

The Betrothed.

(Continued from Page 3.)

handbag of manners. It seems one of the ladies raised a monocle, went behind a statue 'looking,' as she bluntly said, 'for the contrivance that made it wink and speak,'—never dreaming that the child with the foreign-looking governess understood English. On leaving the church she told mademoiselle that she would have liked to box the creature's ears, only they were so large and mulish. Do not think my pet is spoiled or bold; on the contrary, she is the most docile and obedient child possible.

"There is quite an English colony here at present. Francesca does not favor this, 'because,' she says, 'they ridicule the Bambino she loves so much.' Elizabeth advises me to keep my Protestantism in the background, else this charming little enthusiast will be very shy and reticent with me. We are now very fast friends."

Messina, December 23, 1908. "Dearest Sister:—By this time you will have received my letter and little packages, mailed on the fifteenth in due time to wish you the season's joys. Christmas here is to be quite merry. Theatre parties, pantomimes, dinner on the twenty-seventh at the American Consulate; but I promise you I shall observe another and more fitting Christmas—one more in keeping with the Christian spirit.

"Even now I am busy helping Francesca, all-intent on the crib she is preparing for the Bambino. I am decorating the scroll on which her brother Tomie, printed 'Venite Adoremus,' and I heard her tell her governess this morning that I was to occupy the prie-dieu next to hers at the midnight Mass. So there, dear Sister, is not this reassuring?"

"Messina, Christmas Eve, 1908. "Dearest, kindest of Sisters:—What noble amends for your long absence! Nothing less for a Xmas box than your own dear self in photo! My gratitude is beyond words and extends to the little pupils who 'snapped' you for me.

"It is not for myself I want your picture—you are always vivid in my memory, radiant, and happy as you look last summer—but friends here ask so many questions about your dress and customs—indeed you and the good Sisters—at St. Mary's would be highly amused at the queries that are made concerning you in general, and I, because of my relationship with you (let me claim it), am considered an authority on convents and their inmates. Why even Elizabeth asked if you were not old and widowed and (pardon me) fitted, before you shut yourself up, or rather buried yourself alive! N.w. don't think my cousin narrow or bigoted; she is not. In fact she is quite convinced of the propriety of leaving Francesca in the 'trinité' in Rome, when they travel next year. The Paola girls, for several generations past, have been prepared for first communion in this Convent of the Sacred Heart.

"Strange to say, Francesca looks forward to it with the greatest delight. For my part, were I her mother, I wouldn't let her go—she might want to stay there. The dear child grows more charming every day. So clever and winsome! This morning she asked me for your address; she wishes to thank you herself, for the pretty picture of the Madonna.

"Dear Bert!—of course you will have the pleasure of a visit from him during the holidays, whilst I—but I must not complain. It had been arranged that I was to return to Genoa on the twenty-seventh, but as there is to be a grand reception here on the twenty-eighth, given, as my cousin's distinguished husband declares, in my honor, the voyage is postponed until the third of January. So I am to meet all the notables of the Island—American, British and Messinians.

"Antonio sent pressing invitations to Genoa, but aunt does not want to leave home at this season and mother got enough of the sea. However, she is well and enjoying to its full the life, intellectual and social, of Genoa.

Leaves from Miss Seaton's Diary—The earthquake and its aftermath: "Mother! Bert! I may never see you again. I must try to leave you a few lines of farewell! You will be told by survivors, if there be any (the shocks continue every few hours) of the horrors of this day, December twenty-eighth. Gratitude to Providence. We have been dazed—how long I do not know. Tomorrow I will—

"Tomorrow" is here. I must write the date, lest we lose track. It is the twenty-ninth and it is December, thank God!

the house, fearlessly ascended the creviced stairs, and brought out her opera cloaks. It was only then we realized we wore nothing but our night robes. We sat on the stone steps of the terrace. How long? I cannot say.

"The next break in the dumb and fearful agony was when Tomie and Francesca appeared, climbing the wall at the back of the garden, followed by a line of almost naked children. The little one she held by the hand, was covered with blood. She led her over to me, caught my arm, and pointed to the dust-be-grimed face around. The mute appeal of misery was a clarion call to duty!

"By this time, Elizabeth was alert. Tomie brought out some water he found in the kitchen, we washed the blood from the poor children's wounds, and their crying ceased.

"Looking to the left of us, we beheld Antonio, pick-axe in hand, trying to release from the debris of his fallen home our neighbor, the Duke—I cannot recall his name. Elizabeth shrieked—she saw some loose masonry tottering over her husband's head. She ran to the spot and helped the men.

"After some hours, it was decided by Antonio and Senator Deprato, whose palace is in ruins, that we might re-enter the house, since it had withstood the first tremendous shocks when all around had fallen. Antonio said something to his wife, she bowed her head and her tears fell on his shoulder. He spoke to her of what God demanded of them, having spared them and their household amidst the awful wreck and ruin.

"Elizabeth found her keys, opened the wardrobe of the store-room, and we piled sheets and linen in Antonio's outstretched arms. The Senator and several nobles loaded themselves with all sorts of necessities for the wounded—then left us. The day was far spent and we had not broken our fast, nor had we thought of it, but Francesca remembered. While we were procuring the provisions for the relief corps, she had led her youthful regiment to the dining-room, and with the aid of the older and uninjured ones, had brought from below cakes, fruit and confectionery. She called to us to come to her. What a sight met our dulled and heavy eyes! The ball was to be that evening. The decorations had been completed the night before, save for the cut flowers which were to come from the conservatory at the villa, but now God's choicest flowers, human souls, were in the places of honor.

"Francesca pressed us, we tried to please her. 'Mother, mother,' came Tomie's voice from the street. We hastened to open the door. Men were waiting there, with stretchers, bearing the dying and wounded rescued by Antonio and the other noblemen. We let them in.

"December 30—Last evening we sheltered about sixty persons, brought to us by the relief corps. What prodigies of charity these men are performing! The soldiers are helping now, too. We were about to succumb until our little angel, Francesca, appeared with five of her friends, cheery, heroic Little Sisters of the Poor whose convent is in a heap of ruins. They brought with them ten of their old men whom they succeeded in rescuing with their own hands, from the debris. The only sustenance they had had since the awful morning was some goats' milk given them by a kind old man. After partaking of some refreshments they started in to help us. What nurses these good Sisters are! The identity of our first day's little charges has been discovered. They are children from an orphan asylum founded by Antonio's father. The Archbishop came here yesterday and had them sent to a Refuge in Catania.

"December 31—The captain of one of the vessels in port, a friend of Senator Deprato, has promised to take Elizabeth and the children to Genoa. They insist, all of them, on my going, too. But I cannot—I will not leave the stricken city—besides, somehow, I seem the official head of this abode of misery. Antonio comes in for a little food and rest at night. How our hearts leap to see him. His strength, like Sir Galahad's, 'is as the strength of ten,' because he is so good! But he is needed elsewhere; he says we are about the best off in poor Messina, which he calls a 'burning cemetery,' and will not allow us outside our own precincts.

"New Year's Day—I have learned from many of my sufferers to say 'Deo Gratias!' At first I thought it strange, but now it is music to my heart! The Archbishop said Mass here this morning. The cathedral is a mountainous heap of wreckage; however, the Sacrament, they tell me, was saved. The priests and brothers are indefatigable. I like the Archbishop to come here. He is so kind and capable, directing the incredible zeal of Antonio and his friends.

used to visit. In her room and that of her governess adjoining, there are fifteen poor women on cots procured from the ships.

"Elizabeth and the Duchess di Printini gave out the supplies of food, clothes and medicine sent from Rome and Milan, to the half-naked, starving creatures, who receive the slightest article as a gift from heaven.

"We heard to-day that conditions are appalling in Catania and other immune towns or the hills, whither thousands and thousands of refugees have fled. They are even in greater need of food than we. My God! 'Thy kingdom come! Thy will be done!' The dear Archbishop met me yesterday, and bade me take this gem from his setting in the Lord's Prayer. It is short and easy to say. I have the habit now of getting his blessing. How kind he has been to me! I spoke to him of mother and Bert, and he it was who sent the telegram via Palermo that satisfied my dear ones.

"January 3—A gleam through the gloom to-day! Mr. Bayard Cutting Vice-Consul at Milan, and Representative of the American Red Cross, was brought to us. I was too busy receiving fresh relays of the rescued all day yesterday to notice the welcome arrival of the well-laden steamer 'North America.' Thank God it came. The aid of the Red Cross nurses here, with few exceptions, are physical wrecks. Myself—I cannot understand!

"With Tomie and Francesca, I went to-day to the newly arrived steamer for a supply of olive oil and medicine. It is the first time since the earthquake that I was on the Marina. Some of the terrible and revolting details of the disaster could be here partially realized. The dazed but brave Messinians were still working at the excavations. We had to defile among rows of black and mutilated corpses awaiting the row-boats that were to take them for burial out into the sea! Even to these the saintly child had something to say. She clutched Tomie's arm and bid him repeat some words of peace in soft Italian. I, too, have begun to pray for the dead, prompted by my own helplessness in the sight of such utter desolation!

"January 4—What have I not learned standing beside the cots, while the priests performed their noble ministry! Could I ever have imagined such scenes? Could I ever dream of such things—happiness and peace? But I have seen it—I have seen it each hour. Good God! I am face to face with another life—a nobler one—the supernatural! Mother! Bert! Sister Clara! are you praying for me?

"This afternoon the Senator came to say the Marchesa and children are to be ready to-morrow, when the frigate is to sail. Elizabeth is annoyed with me. She asks how can she meet my mother, who clamors for me! Francesca begs to be let stay with me. But it would be rashness. The child, despite her bravery, is ready to collapse. She sleeps on the floor—nothing could induce her to use a cot while so many are in need and suffering.

"January 5—The parting is over. I only 'broke down' when Francesca whispered, 'I shall ask the good God to send Signor Bert to you.' Poor Antonio! I promised Elizabeth to look after him, and to go with him to Genoa when extra help comes from Rome.

"The dear Archbishop has sent his niece and another religious to remain here with me. New courage has been infused by the sight of the beneficent Red Cross.

"Sister Clara's little medal never leaves my neck. It has been to me more than the insignia of all the world's monarchs! I clasp it frequently—many dying lips have kissed it—and say the prayer as Sister requested.

"Note must be made of a marvel we heard of to-day. A little chap was rescued at dawn from a mass of debris. The roof of the house had fallen in such a way as to form a protecting angle. Others have been released from their living tombs but they are victims of utter horror and starvation; nothing can save them; this child is happy and healthy after his nine days' burial! The doctors questioned him—he says his mother, long since dead, brought him oranges each day! His physical condition bears testimony to some such prodigy. O my heavenly Mother, what mysterious fruit do you not bring to me!

"January 6—Via wireless, we learn our darling Francesca has collapsed, and pneumonia is feared. The poor father! God comfort him and all of us. It is well she went away in time. Everything will be done for her now; here, without a miracle, it would be impossible for her to recover. The entire 'hospital' is praying that her sweet, precious life may be spared.

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