

# ANITA

By ALICE JONES

Illustrated by Arthur Heming

WHEN Eustace Hartley decided to study architecture his father freely expressed his disgust.

"Well, it's your own affair if you choose to drudge all your life planning fine houses for other folks instead of living in them yourself. I won't talk any stuff about cutting you off with a shilling, for I wouldn't be such a fool. Tom will take your place in the business and be the rich man you might have been. I'll do my best to push you in the way you've chosen, only, see here, now," and the big fore-finger was shaken in the fashion that inspired wholesome awe in his surroundings, "if you're going in for being artistic and gen'rally out of the common, fooling round over in Europe, I expect you to do it well. You're not bad-looking and the least you can do is to help the family along with a fashionable marriage, that will make it nice for the girls when they're over there. A lady of title wouldn't sound badly out here where such things aren't so common, but mind, she's got to have money or something."

Eustace laughed, but he knew his father was in earnest. Helping the family along was as much old John Hartley's creed as it was the Rothschilds', and it seemed to have done its share in making him the lumber king of the great lakes. Eustace was the only one of his children who ventured to take his own way with him, generally with success.

When he took it now and started for a year's study in Italy it was with a letter of credit for a good round sum in his pocket and a somewhat grudging paternal blessing. He went straight to Sienna, reaching there as the first flush of spring was touching the Tuscan hills, clothing with rosy mantles the slim almond trees and starring the meadows with daffodils and violets.

In the grim, medieval streets, he entered on his heritage of the past and began an orgy of architecture, the result of which was sketch-books full of careful drawings of loggias and towers, and portfolios of dainty water-colours of faded frescoes in dim old churches and above city gates. At the end of three months there was another result in his engagement and speedy marriage to Anita Terzani, the stary-eyed daughter of the little widow who had let him a room in her apartment, high up in one angle of an old palazzo, shaken and cracked by more than one earthquake. Anita and her mother eked out their minute income by letting this room and by toiling all the long spring days at lace and embroidery of the immemorial Sienna designs.

The girl had been taught drawing in the high school and was clever at it in her small way.

Eustace was soon used to glimpses of Anita's black head bent over her frame, but always readily raised in answer to his occasional small demands.

At such times he would note that the curve of oval face was of just the creamy texture of an opening magnolia flower, and would wonder if ever, through the centuries, the dark old palazzo had sheltered a lovelier blossom.

But though he had grown familiar with the sight of her, the first chance he had of really talking to her was one day when Anita had gone to make a careful drawing of the embroidered pillow under the arm of the noble white clad figure of Peace on a frescoed wall in the Palazzo Publico, the pride of Sienna for five hundred years.

Eustace, intent on a careful drawing of the neighbouring chapel arches, spied her through the open doorway and was straightway drawn by the agelong magnet to her side.

Anita's clever fingers seemed less skilful than usual. Perhaps they were a bit tremulous, for in the land of Romeo and Juliet young hearts still catch fire quickly. At any rate, Eustace, laughing at her in the gentlest fashion, took her pencil and note-book and finished the design. Was it to be wondered at, after this, that putting his wits to work he should find good ideas for embroidery patterns on the painted covers of the medieval tax books, the famous Biccherna of the quiet archives galleries, and that he used some magic to persuade the old soldier and enthusiast who guards them to break all rules and leave they two alone while he showed round the parties of tourists.

WELL, it was all the old story and had the old ending, the blissful ending of a June morning, when the roses were blooming and the fresh vine leaves glowed like emeralds in the valleys as Eustace and his bride set off in a hired motor for their honeymoon in the Tuscan hill country. The happy bridegroom had no thought for economy just now, though behind his happiness lay the doubts, or rather the unpleasant certainty as to his father's reception of the news that he had married his landlady's daughter, the little embroidery girl, and speculations as to what would happen when his letter of credit should wane like the moon. As a matter of fact it was already well started on that process.

He had gone through some recent wrestlings with his conscience as to the possibility of describing his shabby little mother-in-law as the Contessa Terzani, and although nothing could make Anita daintier and sweeter than she was, yet the Contessina Anita would certainly sound better to his father and might bring another letter of credit.

But John Hartley had a way of getting at the true facts of things, remembering which, his son decided on the thorny path of truth. These misgivings were well tucked away in the mental background, where we keep such things, as they sped



The stary-eyed daughter of the little widow.

along the red roads past waving wheat and corn, up among the chestnut and oak woods and down again into valleys by slow winding streams, where the great, white oxen, with spreading horns, toiled along the roads.

They came to a region where the woods pressed lower down the hills and a silence seemed to possess the land. Here there were no field toilers with songs, only a solitary shepherd leading his flock among the arbutus bushes and the flowering lavender that grew among the rocks.

At the wayside inn, where they lunched, the landlord welcomed their advent with the joy of a shipwrecked mariner.

"The signori no doubt go to visit the Castello of the Four Towers? The signori never heard of it? Ah, what a wonder! Why, it was the greatest stronghold of the Panini, and in the wicked old days our grandfathers say they have heard that murder was commoner there than saying your prayers. There is a rich man from Milan, he makes soap for all the world, they say—has bought it now, and he has polished it up till it is like a bride on her wedding-day. But he cannot polish up the souls of the poor Christianis who died in the dungeons or were hung on the towers, and who they say on winter nights—but who knows?" and he crossed himself hastily, before he remembered what an old-fashioned thing it was to do. "At any rate, it is a grand place to see in the blessed sunlight, and old Guiseppe, who served the last of the family, is there still, and will rejoice to show you the castello for a little, little gift, a mere nothing to signori in automobiles."

"LET'S hurry up lunch and get off at once," said Eustace, his professional soul afire, but his little bride wore a disturbed air.

"It sounds like a wicked place, where men were killed," she protested.

"Most likely not half so many as in your Sienna streets and houses," her husband retorted. "Why, that dear old Palazzo Publico that we both love has seen dozens flung out of the windows to be massacred in the street below."

"Ah, but why think of those bad old things!"

"We won't think of them, carissima, if you don't want to, but we'll go and have a look at this Quattro Torre, and if any ghosts show up, we'll run away. Ghosts can't follow motors."

It was worth saying such things to have her slip her soft little hand, the hand that had toiled so bravely, into his, when the landlord's back was turned, and to see her raise her eyebrows in the whimsically appealing fashion he loved.

The stillness of noontide still brooded over the country when the motor was speeding into a region that grew ever wilder and more solitary.

The hills narrowed into a gorge overhung by reddish-brown crags and dark woods of gnarled evergreen oak and ilex. High above, the strip of sky was veiled by threatening masses of cloud, and already a distant thunder growl sounded on the heaviness of the still air.

"Well, if he calls this a good road!" Eustace muttered.

"Ah, caro, let us turn back!" Anita pleaded, nestling closer to him.

"Can't be done," was his cheerful answer.

"There's no room to turn here, so we've got to see (Concluded on page 27.)"



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