain had been silent since the 1870s. As they came to the top of a hill the driver stopped the wagon. All the men looked in awe at the sight before them; the beautiful crescent moon shaped bay of Naples and the port with the huge steam ships waiting to board passengers lay before them. He described the city and its tall buildings surrounding the bay

and the tall façade and duomo of San Gennaro Cathedral. To the south off the point of Sorrento was the Isle of Capri, the summer place of ancient Roman nobility. Naples was a sight to behold.

They rode down into the city and Marcello told them about buildings four stories high and of the vehicles without horses pulling them; that were called automobiles. He saw trains with cars linked together from Northern Italy that brought people into the city, many were immigrants heading for the port and the waiting ships. Streetcars were rolling on tracks through the city with people getting on and off going to various destinations. There was so much going on, Marcello was overwhelmed by everything he saw.

Pietro wanted to know if all the people in Naples were getting on the ship. Marco shook his head, chuckling and told him that Naples was a big city and it had so many people that lived there. However, people came from all over Italy and other countries to board the ships in Naples harbor bound for America. He saw mostly men traveling alone, or in some cases with companions from their villages, and mothers with their babies and children clinging to them, leaving Italy to meet their husbands in America.

He paused, poured a glass of wine for himself and his Papa, then continued explaining how they waited in long lines to purchase their passage tickets and then stood around waiting and waiting. People were holding their belongings in *valigia*, boxes, or just wrapped in a cloth with rope; these packages representing all their worldly goods. He said women stood with large packages or baskets balancing on their heads or men holding packages on their shoulders. They were afraid to set their bundles down; afraid someone would steal them. His uncle told him to be careful that there were bad people all around that would take advantage

of any opportunity. Marcello said he held his small pack all of the time and never let it out of his sight. He decided to place his money in his shoe so someone couldn't steal it from his pocket.

He told of how the people were all nicely dressed; the men in suits and hats and the ladies in their long skirts, coats and shawls around their shoulders or over their heads. They tried to look as nice as possible for their trip to America; they did not want to look like poor peasants.

Babies were crying and mothers were trying to keep them quiet while holding onto their other children to keep them from wandering off. No one knew what to do so they waited. It took two days before they were able to board the ship. The shipping company had a building with rooms they rented so the travelers could use a bed or a cot to rest while they waited.

Peddlers were lined up on the pier selling all sorts of fruits, vegetables and other food. Marcello said his uncle told him to buy some bread and cheese to put in his bag so he wouldn't go hungry. He said when he heard this he was worried they wouldn't have any food on the ship.

When the passengers were told they could board, they filed up the gangplank and were directed to an area where clerks from the shipping company gathered them in groups to record their names on the ship manifest. For those who could not read, write or spell their names, individuals with schooling were hired to assist the new passengers. In some cases, names were written and entered as they sounded, thus causing the misspelling of many names.

They passed by nurses and doctors who were examining their arms to see if they had been vaccinated, if not, they vaccinated them on the spot; they could not sail without this procedure. The medical people would look at the passengers for any signs of illness and would write down

their findings on the ship manifest. If the doctors determined someone was sick, crippled or too old, they were denied passage and sent away.

Pietro listened intently then asked, “People go all da way from their village to *Napoli* an’ no go to America?”

“*Si*, Zio Antonio say it issa good dey no go, America send dem back if dey are sick, crippled, too old or *criminale*. *Il criminale* was verry bad, dey lie, dey try to hide who dey are but da *polizia* dey smart; dey stop lotsa bad men an’ take dem away. I see one man dressed like a woman, but the *polizia*, dey catch him. The guy was *stupido*, he no shave his mustache.” Everyone laughed at the stupidity of the individual.

Marco asked his son how many people were on the boat and Marcello smiled telling his father that it was no boat, but a very big ship. He tried to explain to his family how big it actually was. Telling them that an Italian that worked on the ship as a Steward told him there were more than 2000 people or more on this one ship. They couldn’t visualize that many people; their village didn’t even have that many people. Marco looked at Marcello with wrinkled brows and questioning eyes, not able to comprehend. So he asked another question, he wanted to know how many days it took to get to America.

He told them the entire trip took almost two weeks. First, they sailed from *Napoli*, south to Palermo, Sicily where more people got on the ship. When they left Sicily they sailed across the *Mediterraneo*; the Steward told him the route the ship would take. After making their final stop at Gibraltar, they sailed across the Atlantic Ocean. He continued telling them how big the ocean was; he said once they left Gibraltar, they did not see land for many days. Many of the women and children were afraid of the ocean

and cried all of the time, believing that they would be lost at sea.

Pietro wanted to know if Marcello enjoyed being on the ship. He thought of the two weeks he spent at sea and told them it was very hard, it was not enjoyable, but he kept thinking about his new life in America and he tried to do the best he could.

They had been given cards with a passenger number on it and it was also their sleeping assignment number. The compartments were huge, each sleeping 400 passengers. The beds were small stacked two high and side by side. They were hard with a thin mattress filled with straw with the foul smell of mold. The passengers were given life-vests to be used if the passengers had to go into the water; most used the vest for a pillow.

Metal pails and utensils were distributed for their meals which were served from very large vats. Most of the people stayed in the lower decks of the ship called "steerage". This was where the third class passengers were assigned. It was a very uncomfortable section where you could hear the constant pounding of the engines and smell the oil and grease permeating from them. The compartment was located in the bow of the ship and every up and down movement could be felt as the ship made its way through the water causing so many to become sick. The moaning and crying of the sick could be heard all the time; women were constantly calling out for help. They could not wait for the voyage to end. Marcello said he did not get sick on the ocean, but he would go up on the top deck as often as possible to get some fresh air on his face and in his lungs. He said between the urine, dysentery and vomit, the stink on the lower decks was unbearable. Women and their children, in an attempt to move far away from the retched smells, would go to the upper deck section allowed for third class passengers; they huddled together

near the smoke stacks, protecting themselves from the wind and cold with blankets over their heads, enjoying the fresh, cool salt air on their faces.

Marcello told his family that Zio Antonio was not in the lower decks with them, he had a room with one other man on an upper deck. Marcello saw him talking to many men on the ship; he was unaware that his uncle was being paid to recruit men for companies in New York.

Marcello told his family of the jubilation when they neared the east coast of America. People were saying, “land, land!” Then they started yelling, “America, America!” Everyone scrambled to the top deck to see the beautiful bay and the big lady statue as they entered the New York harbor. All the people were quiet as they just looked at the statue in amazement as they sailed by and then everyone cheered, hugging each other and started singing. The women raised their hands to heaven thanking God! ‘*Grazia Dio, Grazia Dio*’ and he heard women from other countries saying words he couldn’t understand but he thought they were also thanking God! They were all so happy to be in the new country that held such promise for them. But, they were not prepared for what they would go through to pass immigration.

Marcello had piqued Pietro’s interest who sat wide-eyed, waiting for his brother to continue.

He said the ship could not anchor at the pier so they disembarked and got onto crowded ferryboats that took them to what was known as Ellis Island. So many passengers were disembarking from other ships and being processed that they had to stay on the ferryboats for long periods of time. The boats bobbed on the cold water, people huddled together to keep warm against the cold water spray and blowing wind; women were screaming and

children were getting sick to their stomachs, they just wanted to get off the boats and onto solid land.

When they started unloading, they were told to walk in long lines into the main building. Doctors and nurses were waiting to start medical inspections. They had to be sure no one was contagious from various diseases. The doctors looked at their eyes; lifting eyelids with a medical tool that looked like a buttonhook; they were very cautious since some Italians carried a very contagious eye disease known as Trachoma. They poked at stomachs, looked in ears and stuck sticks into mouths to look down their throats. All of these procedures were foreign to these new arrivals; many had never seen a doctor in all of their lives.

When they finished the medical inspections, they went through the legal process to be sure all passengers were accounted for as listed on the ship manifests. Names were checked and cards were pinned to their clothes. The card was their identification as to which ship they arrived on, the page where their names were listed along with their medical information and passenger number. The passengers sat on long hard benches waiting for their names to be called. Marcello told them he went through quickly, it took him only three hours, because he was in good health, he had money and he had his Zio who sponsored him. It took some people a very long time to process and some were sent to the infirmary and quarantined because they were sick; others were held in detention because they did not have any money, a sponsor or someone to meet them. He heard that many were being sent back to the country they came from.”

The family wanted to know why America would send people back to their home countries and Marcello explained that America did not want undesirables. They did not want people who could not take care of themselves and would

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end up on charity. They did not want criminals or individuals who would cause trouble.

He told them that as the passengers passed all the medical and legal phases they were then approved and directed to the money changers then allowed to exit the Ellis Island gates. They took ferries into New York City, where most of the new arrivals scattered to various parts of the city and those heading for new destinations outside of New York were given directions to the train stations. Marco said when they left Italy, everyone tried so hard to look nice when they arrived in America but two weeks on a ship, wearing the same clothing most of the time left them looking very bedraggled, needing baths and clean clothes.

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“Why you no stay with Zio Antonio, Marcello?” Marco asked.

The young man was hesitant to tell his father the truth about his brother, but thought he had to know, “I tell you, Papa. But you no be happy.”

He described how his new life began when his uncle brought them to New York City, he showed them where to live, which was not at his house. The tenement building to which he brought them was dirty beyond description with rats running down the halls. Men, women and children were living four and five families crowded into one 12 x 12 room with only two beds; most of the occupants sleeping on the floor and if they were lucky they had a mattress to sleep on. Plaster was falling off the walls, exposing wood beams and nails which were used to hang their meager possessions. The place was filthy and the stink of urine, unwashed bodies and sickness was as bad as on the ship; it was unbearable. Life in the tenements was grim.

Outside the building there were people standing around on the streets in dirty clothes and they smelled like they had not washed in a long time. Women were holding and nursing their babies as they sat on the steps in front of the building where they lived, waiting for their husbands to come home with a few cents to buy some food. Children ran around in the streets, yelling and screaming at each other. The noise from the mass of humanity and the garbage they generated was everywhere. Marcello told his family that when he saw the way the people were living in this section of New York, he missed their clean, quiet little village tremendously.

He described the work Antonio Romeo found for them and the conditions under which they worked. Marcello and four of the men were sent to a bridge building site; the bridge was being built over one of the busy rivers running through New York City. He worked at this job for one year and told his uncle he could not work there anymore; there had been an accident where he saw several men fall to their deaths. The bosses acted as if nothing happened and told the men to get back to work even though there were no safety nets below them. The work was extremely dangerous and unsafe; men were maimed from various accidents all the time; limbs were lost, men were crushed; the work continued all without regard for safety. The Italians were badly discriminated against and made to do the hardest, dirtiest work on any project.

His uncle was angry and yelled at him, telling him he was weak and a baby, but then he thought he could use his nephew in another way. Antonio told Marcello he could work for him and sent him out to collect the “protection” money from peddlers, business owners and from the madam and the whores in the brothels. The people he went to collect the money from, begged him to give them some time to pay. They complained about Antonio, that he

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provided nothing for what they paid. They needed what little money they had to buy food for themselves or their family; or to pay their rent and keep a roof over their heads. When Marcello returned to his uncle and said some of the people could not pay, Antonio would get angry and sent men to threaten them by taking them from their homes and throwing them into the streets; others were beaten until they promised to pay. Marcello's heart broke to see how these people were treated by his uncle.

Antonio reminded Marcello that he had to repay his debt; since his uncle paid for the ticket, found work and a place for him to stay when he came to America. Marcello certainly understood repaying a debt, but after one year he figured he more than repaid his uncle for what he spent on him. He could not work for this heartless, greedy man anymore; a man that caused such hardship upon people who were so destitute that they were poorer than if they stayed in Italy.

He met a man by the name of Salvatore Stefano, a *paesano* from Calabria who was staying in the same crowded room where Marcello was living. Salvatore told him he was giving up and going to leave New York and go to Pennsylvania. He had a cousin who worked in the mines there and was making more money than in New York and the mining company built rooming houses for the workers; he said they had to be better than where they were living. He also said they wouldn't have to pay a percentage of their wages to a *Padrone*. Marcello liked what he was hearing and told Salvatore he would go to Pennsylvania with him but there was something he had to do before he left New York.

He told Salvatore his uncle had given him picture postcards of Central Park and 5th Avenue which he wanted to see for himself. He and Salvatore took the streetcar to the park and Marcello did, in fact, see the scenes as shown on the picture

postcards his uncle had given to him. They walked to 5th Avenue and 57th Street and marveled at the big beautiful mansions on 5th Avenue. He told his family the pictures were true, there is a beautiful city outside of the slum area of the tenement neighborhood, but you would need a very good job, making a great deal of money to live in such a fine area.

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Marcello hung his head as he continued telling them that he left New York without telling his uncle; he could not live there anymore. He figured he had to do something for himself. He felt such despair in that city that he wanted to return home many times; but he wanted to keep his promise to bring money home to his Mama.

Salvatore and Marcello, with the few items they owned, left on a train for Pennsylvania. The mines were hiring at a feverish pace and they got work right away, making good money, just as Salvatore's cousin had described. They were assigned a room to rent that they shared in one of the company boarding houses. The room was very clean, two separate beds with dressers, electricity and running water in the bathroom down the hall.

A lady named *Signora* Anna Conte lived at the boarding house with her husband who was also a miner. She cooked for all of the men who lived in the house and their food was included in the rent they paid. It was so different from New York he was happy to have such a nice, comfortable place to live.

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Marcello looked sadly at his father and said, "Ima sorry, Papa, that I no stay with Zio Antonio. Ima no weak or *bambino*. I know how to work hard, I do it in da the mine. Zio treat people verry bad. He issa no good. Ima so sorry."

Marco patted his son's shoulder and said, "You do good, Marcello. I understand what you say dat Antonio no do good. I see now how he make so much da money, dat is no good. Antonio is my brother, but he *e stronzo!*" Using profanity not often heard by the family.

"No! Zio Antonio no do that," Pietro shouted. He couldn't believe the uncle he loved and admired so much to be so cruel.

"Yes, Pietro it is true. Zio Antonio he help da people to fine da work, but he take and take an' put da money in his pocket an' da people dey stay poor." Marcello said.

"No! I no believe you. I wanna see with my eyes what it is!" Pietro was angry with his brother.

Marco stood up so quickly his chair fell backward. He looked at his sons, "*Basta!*" he raised his hands to silence them "I no wanna hear Antonio no more. His name no more, *avete capito?*" He waited for his sons to answer.

"*Si, capito.* They each responded and nodded their heads.

By the end of the evening, Marcello was so tired from his long trip and relaying his stories of the past two years that he went into the room he shared with his brother lay on his bed and slept deeply but had many dreams of home comforts and American opportunities.

Chapter Four

The next morning, Marco was very happy to see his two sons, dressed and ready for a day of fishing. After a cup of hot chicory coffee and a piece of cheese and crusty bread, they went to Marco's boat. The old fishermen, peering through squinting eyes, were happy to see Marcello and welcomed him back. "Marcello, *da America!* You com' back."

"*Si*, Ima back. I promise my Mama, so Ima here." Several started asking questions about America and what he did over the past two years. He did not want to go through the stories all over again so he simply nodded his head and said, "*America e buona.*"

He climbed into the boat with his father and brother raised the sail they had added to the boat and fished, setting their nets and quietly going about the chores that came naturally to them. With the water lapping at the boat and the smooth rhythm of the motion he lay back letting the sun warm his body and breathing in the clean salt air, he knew peace.

Pietro, who was ignoring his brother and hadn't talked to him since the night before, finally looked at him and said, "Marcello, I wanna go to America!"

Marco looked up startled and said, "Pietro you stay with Papa. Soon we get a bigga boat."

"No, Papa, I go. You hear Marcello, you see da money? I wan' dat too! I have money. I go America an' make more."

"No *figlio*, you go I no see you no more."

"What you say? I com' back, just like Marcello."

“No,” Marco said sadly. “Look at Francesco, your *fratello*. He go to Australia, more den two years, more den Marcello.” He said holding up two fingers and waving them in the air. “His wife, Lena she live with us, she no getta *lettera*, no money, *niente!* Dis no good, is Francesco *morte?*” He shrugged his shoulders and held out his hands as the sorrow poured from his heart. He felt he lost his oldest son.

“Francesco say he bring Lena when he has da money. Maybe he have no money, it takea time. I go make da money den com’ back.” Pietro was trying to convince his father.

Marcello looked at his brother and shook his head. He did not believe Francesco would return, simply by some of the remarks he made before leaving for Australia. Francesco disliked being poor in Italy and he would do whatever he could to stay away.

Pietro lowered his head and stayed quiet, but was determined to leave; he would make a plan then discuss it further with his father another time.

They all stayed quietly in the boat and did not catch many fish that day.

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Pietro kept thinking of sailing off to America and was very excited about his possible upcoming adventure. He went into the village and made some inquiries if others were leaving for America. Many of the men had plans to leave when they had enough money or when a relative already living in America sent money for their passage; but no one was planning to leave soon.

Their cousin, Guido Bartoli heard Pietro was talking to men about their plans to leave. He went in search of his cousin to tell him he was selling his share of his fishing boat and

was leaving for America as soon as he could make arrangements. He had nothing and no one to keep him in Italy; his only relative was his Aunt Rosa. Guido told Pietro another villager, Giovanni Martino with his wife, Carmela, and little daughter, Maria were also making plans to go soon. Giovanni was completely frustrated with their poor living conditions in southern Italy he wanted a better life for his family.

The three men agreed to meet and discuss the advantages of traveling together and to make plans for a date to leave. Pietro suggested they hire a wagon and split the expense, but Giovanni said his brother Vincenzo, who was living in America and was sponsoring his family, sent money for the voyage and other expenses they may have; so he would purchase a wagon then sell it in Naples. He explained that if they hired a wagon and driver, they would have to pay his return trip expenses if he had riders or not. However, if the wagon was purchased locally and they drove it themselves, he could then sell it at a higher price in Naples, making a nice little profit.

Giovanni said he would make the wagon comfortable for his wife and child and the three men could take turns driving. His wife would prepare food for them and they could take turns sleeping, making stops only when necessary.

“Dat issa verry good plan.” Pietro said, with Guido nodding in agreement.

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Pietro asked Marcello to meet with him, Guido and the Martinos to describe some of the situations he encountered when he sailed, both going to America and returning. He agreed, but asked, “You think Papa gonna let you go?”

“Why not?” Pietro asked, “Ima 16, you were 17 when you go.”

“Yes, but I go with Zio Antonio. I go with someone I know.”

“So, I go with Guido and the Martinos and we know what to do when you tell us.”

“Ah, so you think you a big man because I tell you what to do”, Marcello said shaking his head. “There is so much you don’ know. You learn when you see.”

“It is what I wanna do an’ it can be no so bad since you gonna go back one day.”

“Yes, to make da money dat I no do here in Italy.”

Knowing his younger brother was determined to go to America, Marcello decided it was no use debating with him, so he said, “I know you wanna go. I give you da place to go in Pennsylvania where you find Salvatore Stefano. He issa good friend, a *paesano* an’ he help you getta job. No go to New York, go to da mines where you make more money.”

“Some things are verry important when you get to da ship, when dey say to you, ‘where you go’, you say Scranton, Pennsylvania. Dey no care where you go. When dey say ‘you know someone in America’, you say ‘Salvatore Stefano’. Den they think you have da sponsor.”

“But I don’ know Salvatore! I tell dem Zio Antonio!”

“No! No say Zio Antonio!” Marcello said sternly. “Too many people no like him. No say Zio Antonio! You say Salvatore Stefano. You promise me and you promise you no go to New York!”

“*Si*, I promise.” Pietro would do as his brother asked, but wanted to see his uncle once he got to America.

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Two nights later when Marcello met with Pietro, Guido and the Martinos, he decided to tell them some of the worse experiences to expect, as well as the good. He wanted them to be prepared and be able to face whatever happened.

“What I tella you, *Signora*, is so you be prepared.” He directed his attention to Angela Martino. He told her that by traveling with her husband and child that there are much better accommodations available. He told them that the new German ships, in an attempt to get more passengers, made many improvements. Families now can sleep in cabins with one to six beds and in a much better section of the ship, without so much ship movement. He said they would have to pay a little more when they purchased their tickets, but it was worth it.

He proceeded to tell of his experience on his first sailing, but then explained how much better the accommodations and services were on the return trip. Steerage had been eliminated and changed to third class. Single men were no longer delegated to the single, overcrowded cabin but to smaller cabins with only 40 men to a compartment, making it much more comfortable with more room to move around. The passengers were able to have their meals in a dining room at nice tables with dishes and silverware. They were allowed much more upper deck space to walk around or sit on deck chairs to enjoy the fresh, salt air.

He told them of the people they would see on the ship; many from other countries, but, he said, most stayed among their own countrymen. People who had musical instruments like accordions or harmonicas would play music at night and everyone would enjoy the music, some would sing and dance.

He warned them that if the ocean got rough, people would get very sick; there would be moaning and crying every

time the ship would go up and down while it cuts through the rough seas. He said the mothers would keep their children in the cabins so they would not fall when there was so much ship movement. He personally liked to be on the upper deck and find a place where he could put a chair so it would not move and just breathe in the salt air and enjoy the ride.

“Oh, *mamma mia*,” Angela said as she put her hands to her face, “dat is because you a fisherman, you like da ocean. But it issa good you tell us. *Grazia!*”

“I think we gonna go onna German ship. It be more good for my wife an’ child”, said Giovanni Martino.

“I go to Locri next week, to the shipping company office”, said Pietro, “an’ getta times for da ship when dey go; it be more better to go in da spring or summer, den we no have too much bad weather at sea.” They all agreed.

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A week later, following supper Pietro asked his father if he could show him some information he received. Marco agreed, already knowing what his young son was going to discuss with him. Pietro laid out all the information he had gathered to present to his family; there were colorful brochures from the shipping companies. Even though he and his family could not read; the shipping agent explained what they described; there were pictures of beautiful ships with well decorated cabins and dining rooms. The pictures showed people dressed in fine clothes strolling the decks; men in their homburg hats walking, arm in arm, with a beautiful lady carrying her parasol. Rosa and Maria were very impressed. Marcello reminded them that the pictures in the brochure were not totally accurate and most of them were directed to first class passengers.

Pietro laid out very explicit travel plans of who he would be traveling with; how they would get to Naples and what he would do when he arrived in America. He said Marcello gave him very good instructions of where to go in Pennsylvania, to get a job in the mines and wait for his brother to return.

Marco said he had been thinking about Pietro leaving ever since he said he wanted to go. He was ready to object to any of his requests, but since his son showed such enthusiasm, responsibility and well-made plans and the fact that Pietro was just one year younger than Marcello was when he left that he was willing to agree to Pietro going. “But”, Marco said sternly, “You send da *lettera* to Mama so she no sad alla da time – *promessa?*”

“Oh, *Si*, Papa I promise!” Pietro happily jumped up and embraced his father, then his mother, sister and then said to Marcello, “You an’ me we be in America soon.”

Pietro and his traveling companions decided to leave Italy in May.

Chapter Five

At supper the next night, Marcello kept his head over his plate but calmly asked his sister, “Maria, you see Teresa Costa in da village?”

Maria looked up startled at her brother across the table her mouth open, her eyes wide and then she laughed at him, “So, you like Teresa Costa?”

“No! No, I no say that.” He said, lifting his head. “But she issa pretty girl” he smiled looking at the ceiling stroking his chin while he thought of her. “She you friend, no?”

“*Si*, she is my friend. She com’ every day to da fountain, and sometimes we go getta wood in da hills. You wanna talk to her?” She smiled and raised her eyebrow as she looked at her smitten brother.

Marcello shrugged his shoulders, “Could be, if she wanna talk to me den I tell her about America.”

“*Si*, dat is good. Before you com’ home, she wanna know alla time if you send a *lettera*? I think she wanna talk to you too. You com’ get da water with me, you see her dere.”

“Maybe on Sunday, Ima think about it.” Again he tried to act nonchalant.

Pietro, sitting next to his brother, laughed and punched him on his arm, “Marcello like a girl! Marcello like a girl!”

“*Basta*, Pietro, *basta!*” Marcello tried to quiet his brother as he slapped him on the back of his head.

Everyone was happy that night, thinking perhaps Marcello was interested in a girl. Rosa secretly prayed that if her son would marry, maybe he would stay in Italy and that would make her very happy.

Maria knew Marcello was going to the fountain with her on Sunday when she saw him dressed in his suit pants and vest, a white shirt opened at the collar with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows, his American shoes all bright and shiny and his fedora sitting tilted on his head; he looked very handsome. As they neared the fountain, Marcello turned one direction then another looking for a sign of Teresa, but she was nowhere to be seen. “You say she be here. Where?” He asked his sister anxiously.

Maria laughed at him, “You *stupido*, she be here. *Aspetto!* You wanna marry Teresa?”

“*Silenzio*, He scowled. “Ima just talk to her. I wanna see what she say.”

When they saw Marcello, several women and girls stopped filling their water jugs and stood back, giggling and whispering to each other behind hands covering their mouths. They were admiring this handsome man that used to be known as “the fisherman Marcello” but now referred to as “Marcello, *da America*”. Many of the girls wished he would look at them; some waved at him, but he paid no attention and continued watching for Teresa.

Teresa entered the fountain square carrying her water jug on her head and hesitated as she saw Marcello. Maria had prepared Teresa by telling her that Marcello would be at the fountain on Sunday and wanted to see her. Her prayers were answered, he was there. With a little smile on her face, she coyly looked away and continued toward the fountain in that slow, smooth gait that the Italian girls and women used to keep from spilling water or whatever they may be carrying on their heads or shoulders.

When she lifted her head briefly to get a glimpse of him, he was more handsome than she remembered and how wonderful he looked in his American clothes. He definitely did not look like a peasant. She was trying to stifle a smile

as she reached the fountain, she kept her face turned away slightly as she removed the jug from the top of her head and started lowering it into the fountain. As Marcello approached Teresa, Maria being a good sister, walked over to talk to another friend giving him some privacy. He removed his hat and said, “*Buon giorno*, Teresa.”

“*Buon giorno*, Marcello” she replied timidly with her head lowered.

“Let me help you?” He reached for the jug.

“No, *grazia*. . .I do it.” Marcello loved the sound of her voice.

“Please, let me help.” He put his hat back on his head and took the water jug from her, finished filling it and placed it on the edge of the fountain. He started by asking some simple questions but she would only answer with a “*si*” or “*no*” while she kept her head down. When he told her how beautiful she looked, she lifted her head and looked into his eyes. “You think Ima beautiful?”

“*Si*, you are verry beautiful! I always think you are more beautiful than alla da girls in da village.” She put her head down, shaking her head but kept a smile on her face.

When he looked at her soft, smiling face, long black wavy hair, dark eyes with long lashes and pouty red lips he knew he had secretly loved her for many years, but never said anything to her, or to anyone.

He was talking non-stop, trying to keep her from leaving; he wanted to spend time with her, he had to let her know how he felt and he wanted to know if she felt the same. He was telling her of things he saw in Naples and in America, piquing her curiosity to the point that she started asking questions. Time was passing when she said, “I must go. My Mama she wait for da water.”

“Letta me walk with you, I pay *rispetto* to you Mama and Papa.”

“Oh, no, no walk with me!” Teresa stiffened and hesitated, thinking what people would say if they saw her walking with Marcello with no chaperone. After all, didn’t all her aunts walk with her sister when her husband was courting her? It was unheard of to walk alone with a man who was not a member of your family.

Seeing her concern, Marcello spoke softly saying, “My sister, Maria, she com’. It issa good. If somebody say something bad, I give *mal occhio!*” he said giving the sign of the horns.

“Oh, no, Marcello”, she laughed. No *mal occhio!* It issa good with Maria.” Teresa lifted her jug and placed it on her shoulder as they started walking to her house.

She asked more questions about America and Marcello was happy to tell her about the good things like the festivals and celebrations to the various saints. He said the festivals were like a big party and men would light fireworks and there was singing and dancing. She smiled thinking how wonderful life must be in America.

When they reached Teresa’s house, she called out, “Mama, Papa, Marcello Romeo issa here with his sister, Maria.”

Signore and *Signora* Costa were happy to see Marcello and her brother, Giovanni was happy to see Maria. Teresa’s parents always thought Marcello was a very polite, respectful boy and here he was, a very handsome, prosperous looking young man standing before them. The Romeo and Costa families had known each other for many years; everyone had grown up in the same village. Giovanni and Marcello were lifelong friends. Teresa’s father knew Marcello had recently returned to Italy. He welcomed him into his home and offered him a seat then

poured a glass of wine for each of the men. To be polite and show respect, *Signore Costa* asked about Marcello's family; but he and Giovanni were anxious to ask many questions about his trip which Marcello answered very politely. They spoke for well over an hour and when there was a lull in the conversation; Marcello thought he and Maria should leave. Instead he hesitated, then on impulse, took the opportunity to boldly look at Teresa's father and say, "*Signore Costa*, if Teresa is no promise to marry, I be verry happy if you say 'yes' to me to marry her". Teresa stood across the room with Maria and reached for Maria's hand and held tight. She was so surprised to hear what Marcello was saying but in her heart she always thought about him lovingly. She looked at Maria, who shrugged her shoulders back to her; then to her parents and they looked at each other, astounded by the request being made on this first visit by what they now thought of as a "brash young man".

The father in his most stern voice asked, "*Cosa!?* You com' to my house one time an' say you wanna marry my Teresa? What kine respect issa dis?"

"*No! No, Signore*, no disrespect. I say Teresa is da most good an' most beautiful. I *rispetto* verry much. I know her long time; we were children together. You know my *famiglia*, you know my Papa and Mama. We are a good *famiglia!* When Ima in America I think alla da time of Teresa." He said tapping a finger to his temple.

"*Basta, Marcello! Aspetto!* Tella me, you wanna marry Teresa den you stay in Siderno and be a *pescatore?*"

"*No!* I no wanna stay an' be a *pescatore*. It issa too poor to stay in Italy. *Si*, I wanna marry Teresa verry much an' we go to America. It issa good dere with good job an' I make lotsa money. We have a nice house with water an'

electricity inna house; we send money to you an' to my *parenti*."

Signore Costa was shaking his head in disbelief, "You make *dat* kine da money to send me, to you *parenti* an' still a good life for you an' Teresa in America?"

When Marcello told him how much money he brought to his parents when he returned, *Signore* Costa's mouth dropped open and he just shook his head. "Oh, *Madre di Dio!*"

Teresa continued to stand across the room holding tightly to Maria's hand, she was hardly breathing holding her other hand over her mouth. Everything was moving so fast. Was it true what she was hearing? Did Marcello really want to marry her and take her to America? Yes, she thought to herself, I do want to marry him. I want to go with him. I must let my Papa know, she thought.

Marcello continued by saying, "Pietro, *mio fratello*, issa gonna leave for America verry soon and when I go back we work together; we make da money for everyone."

Then her mother cried out, "But, Teresa so far away. America far away. Oh, *mamma mia*. My *bambina!* I see no more." She put her face into her hands and started crying.

"No. . .no, Teresa she com' to visit. You see her. I com' see my Mama, Teresa she com' to see you." Marcello tried to calm her.

Teresa's father turned, facing her and asked sternly, "Teresa, whatta you say?"

Teresa took a deep breath, let it out slowly then released Maria's hand and stepped forward hesitantly. Marcello watched waiting to hear her words. He couldn't tell by the expression on her face what was in her heart. "Please, *Dio*", he secretly prayed to himself.

“Ima think about Marcello alla da time for long time. I wanna marry him an’ go to America. Look, Papa, does he no look like a rich man? I believe I have da good life with him.”

“Ima no rich, Teresa, but we live good. Verry good!” Marcello corrected Teresa’s description of him. He went to her and took both of her hands in his and held them tightly. “It be good to marry an’ live in America, I promise.”

Her father pondered what his daughter just said; watched Marcello as he stood in front of his daughter holding her hands then he stood up and sternly said, “Go,” he pointed to the door. “*va casa*, Ima think about dis, I letta you know *domani*.” The scowl on his face was frightening.

Marcello looked at Teresa squeezed her hands then he bowed to her mother, shook hands with her father and Giovanni and said, “*Grazie, Signore and Signora, buon giorno con tutto il rispetto. Avanti, Maria.*” He stopped at the door, turned and looked at Teresa once more; could this beautiful young woman that he loves so much possibly become his wife? He and Maria left the Costa home.

Marcello was worried at how abruptly Teresa’s father asked him to leave and as he and Maria were walking home, he turned to her and asked, “Whatta you think, Maria? You think I marry Teresa?”

She stopped, took her jug from her shoulder, set it on the ground and looked at her brother shaking her head and shrugging her shoulders and said, “I don’ know, but I know Mama cry so much when you go. She cry many nights she think she no see you no more. Da Costa family dey talk now. Dey see how good you look, dat you make da money in America and we have *niente* in Italy. Dey know you, dey know Mama an’ Papa; dey know you make a good husband for Teresa. It be good for her.” She hesitated then added, “I wish to go to America one day.”

He smiled at his sister, took her water jug, lifted it to his shoulder and put his other arm around her hugged her close. “*Io ti amo, sorella*. You pretty smart for a girl.”

She looked at her brother, “Den maybe I getta to see Giovanni, whatta you think?”

Marcello looked at his sister with one eyebrow raised then laughed loudly, “Ah, you have da plan! Datsa good! You an’ Giovanni, dat is good!” They continued their walk home, laughing together.

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In May of 1907, when Marcello turned 20 years of age, he and Teresa were married at Santa Maria Church in front of their families, friends and all the villagers. Following the ceremony, everyone walked together, while a band played keeping the rhythm of the procession, from the church to the festivities that followed in the fountain square; tables, chairs and benches were set up and the women of the village brought food, men brought wine and little girls placed wildflowers in jars on the tables.

Teresa was adorned in the traditional peasant wedding attire that had been her mother’s; it was a colorful full skirted dress with a laced bodice; the entire ensemble was hand embroidered and covered with ribbons. Around her head she wore a band of flowers braided with the same colorful ribbons as on her dress. Marcello wore his American suit with ribbons to match Teresa’s pinned to the lapel of his coat and on the band of his fedora.

Villagers played music on concertinas, tambourines, flutes and trumpets and everyone joined in the singing and dancing. When the strains of the “*tarantella*” began, Pietro went to this mother taking both of her hands lifting her from her chair, “Com’, Mama, dance *la tarantella*.” She rose, looking at all her friends and smiled, yes, she would

dance with her youngest son. They started with Rosa holding her hands out as if inviting her partner to come to her; Pietro danced in a circle around her. Rosa then took hold of her skirt and lifted it slightly to show the quick movements of her feet. Maria then went to Marco, "Papa, go, dance with Mama." Marco nodded his head as he got up from his chair. He looked across at the wonderful woman who had been his wife for so long. As he started walking towards her he was thinking about their wedding day when they danced the *tarantella* for the first time and he smiled. She smiled at her husband as if she could read his mind as Pietro stepped away and Marco moved in with his hands held behind his back, their feet moving in rhythm to the lively music. As Marco danced in a circle around her, Rosa looked over her shoulder at him; he touched his shoulder to her in a teasing manner. Maria and her siblings were thrilled to see the sensual way their parents still acted towards each other after all these years. Marcello stood, removed his coat, hat and rolled up his sleeves. He took Teresa's hands and they joined in the dance. Giovanni and Maria enticed Teresa's parents to also join in. Everyone started clapping and calling out "*Bravo, bravo!*" there was such happiness to see the bride and groom and their parents all dancing together on this wonderful occasion. A wedding was always a very festive occurrence in the village, representing a new beginning to a new family and the villagers always welcomed a *festa*.

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When Marcello told Teresa's father that they would be staying in Italy for some time, he made arrangements with one of his *compare* who owned a small one room stone house that Marcello and Teresa could use. The old man had moved into the home of his daughter and his house was sitting vacant, he was pleased to let the young couple use it. Teresa, Rosa and Teresa's mother cleaned the house and

made it bright and livable. Teresa did not want Marcello to see it until after the wedding festivities.

When the evening ended and the bride and groom walked into the house, Marcello looked around and saw how neat and clean it was, but he was sad when he saw how sparsely it was furnished; there was a table, two chairs, a crude rock stove for cooking, an oil lamp on the table, a water jug, some dishes and pots on a shelf and a wood plank bed with mattress, made up beautifully with a handmade quilt, but like all the other houses in the village there was no running water or electricity.

Marcello drew Teresa into his arms and told her how very nice she made everything in the house. But, he explained to her, soon they would have a nice house with lots of rooms, including a kitchen with a real stove and a bedroom with a nice bed and mattress. The house would have water and electricity and she would not have to carry water every day. He promised they would have a good life together. He then looked into her dark eyes and said, "*Io ti amo, Teresa Romeo.*"

"*Io ti amo, Marcello Romeo.*" And their life began.

Chapter Six

A week after the wedding, Pietro, Guido and the Martinos were packed and ready to leave for Naples. Family, friends and most of the villagers gathered to bid them farewell. Marco embraced his youngest son and said, “Remember *da lettera* for Mama. I pray to see you again, *figlio mio*.”

“*Si, si, Papa, we see again.*” But Marco shook his head as he stepped away; he felt in his heart that he would never see his youngest son again.

Rosa was so distraught at the thought of Pietro leaving and possibly never seeing him again she cried and held him so close that Marco and Maria had to pull her away screaming, “*Mio figlio – mio figlio! Oh Madonna mia!*”

Marcello and Teresa were saying their goodbyes and Marcello wrapped his arms around his brother giving him final instructions, “No forget, *fratello mio*, what I tella you. Look at everything around you.” He motioned to his eyes. “You no trust no one. Think, always think” he tapped Pietro on the forehead. “You go see Salvatore, soon I see you! *Arriveiderci, mio fratellino.*”

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The wagon was very comfortable for the long ride; Giovanni Martino made it so by using items from the home they were leaving. They were determined they were going to make a good life in America and would never return to Italy.

Guido was driving the wagon, with Pietro sitting next to him. The first part of the road was easy, traveling north along the coast with the beautiful Ionian Sea off to the

right. They looked across the sea, contemplating if they would ever see it again or would they find something as beautiful in America. Guido expected to make his fortune and stay in America, but Pietro was not sure what he would do, he wanted to see what his future held in store for him. They talked about what they could expect during their trip, thinking of what Marcello experienced. Guido told Pietro he decided that he was not going to the mines with him. He asked how to locate Antonio Romeo so he could ask for his help to find whatever work was available. Pietro told him he wished he would change his mind and go to the mines because Marcello warned them of the hardship of living in New York and he reminded him that his uncle would find work for him but he would also take a good percentage of his wages. Guido said that did not matter, he just needed help. He thought whatever wage he made would be more than what he earned fishing in Italy.

Pietro was thinking of everything Marcello had told him; he knew that after going through Ellis Island he was to board the train east to Pennsylvania. The mine companies had wagons that would bring the new arrivals into their towns. When he gave Pietro the address where to find Salvatore Stefano, he also told him there were many Italians living in the area that he could communicate with; but he warned him that even though most *paesani* helped each other, there were some that were unscrupulous and would take advantage of new arrivals. Pietro was determined he would not allow anyone to take advantage of him; he would be shrewd and remember his brother's experiences.

The trip north to Naples would take several days by wagon. Pietro told Giovanni Martino the shipping company agent explained that they could take a train for most of the trip from Locri, the town just south of Siderno, to Reggio, across the straits of Messina then east to Palermo, Sicily

where they could board a ship. The agent said it would be quicker and far more comfortable than riding in a wagon. He also explained that much of Naples was under reconstruction since the Vesuvius eruption the year before. But Giovanni said he had to see another cousin in Naples before they left. Pietro understood and went along with the original plan.

Everything in Naples was as Marcello had described, but Pietro couldn't visualize the huge buildings and all of the people until he actually saw them with his own eyes. Since the reconstruction started life in Naples were returning to normal. Automobiles were running on repaired roads; trains and streetcars were carrying masses of people, many coming to the port to board any one of several ships waiting to sail to America. Pietro wondered if he could ride in an automobile before he left and he wondered if he could even learn how to drive one; he would make some inquiries.

Giovanni Martino made sure when he purchased the tickets for their passage that they would sail on one of the newer German ships; he wanted everything to be comfortable for his wife and child; that was his promise to her so she would agree to leave Italy. The ship was scheduled to sail in three days. This gave Giovanni time to see his cousin and Pietro time to see if he could find someone who would teach him to drive an automobile.

As Pietro and Guido walked to the rooming house, owned by the shipping company for passengers to rent a bed for a few nights, they saw a young man sitting in a delivery truck parked next to the sidewalk. "Guido! I wanna talk to dat guy."

"*Cosa?*" Guido shrugged his shoulders, "You know dat guy?"

“No! I wanna drive da truck.”

Pietro approached the young man who was about the same age as he and called “Hey, Giuseppe!”

The young man turned and looked questioning at Pietro, “You know my name?”

“You look like Giuseppe, my friend! Where you from?”

“Calabria, *e tu?*”

“Oh, *Calabrese*, Ima *Calabrese*! My name is Pietro. *Come stai?*” The two young men started a very lively conversation, both talking at once, hands flying around emphasizing a point. Giuseppe saying his family moved to Naples from Verbicaro, a village high in the mountains. Pietro told him he was a fisherman from Siderno Marina and that he and Guido were leaving for America in a couple of days. Giuseppe was in awe that they were able to go to America. He said he would love to go one day.

Pietro then asked Giuseppe how he got such a good job driving a delivery truck. The young man told him it belonged to his father who owned the produce market up the street. Pietro said he wished he knew how to drive then he could get a good job too, when he got to America. The young man said it was easy and he could teach him. “You teach me now?” Pietro’s wish was coming true.

“*Si*, we go uppa da road where dere no so many cars. My work is *finito*, I have da time now. Com’, get in.”

“Dissa my *cugino*, Guido. He com’ too?”

“*Ma*, sure – com’ on!” Guido and Pietro threw their bags in the back of the truck and climbed in next to Giuseppe.

Giuseppe headed up a road where there wasn't much traffic; he was showing Pietro and Guido the fundamentals as he drove. Explaining how to start the truck by using the lever for the spark, turning the crank, giving it gas for the engine to start, showed them how to release the brake and shift the gears. Pietro watched everything and thought he understood, however the first time he started the truck it "bucked" forward and the motor died. Giuseppe and Guido laughed, "Das OK. It happen alla time. Try again! Try more slow with da clutch, you see!"

This time Pietro eased the clutch out as he pressed down easily on the gas pedal. It moved forward. "Give more gas, then shift, shift," Giuseppe yelled as he ran along side. Pietro gave it more gas then stepped down on the clutch, eased on the gas, moved the stick shift into the next gear again, eased out the clutch and gave it more gas. He was doing it, the truck was still moving. When he finished all gears, the truck was putting along smoothly. Pietro was so excited, he was driving! It was easier than he thought! Wouldn't Marcello be excited to see him driving!

When Pietro turned the truck around and headed back to the two young men, Guido asked if he could try. Giuseppe agreed, "Sure you try."

"*Aspetto*, Guido. Ima do again, den you." Guido waited patiently until Pietro again drove up the road, turned and drove back.

As he stopped the truck in front of Giuseppe and Guido, Giuseppe said, "You learn verry fast. You gonna be good driver." Pietro was very proud of himself.

When Guido took a turn, he proved to also be a good student, proving that he and Pietro were quick learners. Giuseppe drove them back to where they met and they

thanked him for the driving lessons. They were very happy to meet him and said they would stop by and talk to him again tomorrow, when he finished his deliveries.

“When you sail for America?” Giuseppe asked.

“Inna two days.” Pietro held up two fingers.

“Com’ with me *domani* when I deliver. I like da company.” The two young men were excited to spend time with their new found friend.

The next day, Giuseppe told them he wished he could sail with them or at least sail at another time, but he told them he thought it would be impossible. His mother was dead and his father was crippled so it left a lot of responsibility on his shoulders. When they left at the end of the day, the three men embraced and bid farewell as if they had known each other all their lives.

“I never forget you, Giuseppe. You good friend, you *paesano*.” Pietro liked the young man who was their friend for just two days.

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The next day, Pietro, Guido and the Martinos gathered together on the dock waiting to board the ship. When the passengers received the call to board, they walked up a gangplank and were told to go into the dining rooms where shipping clerks asked them to gather in groups of thirty to have their names and information recorded on the ship manifest. After a simple medical check was conducted by the doctors and nurses, the passengers received their cabin assignments. Pietro and Guido found their accommodations to be much better than what Marcello had described. They were assigned a cabin with only four other men. The berths were each equipped with comfortable

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mattresses and bedding, with wash basins in each room and a locker for their possessions. The Martino family was very pleased with a private room all to themselves. The travelers agreed to meet in the dining room at meal time, where they received well prepared, wholesome food served by stewards at round tables, with place settings for eight. The tables were covered with clean linen, china and silverware. After their meals, they were able to go to the promenade deck, which was covered against inclement weather. It gave them the opportunity to walk around in the fresh air greeting other passengers.

Angela Martino expressed her delight in the wonderful service they were receiving, it was much better than she expected.

The twelve day sailing was fairly uneventful, with just two small storms encountered. In the evenings, the music would begin; singing and dancing followed, it was like entertainment every night.

Each night, Pietro was more excited and thought to himself, “another day at sea and one day closer to America.”

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Coming into New York harbor, all the passengers were in awe of the Statue of Liberty, just as all travelers had been before them; they called her “the lady with her hand in the air”. The sight of her gave them all a sense of freedom and hope. Perhaps their dreams would come true in this new country.

Disembarking from the ship was much more orderly than in previous years, the passengers were asked to gather in the same groups of thirty as they did when they were registered upon boarding. They would leave the ship and board the ferries for Ellis Island, at this point, Pietro told Guido they

may get separated from the Martinos so they should say their goodbyes. They bid farewell to their friends and wished them good luck in this new country; shook hands with Giovanni, kissed Angela on each cheek and Pietro picked up little Maria and hugged her and told her to grow up to be a good American, she gave him a kiss and hug and then they were gone.

Pietro told Guido to give all the same information he gave so they would get through the processing together. They were very pleased that they were finished within three hours; Pietro thought, thanks to Marcello's instructions. The Martinos were delayed slightly since the doctors wanted to check little Maria to see if she was carrying any contagious diseases. Pietro saw them later going through another line, Giovanni waved, indicating that everything was going well. Pietro was pleased to see they were passing without any complications.

With their medical and legal processing completed and having gone through the money changers, Pietro bid Guido farewell and told him to consider going to Pennsylvania with him, but Guido looked forward to being in the big city of New York. Pietro cautioned Guido not to give anyone his money; he warned Guido just as Marcello had warned him. They embraced and each headed in different directions never knowing if they would ever see each other again.

Pietro was amazed at the people flocking out of Ellis Island. Once out the gates they were feverishly looking for friends or loved ones who were going to meet them. He saw young women wondering aimlessly without anyone to meet them. Men would approach them and engage them in conversation and soon win over their misguided trust. The young women would smile and soon leave with the men for

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destinations unknown. Pietro shook his head, “No trust no one” he heard Marcello’s words ringing in his head.

Chapter Seven

Pietro arrived in America with \$30.00 in his pocket as he headed to the train station that would take him into Pennsylvania. He saw men from Poland, Germany and Ireland boarding trains heading for the mining towns but he was especially pleased to see many Italians traveling with him; some were returning from a trip to Italy. They were all conversing with each other; everyone had their own bit of information to offer, some they knew first hand and some they were told by others. Pietro listened intently, trying to decipher the good information from the bad. The coal company had wagons waiting at the train station to bring the new arrivals to the town. Two of the men on the wagon knew Marcello and Salvatore Stefano, they were pleased to welcome Marcello's little brother and told him they would help him find Salvatore.

They were told to go the Administration building to see about work. There were several foremen talking to the men, determining their capabilities. Pietro approached a foreman he heard speaking Italian. He introduced himself and told him he was Marcello's brother and he was looking for work. "I know Romeo, so you are his brother, eh? You are pretty small, I don't know if I could use you in the mine. How old are you, sixteen?"

"No! Ima eighteen," lying about his age, "Ima small but strong as all here." He waved his hand towards all the other men in the room. You give me da job, I show you."

"Smart guy, eh? Most of you guys are all talk. When issa you brother coming?"

"He has a *moglie* an' dey com' soon. We work together. You give me da job?" Pietro was being persistent. The

foreman liked his attitude and determination but wouldn't show it.

“Dats good to hear about you brother, we like family men; dey more stable. Marcello, he was a good hard worker. You do the same, I give you a try. You com' *domani* to the office”, he said pointing to a field office near the mine opening. “Tony Razza, he show you da job.”

Pietro was pleased he now had a job and was heading for the boarding house to which he was assigned. It was the same boarding house where Salvatore Stefano lived. He met *Signora* Anna Conte, who managed the house and was the cook for the men living there. She told Pietro there was an unoccupied bed in the same room with Salvatore and that all the men in that particular house were Italian so he should be comfortable in the surroundings. She told him the house rules and meal schedules. Pietro then went up the stairs to bring his things to the room he would share with Salvatore and he couldn't believe what a comfortable room he would be staying in; the bed had a nice mattress, a dresser to keep his things and electricity. He was amazed when he saw a switch on the wall and pushed it up and down making the light go on and off. He found the bathroom at the end of the hall that had a sink and tub for bathing, but the toilet was outside at the far end of the property, he didn't mind, the toilet had always been outside all of his life.

Salvatore was happy to meet Pietro when he returned to the boarding house following his shift. He said he would wash up and be back in a few minutes. Pietro waited in the kitchen talking to Anna and told her Marcello would be returning soon and would be bringing his new wife. Anna was pleased to hear this and said it would be nice to have another woman around. When Salvatore entered the kitchen he told Pietro he was looking forward to his arrival.

He said Marcello talked about his little brother all of the time, so he felt like he already knew him. He told Pietro to let him know if he needed any help getting adjusted. Pietro thanked Salvatore for his kindness and knew he would be a good friend.

Early the next morning Anna gave Pietro a heavy coat to wear. She said he would also have to get pants made from stronger material and sturdy work boots. She told him he could get these items at the company store and that he would have to get his own tools when the foreman told him what he would be doing. He and Salvatore were walking toward the mine entrance, when Pietro said he had to stop off at the office to see the foreman. Salvatore said he would see him later back at the house.

The foreman looked at the eager Pietro and said, “Ok, you ready to start, eh. Come on I’ll show you Tony Razza, he’ll help you.” He called and motioned to a young man about Pietro’s age. “Hey, Rags!” The young man came running over to the foreman, “Yes, boss, you need someting?”

“This is Pietro Romeo; you show him what to do. He’s a new Nipper.”

The foreman turned to Pietro, “You get paid 11 cents an hour and you work 10 hours a day, I’ll let you know if I need you on the weekends. You’re a trainee, so I’ll be watching you. I no like ‘slackers’. *Capisci?* Peter looked at Tony, who nodded his head yes.

“*Si, io capisco! Grazie, Signore, you no be sorry.*” Pietro was so happy and confident he would show this boss that all little guys are not all talk.

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“O.K. Less go! Com’ on Pete, I show you.” Tony Razza held out his coal dust covered hand. “Dey call me ‘Rags’. Dey have da name for everyone.”

“Pete?” Questioned Pietro. “And what is da ‘slacker’?”

“Pete issa you American name an’ a ‘slacker’ issa lazy guy, alla time no work hard. OK?”

“OK. Do I buy da tools?”

“Nah, we do da pick up work, we help da guys in da mine.”

Peter nodded his head as they headed for a work site and he was thinking how lucky he was to have a job making 11 cents an hour. *Madonna*, he thought, that is so much more than I could make in Italy; I am happy to be in America.

That day Pietro Romeo started working at a coal mining company in Pennsylvania.

Chapter Eight

While Teresa was salting fish with Rosa, she noticed her mother-in-law to be very agitated. “Mama Rosa, wassa wrong?”

“*Niente!*” she waved her hand, but kept shaking her head.

“Mama Rosa, talka to me, wassa wrong?”

Rosa looked up with tears in her eyes. She was so distraught, she clenched her fist tightly against her mouth and she was trying to hold back the tears, then she said, “Itsa Lena”.

“Wassa wrong, she sick?”

“No, she no sick.” Rosa hesitated, then looked at Teresa and whispered, “She see a man inna village.”

“No! She no do dat?”

“*Si*, she sees *Signore* Longo. You know da man; his wife she die a while ago.”

“*Si*, I know, but he is old! Why you say Lena see him?”

“He no so old as Papa. I talka to his sister, Lucia, when I go buy da salt an’ she tella me. Lucia she issa nice girl.”

Rosa proceeded to tell Teresa about the conversation she had with Lucia Longo. Rosa was disgusted and did not know what to do. She thanked Lucia for telling her and said she would discuss it with Marco.

“You talka to Lena?” Teresa asked.

“No, I talka to Papa first. He know what to do.”

When the men came home Rosa stopped Marco outside the house and said she needed to talk to him. She relayed everything she learned from Lucia Longo. She started to cry, “What we do, Marco? We take her to our house when Francesco go to Australia. She was always a good girl, but she has no money, no family, no place to stay. What we do?”

Marco had always been a gentle, forgiving man, but this he could not tolerate. Lena had brought shame on his home. “*Cristo!* Who knows dis?”

“I tella Teresa, but inna village?” she shrugged, extended her hands out and shook her head.

Marco started toward the house and called Lena to come out. “Lena, *vieni qui!*”

Lena was a small, timid young woman. She was always quiet around the family and especially around Francesco. He would always tell her to sit and be quiet. Even when the entire family was together, she would always stay in the background and not offer any opinions or join in any conversations. She would only answer simple questions with a ‘yes’ or ‘no’, looking at Francesco for approval. She and Francesco had been married five years when he left; they had no children. Now he had been gone for more than two years without any word. He promised to send money; he did not. He promised to bring Lena to Australia with him; he did not. She felt abandoned.

Lena came out of the house, wiping her hands on her apron. “*Si, Papa?*”

“What you do with *Signore Longo?*” He demanded, his voice stern, his gaze straight into her eyes.

“Oh, *Mama mia*” her eyes opened wide. “*Niente!* How you know? It issa nothing! He verry nice to me. We just friends! He say I look pretty an’ wanna talka to me.” She turned away and lifted her apron to hide her face, she couldn’t tell him what she had really done.

“Just friends?” He grabbed her wrist, pulled her apron away from her face and made her face him, “Den why you hide? What you do? Tell me!” Marco started shaking her and raising his voice, causing everyone to come out of the house.

“What is it? Wassa wrong?” Marcello called out.

“Go! Go back inna house” Rosa said. “Papa needs to talka to Lena.”

“Why she cry? Wassa wrong? You hear something from Francesco?”

“Itsa nothing about Francesco” Teresa said as she pulled on her husband’s arm and took Maria’s hand leading them back into the house. They were in shock when Teresa explained what had happened.

“No, I no believe it. Lena is good, quiet woman, she no do dat.” Marcello was defending his sister-in-law.

Teresa told them everything she learned from Rosa, that *Signore Longo* was being very nice to Lena, talking to her, complimenting her, seducing her. He would bring her to his house then as she was leaving he would give her money; money she had been hiding. Marcello and Maria were at a loss for words.

“You take a da money from him? What he pay you for? What?! You *puttana!* Get out! You no family no more! You make da shame on Francesco, on dis family. *Puttana*”

di Diavolo!” Marco yelled at her, his face flushed with rage. “Get out! Longo give a you da money? Go to him! Go!”

Marco walked into the house cussing, as he gathered some of Lena’s things and threw them out the door. Marcello and Maria had never seen Marco so angry. They could hear Lena pleading and wailing, “Ima sorry, Papa. I so alone an’ I no hear from Francesco. What to think? I know *niente*; no *lettera*, no money! I have a to take care a myself!”

“You Francesco’s wife, you wait for him, you wait to get da *lettera* from him. You wanna take care a yourself? Good! Go take care a yourself an’ no call me Papa no more. Go!” Marco said as he continued to throw her few things out, “We take a you in da house an’ make you like our daughter an’ you do dis to us? Why? We no treat you good?” Marco asked as he looked into her face.

Lena grabbed Rosa, “You always good! Mama Rosa, please talk to Papa. Ima so sorry, so ashamed. Please forgive me.” Her face showing such grief as the tears streamed down her face.

“You no think about da shame before. We have a no shame onna dis house before.” Rosa shook her head and her finger in disgust. “I say with Papa, you go away!”

“Mama, Papa, No!” Marcello shouted at them. “Dis is Francesco’s fault. He no send da *lettera* or da money. What Lena to think? If she know Francesco wan’ her, she no do dis! Some of da men go away an’ da wife dey no see dem no more. Da wife alone forever!”

“But if she talk a to us we help her, we give her da strength. We know it no easy. But, No! She fall in da hell she make for herself.” Rosa answered back to her son.

“I no wanna hear her name or speak no more. She is *morte* to me!” Marco slammed his hand on the table wanting to end the conversation.

Lena sat on the ground outside the house, wailing and rocking back and forth, “Oh, *Dio!* What I do? Please forgive me. Ima so sorry. Please, *compassione!*” She kept her apron covering her face trying to hide the shame. Trying to hide from all the unhappiness she caused.

Maria approached her father, “Papa, please, you always a verry good, gentle man. Always forgive! Always show *compassione*. Look inna you heart, forgive Lena? Yes, we alla say dat what she do was wrong. But it is Francesco you be angry to, no Lena! She verry, verry unhappy or she no do dis!”

Marco looked at his daughter with softer eyes, “Yes, Francesco do dis. He no show he care for his wife. He no think about her. He no show responsibility or respect. But, I can no have her stay here. Tell her go to da convent, stay with da nuns. I think on dis.”

Again, Marcello spoke up confronting his father, “No, Papa. She is of dis family, Teresa an’ me we take her to our house.”

Rosa shook her head, “Marco, it is true what Marcello say, she is of dis family. Marcello and Teresa dey no have a da room for her. Let her come back in da house, she stay in da room we give to her. I keep her away from you.”

Marco walked back and forth, from one side of the kitchen to the other, wringing his hands; considering what everyone had to say. Then he turned to his family, “*Si!* Dis is on Francesco an’ since he can no go see that *bastardo* Longo, Ima go! Dat man he no good. I talk a to him, make him stay away from Lena.”

He went outside, took Lena by the arm and lifted her up, “Lena give a da money to me Longo give to you.” She went through her things strewn all over the ground, gathered the bills together and gave them to Marco. “Dis is alla da money?” he asked.

“*Si*, alla da money. I wan’ no more dis dirty money!” Lena looked at Marco with sorrowful eyes as she tried to rub her hands clean on her apron.

“I com’ back soon, we talk den. Go! Go inside with Mama.” Marco quickly turned and started for the village.

“Papa, Ima go with you,” Marcello said running to catch up with his father.

Marco and Marcello walked with very determined strides to the village. “Dat man is a *stronzo*,” Marco said to his son as they walked, “when his wife she was sick and before she die he always look at da young girls an’ da young women. Alla da men of da village dey know him.” He pointed to his eyes. “Dey see, dey know he no good. But no one do nothing! Ima go now, Ima do something!”

When they approached *Signore* Longo’s house, Marco pounded on the door. Lucia opened the door, smiled at the Romeos but when she saw their faces, her smile faded. Lucia was a very kind young woman, “*Buon giorno, Signore* Romeo, com’ in, com’ in, Marcello.”

“No, we no com’ in dis house. We wanna see you *fratello*.” Marco stated firmly.

Realizing the purpose of the visit, Lucia put her hands to her face and said, “Oh, *mama mia. Si, aspetto*.” She went back into the house and returned with her brother, he greeted the two men without any indication that anything was wrong.

As Marco and Marcello confronted him about the situation, he waved it off as if Lena did not know what she was talking about. He said it was nothing he only spoke to her a few times. When they asked if he gave her any money, he denied that he had. At this point, Marco threw the stack of bills in his face, “den where dis money come from?”

“I know nothing of dis. The woman issa crazy, she go with lotsa da men.” Longo scowled, watching the money fall to the ground.

Lucia stepped forward, slapped her brother across the face and shouted at him, “You liar! You say to me to leave da house on lotsa times when you bring her here. I see you give da money to her. You bring lotsa da women here even when you wife was sick in da bed, in da next room. *Bastardo!* You no make Lena da liar, she no go with other men, you da liar! You do dis to all da poor women!” She was poking her finger deeply into his chest.

“*Silenzio! Stupida donna*, you betray me, *tuo fratello?*” he shouted at his sister as he pushed her hand away.

”Ima no betray you, I tell da truth. I see for too long what you do an’ I no stay quiet no more. I letta you stay here when you wife was sick an’ she die, because you are my brother an’ I think you need da help. It is *finito!* No more! No more! Mama an’ Papa dey leave dis house to me. Now you get out!”

Listening to this exchange, Marco then grabbed *Signore* Longo by the shirt and looked directly into his eyes, “You no go near Lena no more. She is da wife of my son, she is family. You leave alone. I see you near her again, you be so sorry, I promise! I tell you to leave da young girls and women in da village alone too, you *diavolo!* I think it be good for you to go away from da village. Dis is no place

for you. We gonna keep da eye on you! Alla da village, gonna keep da eye on you. Marcello an' me we make sure!" He then pushed Longo back with a fierce shove and walked away.

Signore Longo shouted obscenities at the two men as they walked down the street, while Lucia grabbed her broom and started beating on her brother saying, "Get outta my house, you *bastardo*. Get out!"

When they arrived home, Marco called Lena from her room. "*Signore* Longo he no com' to you no more an' you no go to him. *Capisci?*"

"*Si, Papa, si. Benedicia.*" She fell to her knees, grabbed his hand and kissed it. "*Io capisco! Grazia Dio! Grazia Papa!*" She looked up at her father-in-law with a look of remorse and gratitude.

Marco raised her to her feet, "I tell you to stay in dis house with da family. We no talk again, but when Francesco com' back, you tell him da truth. *Capisci?* I make him to understand! He need to know his responsibility. He must show you da respect you deserve, you are his wife."

"*Si*, I understand. I will do it. I promise." Rosa put her arm around her, hugged her and walked her into the other room. Lena was so happy; she would never bring shame on the family again.

Chapter Nine

Two months after their wedding, Marcello told Teresa that he thought they should plan their trip to America. He felt it was time to go back to his job at the mines and now that Pietro was there he would find a house for all of them. “Ima ready. When we go?”

I talk to Papa, I need more money. If we fish for da whitefish, we make da *baccala*, it bring more money when we sell it in Locri. If Papa say yes, we go in *sei mesi*, six months.”

“Six months is no so long, but das in February. Is it safe to sail den? Teresa asked.

“*Si*, it be hard, but I protect you, *Cara mia*. It no so bad.”

“I trust you, Marcello, it is good an’ I help to make da money. I see you Mama how she make da *baccala*. I can do it. I will do it with Mama Rosa.”

“*Bene, bene*. Das good, we all work together. You know” he put his hands on her shoulders to face her, “I make da promise to you an’ to you Papa I wan’ him to see Ima good husband. I keep da promise.”

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Marcello and his father fished for whitefish over the next few weeks; bringing their catch to Rosa and Teresa to cure and preserve. They, along with Maria and Lena finely cleaned the fish, throwing the scraps to the cats that were sniffing around under the work tables, coating the fish with salt and hanging them on poles to dry in the sun.

Marcello was so pleased to see how well his plan was working. They were making money by selling the *baccala*.

“Ah, alla my little workers together.” He teased, putting his arm around his wife’s shoulder.

“Yes, *va bene*,” Rosa said turning to Teresa. “Teresa, go talk a to Marcello.”

“*Cosa?* What is it?” He looked at his wife with concern. “You sick? What is it?”

“Why you always think someone issa sick? No, Ima no sick, but I no go with you to America.” She said as she stepped away from where she was working, wiping her hands on a damp towel.

“Why? Why you no wanna go, you wanna stay here?”

“Oh, no!” she emphasized. “I wanna go verry much, but,” she patted her belly “we havea baby coming.”

“A *bambino*?!” He wrapped his arms around his wife and lifted her in an embrace. “When? How?”

“How? *Come*?” Rosa repeated laughing and waving her hand, “when you put da *pantaloni* on da bed, *stupido*, dat is how!”

Marcello laughed back at his mother, “*Si*, Mama, I know how. I know! But, when, Teresa? When da baby come?”

“In March, inna spring time. I stay here to have da baby, den I go to America”.

“Den I change da plans. I go after da baby come.”

“No! No do dat! You go now, getta da job an’ make da money for me to come.”

“He looked at his wife, “I wanna be here to see our baby. I no wanna leave you.”

Teresa lifted up on her toes and kissed Marcello’s cheek, “You a good man, Marcello an’ I love you verry much, but you must do dis. We have plenty money for you to go

now. It be better for you to go an' make money for me to come."

"No, I no wanna you to stay alone."

"What you say!" She said raising her voice and waving her hands at him. "Ima no alone; I have my family, your family an' Maria she stay with me." Then she stopped abruptly, thinking. "Oh. . .but, *aspetto* . . . I have da good idea," she said with a twinkle in her eye, holding up her hand to her husband's mouth to stop him from saying anything. "Giovanni, my brother, he wanna talk to you Papa to marry Maria."

"Das good, das verry good! Maria she make da eyes with Giovanni for da long time."

"If Maria an' Giovanni they marry, den they com' with me to America. Giovanni talk alla time with Papa, he wanna go, he wanna go. Papa he help Giovanni. Go, talka to my brother, he listen to you. What you think?"

"Ima like it. Ima think you a verry smart wife! Yes, I talk to Giovanni. I tella him how good to be married to da smart woman an' Maria she issa smart too!" He smiled at his wife, patted her belly, gave her a kiss and said, "Now I go tella Papa. Ima gonna be a Papa too! And, we gonna go to America!"

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Giovanni was very receptive to Marcello's suggestions. This was a very good plan for everyone involved as far as he was concerned.

"I wanna go to America, but I wanna marry Maria first. You think you Papa gonna say 'yes'?" he asked Marcello.

"*Si*, Papa he think it good too. He like you an' he see you an' Maria make da eyes with each other. It be no surprise to him. He no like about Maria go to America, but we talk

to him, tell him we all together an' take care together. Den I think he say 'yes'."

Marco was indeed happy when Giovanni talked to him about his intentions to marry Maria. He always thought they were a good match. He asked if they would stay in Italy and that was when Giovanni told him of his plans to bring Maria to America and they would all sail together when Teresa and the baby were able to travel.

Giovanni explained that his father was giving him money that he had saved. He jokingly told his son he was making an investment in him, since Marcello had painted a picture of prosperity for them; he expected his son to become a very rich man. Giovanni was hesitant to take the money at first, but promised his father that it would be paid back.

He proceeded to tell Marco that with Marcello's help, he would get a job at the mines and make a living for Maria and himself and follow the examples set by Marcello.

Both families were very sad about having so many of their children leave for America at one time, but they knew in their hearts they would have a better life, a better home, more opportunity and advantages than if they stayed in Italy.

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Giovanni and Maria were married in September. Maria broke tradition and wore a lovely white gown to her wedding. All of the young village girls admired how she looked and each made plans in their minds to look just as beautiful at their weddings.

Giovanni found a larger home that had two bedrooms. They wanted Teresa to move in the house with them when Marcello left so she wouldn't be alone. Marcello was happy with this arrangement.

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In October, before leaving Siderno for America, Marcello asked Teresa to have the nuns write progress letters of her pregnancy to send to him in Pennsylvania. He was very sad he was going to miss the birth of their baby but he knew Teresa was right, that it would be better if he went ahead and had everything ready for them. He promised to have someone write letters for him so she would know that he was well and waiting for her.

Marcello decided to sail from Palermo, Sicily, since he would be able to take the train from Locri and it would save several travel days. Two other men from Locri joined him as traveling companions.

The number of passengers sailing to America was reaching its peak in 1908 and the shipping companies were in wars with each other for passengers, so many improvements had been made in the accommodations for the third class passengers. Marcello was very pleased knowing that Teresa and the baby would sail in comfort. He saw family cabins large enough for his wife and baby as well as Giovanni and Maria. The trip across the Mediterranean was beautiful and Marcello enjoyed being on the upper deck breathing in the salt air.

As the trip passed Gibraltar and headed out to sea, Marcello was happy that Teresa was not on this trip. Winter was coming in fast and the seas were showing it. Huge waves pounded the mighty ship tossing it around like a toy. Waves were so huge they rose over the top deck of the ship, everyone was told to stay in their cabins and keep from going out on the slippery decks. They could move around the inside of the ship with caution. The only people seen on deck were the crewmen who were going up and down from the bridge to lower decks. They were holding onto the lifelines that were strung for safety. They were dressed in full rain gear and wearing life vests. With their

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experience, they knew how to time the waves. They would move as quickly as possible between the up and down bobbing of the ship and the washing of the decks by the monster waves.

Most of the passengers stayed in their cabins. Many wouldn't even leave to have their meals, but stewards were available to bring food to the cabins upon request. It was apparent with so many being seasick from the storms, the requests were few.

Marcello and the rest of the passengers were happy as they neared America and the storms abated. It was after all, October and there was cold rain, but the seas were calmer.

With his experience, Marcello was able to clear Ellis Island very quickly. He saw his uncle Antonio Romeo recruiting young men as they exited the gates. Marcello turned away not wanting to see or talk to the uncle he came to despise. He immediately headed for the train station to continue his journey to Pennsylvania.

Chapter Ten

Marcello was at the boarding house waiting for his brother. When Pietro returned from his shift, he removed his miner's hat and coat, shaking off the coal dust and hung them on the peg in the mudroom. As he entered, Marcello looked at his younger brother, totally covered in coal dust, "Ciao, Pietro." He said smiling while shaking his head.

Pietro's eyes flew open when he saw his brother. "Marcello, *fratello mio!*" he shouted in surprise. "You are here." They wrapped their arms around each other and jumped around like little boys. "When a you com'?"

"Today! I go to da office an' getta my job back. I start tomorrow. The boss he tella me you do good. It issa good, no? You an' me, we are here!" The two young men, who loved each other so, were very happy to be together again; even though they were now both covered in coal dust.

After washing up and changing their clothes, they were sitting in the parlor waiting for supper and Pietro started asking questions. He wanted to know all the news from home.

"Well, Ima gonna be a Papa in March." Marcello said proudly.

"Cosa? Why you here? You no stay with Teresa?"

"Teresa is da one who say for me to come here!"

He told Pietro that Giovanni and Maria are married and coming to America with Teresa and the baby in May.

"Giovanni and Maria marry an' com' here? Das good. An' Papa what he say?"

“He an’ Mama happy dey marry, no happy we all go away to America. Dey worry alla time.”

“Now I tell you about Lena.” He relayed the story of what happened to Lena with *Signore* Longo and how their father confronted the man. He said their father forgave Lena and she is still living with their parents.

Shaking his head, Pietro said, “Oh, poor Lena. Dat *bastardo* Longo he no good! An’ Francesco, no *lettera*?”

“No! *Niente!* We hear nothing. Papa, Mama and Lena they think da bad things. You an’ me we send da *lettera* so dey no worry.”

“*Si*, Anna Conte she know da nice Italian lady who read an’ write in English; she write da *lettera* for us. I send Mama an’ Papa some money den too.”

“Das good, dey be happy. Maria she gonna have da nuns read da *lettera*. Papa be proud, you do good, little brother.”

“Pietro, what kine job you do?”

“I work with another *Italiano*, his name is Tony Razza, we calla him ‘Rags’. He’s a good guy, I like him. He can talk some English. Ima learn a little. He show me everything to be a good “Nipper”.

He proceeded to tell Marcello that as a Trainee, he is learning what to do when the time comes that he can go to work down in the mine. He also said he was happy they did not put him with the younger boys, sorting coal. He saw some of them get hurt very badly; with their hands or feet getting caught in the conveyor belts. He thought they were too young to do the work of a man but some of them were the only source of income for their families. Many of the fathers were maimed, killed in the mine or died from

coal dust in their lungs. In some cases the men even deserted their family, leaving the responsibility on the young boys for income.

He said he had been learning a lot from Tony; who wants to be a laborer and go deep in the mine. Tony told him it is very dangerous; there are always chances of cave-ins and gas explosions; but he thought it to be exciting. Pietro said he didn't think being crushed in a cave-in was exciting; he was, however, looking forward to making more money as a laborer.

“*Si*, it is very dangerous an’ I no wanna have something happen to me, I have to think about Teresa an’ the baby. We take care, you an’ me we be careful.”

They were both thinking quietly for a few minutes, then Marcello said, “I wanna fine da house for Teresa when she come. You help me?”

“Sure, we fine nice house.” He put his arm around the shoulder of his brother as they went up to their bedroom, “Ima happy you here, Marcello.”

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The next day as the two young men went to work the Foreman was standing outside of the field office and called, “Hey, Romeo.” Both brothers turned, “Not you Marcello, the little guy.” He waved at him to come to the office. Pietro looked at his brother, held out his hands and shrugged his shoulders.

The Foreman was standing with his arms folded across his chest, “Today you start as a laborer go with your brother,” he motioned, “he will teach you. You show me you know how to work hard, keep your mouth shut and do not cause

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any trouble. Now go to the company store and buy the tools you need, they know what to give you.”

“Thank you, Boss. *Grazia.*” Pietro couldn’t believe how fortunate he was, he would now be earning 18 cents an hour as a laborer plus \$1.50 for every 3 tons of coal he loaded. But now he will be going down to work in the abyss.

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As the day shift was beginning, men stood huddled together, waiting to load onto the “cage” which was a very crude type of elevator used to transport the workers down into the bowels of the mine; it would then lift them out again at the end of their shift. Ten to twelve men would crowd in together keeping their arms in and protected since the cage was almost entirely open with no siding on two sides and only side bars on the other two. Each of the men was wearing a hat with an oil lantern, heavy coats and pants for protection, some used bandannas to cover their nose and mouth from the dust and they carried a covered tin bucket which contained their mid-shift meal. They were heading down for 10 hours of hard, manual labor. There was little machinery available to the miners and they relied on their own brute force, pickaxe, hand drills and explosives to smash lumps of coal out of the wall. It was shoveled into the new electric coal cars that had replaced carts being pulled by donkeys being led by young boys. The donkey carts were slow and at times accidents of overloaded carts would tip over causing deaths, serious injuries and work delays. The new cars were faster and could carry a larger more stable load out of the tunnels to the weighing station and the waiting railroad cars.

At the close of each shift, the cage would again be crowded with men waiting to be lifted up out of the deep hole and

into the fresh air. They would all breathe in deeply the air their lungs ached for; some would start coughing and spitting up black sputum. They would go to their homes, wash the coal dust from their bodies, eat a meal and drink wine, beer or whisky to clear their throats of the dust that still lingered there. When they fell into their beds at night, they would sleep as if they were dead until the next morning when they would start the same routine all over again.

At the end of the week, the men would forget about their aches and pains from their hard work and gather outside the company store to entertain themselves in one way or another; some would pitch pennies. Among the Italians there would be yelling and throwing fingers which meant there was an active game of “*Morra*” going on; the Italian finger game. After dinner, Marcello, Pietro, Salvatore and Tony would get together with a bottle of wine and play an Italian card game called “*briscola*”, laughing, teasing and just enjoying each other. It was their life in America – they lived one day at a time.

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One day *Signora* Conte introduced Pietro and Marcello to Mrs. Anna McCarthy she was a kind, gentle Italian woman who, after coming to America, married Tom McCarthy, the Manager of the company store. She was very well educated and able to read and write both in Italian and English. When the young men asked if she would write letters for them to send to Italy, she was more than happy to help. She also told them she would teach them how to speak English as well as to read and write the language; she said it would be very helpful and more opportunities could open for them. The brothers were very receptive to her suggestion, especially since Pietro joked that Tony was just teaching him dirty, slang words.

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They would spend Sunday afternoons learning to read and write English with Anna. When they received a letter from Italy, she would read it to them and have them try to read it back to her. They were very eager students and were determined to learn how to write their own letters. Anna was amazed at how quickly they were able to learn. She could see these young men were eager and determined to learn everything they could to become Americans one day.

They welcomed news from the family; Marcello especially loved hearing how Teresa's pregnancy was progressing; wishing he could be there with her. Teresa would send word that, Maria and Giovanni were taking very good care of her and they were all anxiously waiting for the baby to be born so they could start their voyage. Marco and Rosa were so happy to hear from them; they said they were well and the money they sent was more than they could ever imagine.

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In one of the letters they learned that Francesco had returned to Italy. He had worked at various jobs for a year then found good paying work on a remote sheep ranch in the Outback of Australia and according to a contract he signed was indentured to remain on the ranch for two years. At the end of the contract, he received his wages and sailed for Italy with the intention of bringing Lena back with him. He loved Australia and wanted to return, but not to the sheep ranch where he previously worked. He was prepared to purchase a share of a cooperative farm, raising sheep and wheat. He and three other men planned to settle with their wives and operate the farm together. He was very positive about this new endeavor.

When Francesco returned, Lena told him of her behavior in his absence, just as her father-in-law had asked her to do.

Francesco was very upset and disgusted and ready to cast her out of his life. He said he wanted nothing to do with a soiled woman who could not wait for him. Marco and Rosa stepped forward, counseled with him telling him it was his actions that caused Lena to feel abandoned. They told him he never treated her with kindness, she thought he didn't want her. He abruptly left the house needing some time to think about everything his parents said. He walked to the beach near his father's boat, fell to the sand and lay there looking at the stars twinkling in the dark sky, thinking back to when he and Lena first married and it was true, he rarely was kind to her. He thought the husband should always be demanding even though the example displayed by his father was to be a gentle, caring man. He thought of Lena and how she always tried to please him and make him happy, considering his feelings before her own. He felt shame and sadness for the way he treated her - why couldn't he be more like his father. What happened to his wife was his fault and he would accept the responsibility.

He went back to the house asked his father and mother for forgiveness then went to Lena and asked her to forgive him; telling her that he would try to be a better, kinder husband. He hesitated trying to form the words then told her he loved her and wanted her with him in Australia. Lena cried happy tears, hearing the words of love that her husband had never said to her; she stepped forward as he wrapped her in an embrace.

They were preparing to sail in February, while it was still summer in Australia. Lena had become pregnant and was so happy and looking forward to a new start in their lives.

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“Dis issa good what Francesco do for Lena. She issa good woman.” Marcello said. “I think they be happy.”

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“*Si*, Francesco issa hard man, but I think dis wassa good lesson. He has da good heart, he be good to her. I think he love her verry much, he just has da hard time to show it.”

“You think we gonna see Francesco again?”

“Ima no think so, Australia is verry far away!”

Chapter Eleven

At the end of March, Marcello received a letter that Teresa had delivered a big, healthy baby boy, which she named Marco Giuseppe, as they agreed before he left. Teresa said she expected him to be a big strong boy by the way he liked to feed from his Mama all the time. She was feeling very well and recovering quickly and looking forward to leaving for America as planned. Marcello was so happy to hear the good news, “Pietro, Ima have a son! A son! Marco Giuseppe Romeo!”

“A son, bravo! Whatta good name, Papa he must be proud. Ima happy for you Marcello. Is Teresa good?”

“*Si*, she say she verry good! Dey com’ soon. Now we go fine da house.”

“I hear dere a big, six room house ready in one month. Da man an’ his family gonna go to Pittsburgh; he no wanna work da mines no more.”

“Six rooms! Teresa and Maria dey gonna love dat. But, how much da rent?”

“*Signora* McCarthy she say da house dat big it rent for about \$15.00 a month. We alla pay; we ask Salvatore and Tony if dey rent da extra room. We can do it. We go to da office to see what dey say.

The six room house was indeed going to be available for \$15.00 a month. They were given the address and a lease to sign. They went to the house to see if they could look around. The man that was living there was a southern Italian and very receptive to let the brothers into the house. The lower floor had a large kitchen fully equipped with

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stove and sink, dining room, living room and a mudroom attached to the back. The upper floor had four double-sized bedrooms and a bathing room at the end of the hall. None of the houses had indoor toilet facilities; an outhouse was located at the far back of the property which was maintained by the company. The coal storage shed was also located at the back of the property. There was room to plant a vegetable garden at the side of the house. Marcello thought how pleased Teresa and Maria would be to live in a fine house like this with running water and electricity.

Marcello and Pietro asked Mrs. McCarthy to look at the lease. They trusted her and knew she would let them know if anything was not as agreed. She told them all the leases with the company were the same and there should be no problem as long as they remained on their jobs; if they left their job or were fired, they would be given 30 days to move. She also told them that the rent would be deducted from their pay, if the two of them signed for the house, then half the rent would be deducted from each paycheck. How they worked out the rent from Salvatore and Tony was up to them personally.

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The house was left in good shape, but Marcello decided he wanted to give the kitchen and bedrooms a fresh coat of paint. Pietro, Marcello, Salvatore and Tony all did their share of the painting and making small repairs and renovations to the house whenever they had time from work. Pietro started a vegetable garden, he thought his sister and sister-in-law would appreciate having a garden to tend and harvest fresh vegetables in the summer.

They found a second-hand furniture store where they were able to purchase beds, a dining table and chairs and a nice

settee set for the living room but they needed a way to pick it up. Tony said, “I ask Mrs. McCarthy maybe we use da company delivery wagon.” She trusted the young men and agreed to allow them to use it.

Pietro decided to do a little bragging and said, “Eh, Marcello, you know I learn to drive da automobile?”

“You drive da automobile? Where you learn?”

Pietro told him about meeting the nice young man in Naples that they befriended before sailing and how he taught Pietro and Guido how to drive his delivery truck. Marcello was envious and wished he could learn to drive.

When da family com’, I gonna meet dem at da Ellis Island, we take da train here to da town. You tink der issa carriage we use to drive dem from da train to da house?”

“*Signora* McCarthy she let us use da wagon, maybe we use that again.”

“No, I wan’ something nice like da *dottore* carriage.”

“You crazy?! The *dottore* carriage! *Mannaggia* you wan’ too much! But, I see what *Signora* McCarthy have to say.” Marcello always left negotiations up to Pietro as he had a way of convincing people to agree to his requests.

Dr. Vincenzo Esposito, had a lovely horse drawn carriage that he prized; he used it to make his house calls throughout the community and beyond. The children admired the carriage and would ask the doctor if they could wash and clean it, which he would agree to then give them each a nickel. They were so pleased with their nickels that they would also brush his horses until their coats shined.

When Mrs. McCarthy asked the doctor if Marcello and Pietro could borrow his carriage when their family arrived,

he listened to the request with humor. "You wan' me to let two young men I don' even know to borrow my carriage?"

He was smiling at the very kind woman, waiting to hear what she had to say. He knew she wouldn't ask if she thought the men wouldn't be responsible.

"You will get to know da family soon, especially since dey have a new baby. Dey will need your services before long. Dey are two verry good men. Dey will be very careful with your carriage. I let dem use da store wagon, dey always bring it back cleaner den before."

Dr. Esposito had a soft spot in his heart for Mrs. McCarthy, so he looked at her, nodded his head and said, "OK, OK, I think about it, as long as it is only from da train station. I never know when I have to go when someone needs da doctor. Have dem com' to see me an' I talka to dem about it."

When Anna said Dr. Esposito would consider letting them use his fine carriage, they were ecstatic. "He has to like you," she cautioned shaking a finger. "So be nice to him, turn on your smiling faces." She joked and smiled at the two young men.

The doctor immediately liked Marcello and Pietro. "I see you com' from a good family, you look like verry responsible young men. So, you wanna impress you wife an' family. *Io capisco!* I let you use my carriage, but you promise to bring you family to me when dey sick, and let me see dat new baby." The two brothers happily shook hands with the kindly doctor in agreement.

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Marcello asked for time off work to go meet his wife and sister at Ellis Island. He was granted a couple of days but

had to take them off without pay. The company was not in the habit of giving paid days off. Pietro told his brother not to worry he had money to help out, if he needed it.

When the letter arrived telling Marcello of the arrival date, he made sure everything was ready at the house then left for New York. He rode the wagon from the mining town to the train station. When he returned with Teresa, Maria and Giovanni, Pietro would meet them at the train station with the carriage.

The arrival day was very eventful, Marcello embraced and kissed his wife and proudly took his new born son into his arms, hugging and kissing him. "*Figlio mio!*" He embraced his sister and shook hands with Giovanni. It was good to have his family with him. Marcello led them away from the crowded gate area of Ellis Island to the ferry which brought them into the city, and then he took them to the train station.

Teresa, Maria and Giovanni told Marcello about the exciting trip across the Atlantic Ocean. They said the cabin was very comfortable and everyone on the ship was very kind and helpful, especially when they saw she had a newborn baby. The weather cooperated so they did not have to worry about any heavy storms or sickness. Giovanni teased Maria stating that she didn't even get sick, considering her condition. Marcello said, "*Cosa? You gonna have a bambino, Maria?*"

"*Si, we gonna have da American baby inna quattro mesi. Four months.*"

"Wonderful, little Marco will have a *cugino!*"

They told Marcello how impressed they were to see such modern machinery as they saw in Palermo and now even much more in New York. They were watching the various

sights out the train windows that were totally new to them and they were overwhelmed. “This is America, our new home” Teresa said with Maria and Giovanni agreeing.

As they stepped from the train, Pietro ran up to the family embracing and greeting each and every one, then took his new nephew into his arms and kissed him, “little Marco Giuseppe, Ima your *zio*, *Zio* Pietro! Com’, we go to da house.” He handed the baby back to Teresa and as he turned to lead them to the carriage Marcello stopped him. “Eh, Pietro, you have one nephew an’ you gonna be *zio* again”. Marcello said nodding to Maria.

“Maria, dis issa good. We alla one big *famiglia!*” He hugged his sister again.

Pietro picked up Teresa’s valise and Marcello took her arm and led the family along the walkway and stopped in front of the carriage; Teresa, Maria and Giovanni stood in awe at the beautiful carriage totally covered with streamers. Marcello told them the kind doctor from town let them use the carriage; so they had to be very careful with it. After placing their bags into the cargo holder on the rear of the carriage, Marcello helped Teresa and the baby into the front passenger side, Maria, Giovanni and Pietro fit into the rear seat. Everyone laughed and the women squealed with delight. Children saw the decorated carriage and ran along side, waving and yelling.

They arrived at their new home and the two women looked up at the two story building in awe; were they really going to live here? Marcello helped them out of the carriage while Pietro and Giovanni gathered the bags and carried them into the house, following Teresa and Maria. With their mouths open in amazement, Marcello showed his wife and sister some of the conveniences like the light switch and the potbelly stove in the parlor; Pietro showed them the

running water in the kitchen sink. Anna McCarthy and Anna Conte were in the kitchen to greet them with a large bowl of pasta with meat sauce, bread and cheese; they also brought many useful items to the home to make it comfortable. Marcello took Teresa upstairs, pointed out the bathroom and the four bedrooms. When he showed her their bedroom she cried happy tears when she saw the bed with an embroidered spread, which had been a welcome gift from the two Annas, and the baby bed next to it. Yes, she was going to be very happy here; just as Marcello had promised.

“I promise you on our wedding night dat you have a nice house like dis. You like?”

“*Si, cara mio*, I like it verry much.” She looked at him through her tears of happiness. “Alla people dey so nice. America issa good place to live.” The smile on her face spoke volumes and Marcello was pleased.

“I bring da carriage back to *Dottore* Esposito.” Pietro called as he headed out the door. “I no wan’ him to think we gonna keep it.”