

and to engage in a small fruit business in a large American city. It was in Pisa that Tony had first met and soon learned to love the dark-eyed Aliandra Cibrario. And she had seemed to Tony to be by no means indifferent in her feelings towards him. Great, therefore, had been his joy when he learned that the Cibrarios not only had taken passage for America in the same ship as he himself, but were bound for the same final destination. This joy, however, had been somewhat lessened on shipboard, where the rather handsome Luigi Boccardo, a musician, hailing from Florence, had first been met with. He was a fine fellow, rather well educated, and of a frank and unsuspicious nature. He, too, had been attracted by Aliandra, and, owing to his superior refinement of manner and brighter prospects in life, when compared with Tony, had impressed favorably both Aliandra and her parents. And so it had turned out that, when America was reached, Luigi had settled not very far from where the Cibrarios and Luzzatis had taken up their quarters.

On the particular sultry summer evening referred to, they had all been in America about a year. During this time both Tony and Luigi had continued to pay their respects to Aliandra. Tony's existence would have been a lonely one had it not been for his love for Aliandra, and his affection for his mother. These two feelings had absorbed almost the whole of his emotional energy, and to a commonplace Corsican emotion is all in all. Tony knew quite well that, in the eyes of the community, Luigi seemed a more promising man than himself; but still he thought that his long years of passionate devotion to Aliandra must count for something. In fact, he did not dare face the result of a refusal to marry him on the part of Aliandra, and so always stolidly excluded from his mind such a possibility. Now he was reviewing all the circumstances of the case, and was coming speedily to the conclusion that it was time for him to act decisively.

A louder sound of thunder than any that had preceded seemed to rouse Tony from his reverie. He looked out of the window. Lightning flashes began more rapidly to alternate with rolls of thunder, and the darkness became even more deep as the clouds grew heavier and blacker. The streets were deserted now, save for an occasional hurrying pedestrian, whose form might vaguely be discerned in the uncertain light of the flickering street-lamps.

Tony turned to his mother, who had been observing him narrowly, with an anxious look on her sullen face. She arose, and, after lighting a weak lamp, took up her old position on the soap-box.

"Mother," said Tony, rising and beginning to pace up and down the room, "I have decided. I will see Aliandra this very night and ask her to be my wife."

"You think too much of Aliandra," said Tony's mother, gravely, although she knew her warning would have no effect. "A pretty face counts for little in the long run. And, after all, one woman is almost as good as another."

"Mother, I love Aliandra, and she must be my wife, even if there were a hundred Luigis."

"I don't like the way Aliandra looks at Luigi, Tony; you must not depend on her too much; you must go slowly, now."

"Why did Luigi ever come between us?" cried Tony bitterly. "Mother, I hate Luigi!" A clap of thunder followed his words, as if to emphasize them.

A few large drops of rain began to fall, and soon it was raining rather heavily.

Tony's mother said nothing, but as Tony declared his hatred of Luigi, there became visible on her dark face a scowl which only slowly subsided.

"You say go slowly," Tony went on, easily becoming aroused. "Why, I have waited for years; and, mother, I'll have my answer to-night, I'll go at once. I'll soon see whether she prefers Luigi to me."

And with that he seized his hat and rushed down the dark stairway. His mother stood up as if about to recall him, but soon reseated herself, her brow puckered with concern.

Tony, however, shortly returned for a moment.

"Mother," he said, more softly, "wish me good luck." And, remaining but a second to receive a slow, affirmative nod, he went out again into the now pouring rain.

He pushed forward, taking but little heed of the weather. As he proceeded, his mind dwelt on certain little scenes between Aliandra and himself in far-away Italy. How happy they both had been then! The thought of the contrast since Luigi had stepped into their lives caused him a sharp pang of bitter regret. Aliandra had continued to treat him kindly, but there had always seemed to be some new, uncertain barrier between them. How he loathed Luigi with his refined manners!—fawning, they seemed to him! Tony was so occupied with such thoughts as these, that he barely noticed a dark figure hurrying towards and past him in the rain, when about half-way on his journey. He mechanically noted its resemblance to Luigi, and then continued his bitter train of thought until he arrived at Aliandra's home.

He was in no amiable mood when he entered. He found Aliandra musing in a large easy-chair. Her parents were in another part of the house.

"Tony!" she exclaimed, surprised.

But when she noted his wet, unkempt appearance and the unusual light in his dark, glittering eyes, she became grave. Some vague foreboding of evil seemed to seize her.

The sight of Aliandra had, for a moment, driven away all Tony's bitter thoughts, and filled him with a deep longing. But the sudden change in her countenance again brought him to himself. He curbed his passion and relapsed into his former serious mood.

"Aliandra," he said, in a voice in which earnestness and love mingled with a little bitterness, "you know how much I love you! I have come to-night to ask you to be my wife."

Aliandra arose. She gazed at Tony fearfully. Luigi had, as a matter of fact, left her but a short time before; it was he whom Tony had passed on the street, and Tony's entrance had interrupted her while musing over what he had just been saying to her. She muttered something. She was unprepared for the meeting, and hesitated how to reply.

Tony at once noted this hesitation. At first it irritated him; but then the thought of its true meaning flashed upon his brain. A sharp pain seemed to wrench his very heart. He felt dazed. Then all the bitterness of his soul surged up in his breast.

"Ah," he cried, "you would not have hesitated like this before you met that fellow Luigi Boccardo!"

"Stop!" cried Aliandra; but she shrank away.

"I know why you will not answer me," continued