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MACHIAVELLI—SALESMAN

By
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Pomponio Bene looked at his little cousin Rosie. Her eyes were like stars, her olive cheeks aflame with a flood of crimson color.

A Story of Old Country People in the New World

IN THE VERY heart of the spaghetti section of New York's Lower East Side, there is located a pool room, next door to a basement grocery, whose down-leading steps are always ornamented with glowing peppers and with wreaths and garlands of the sustaining, odoriferous garlic.

On a certain raw morning in February, when the cutting East wind brought shivers and chills, and rank odors of mud from the East River, to make goose flesh crawl on the unwashed skins of the Lower East Siders, and mingle with the more permanent aromas of fried fish and ancient grease, and of decayed vegetables scattered over the streets from the ubiquitous pushcarts—on such a morning, comfortable in two dirty sweaters and the protective effects of a heavy head of well oiled hair, Mike Santangelo, rising young yegg, a muscleman for Lefty Carbone himself, stood outside the pool room and, out of the side of his ugly mouth, exchanged low-toned remarks with one Vito Laporta.

This conversation, which related to a forthcoming job for Carbone, in the warehouse end of that gentleman's numerous racket activities, was abruptly interrupted in the middle of a side-mouthed sentence, by Mike's jaw suddenly refusing, as it were, to function. Laporta, surprised, glanced at him quickly, then turned his head to follow his rapt gaze. Laporta saw merely the back of an old shawl, the upper part of which was draped about a girl's head, as it disappeared down the steps of the basement grocery between the peppers and the garlic. He turned again to Mike Santangelo.

"Geese, what's bitin' ya, Mike?" he inquired.

Santangelo heaved a sigh which made the air about him redolent of garlic.

"It ain't nuthin'," he vouchsafed. "See ya later. I gotta blow now."

And with these laconic words he disappeared into the pool room. Vito Laporta shook his head sagaciously. "A skirt, huh!" He walked away slowly, glancing curiously down the grocery steps as he sauntered past. He saw nothing but vegetables. The "skirt" was without doubt inside, probably bargaining over some spaghetti and, maybe, a couple of tomatoes. Laporta continued on his way, turned the next corner to the left, disappeared.

HIS ESTIMATE on this probable course to be taken by his late partner in conversation nicely calculated, Santangelo emerged from the pool room a few seconds later, smoothed his oiled locks in a curve over his low forehead in front of the sagging brim of his old cap, squared his bulky shoulders, and descended into the grocery.

"Gimme a deck of Chesterfields," he commanded the little grocer, truculently. The grocer hastened to fill this order. "Make it two!" barked Santangelo after him. The grocer, returning, handed him the two packages of cigarettes. Santangelo shoved them into a trousers pocket, nodded at the grocer. Then, and only then, did he seem to observe the dainty little person examining tomatoes under the eye of the grocer's stout wife. He approached the two, stood beside the shawled figure. She turned upon him the fawnlike gaze of a Madonna, out of great, troubled eyes. He addressed her, the truculence of his voice buried out of hearing. He was not chiseling now.

"Ain't you—a—Mr. Ruffo's girl, Rosie?"

The Madonna nodded, her expression defensive.

"Well, I'm yer cousin Mike—Mike Santangelo. Maybe you heard your father speak about me, huh?"

The Madonna nodded, doubtfully.

"How ya all gettin' along, huh? Livin' in the same place? Yeah? Well, tell the old man I'll be droppin' in on him one a' these days." With a nod Gangster Mike Santangelo turned and walked across the basement and up the stairs out of the atmosphere of fresh vegetables into that of stale ones.

Very shortly afterwards Rosie Ruffo also emerged on the sidewalk. She clutched a bundle, her purchases, wrapped in a copy of *Il Popolo d'ltalia* and, with her rather thin shawl pulled closely about her lovely figure, hurried through the cold, raw morning and the pungent odors back to where she kept house for her father and another cousin, recently over from Naples, one Daniel Russillo, in a three-room tenement up four creaking, filthy flights of narrow stairs.

Dan Rusillo's coming had been a godsend. Along with him had arrived his most precious possession, a violin descended through several generations, father to son, all artists. With these possessions, Dan had walked in on them, and at first, since he possessed somewhat less than three dollars on which to found his American career, patient little Rosie had sighed as she contemplated an additional burden. On her meager earnings in a paper-flower sweatshop, it was difficult enough to keep herself and Old Ruffo without this additional burden of another relative dumped abruptly upon her young shoulders.

However, Dan had soon picked up a job, and paid for his board and lodging including the arrears; for Dan was an honest little soul. True it was not much of a job, but it made possible a slightly higher degree of security for the Ruffos. Thereafter the bill in that basement grocery began to decrease, slowly but surely. Also, there was more of the life-saving spaghetti, with occasional broccoli, olive oil, onions, peppers, to say nothing of the garlic, in the Ruffo household.

Dan's job took him out every night. It was a job playing "Mar-ga-Ri" and "Funiculi-Funicula" and

similar gay ballads to the accompaniment of an asthmatic pianoforte in the "Little Napoli" Restaurant, and it included a midnight lunch. It was not Art. But it paid, and—it might be a stepping-stone, later. Many patrons from uptown frequented the "Little Napoli."

The job had the additional advantage, for Rosie, that young Dan was out from under her feet daytimes. He turned in about four a.m., and got up around two in the afternoon. By that time Rosie was at the paper-flower loft, doing her own bit, on piecework, to keep the wolf from the Ruffo's dingy door.

On the evening of the second day following her meeting with her "Cousin Mike Santangelo," that gentleman, his cap and sweaters discarded, called on the Ruffos. It was nearly nine o'clock, and Dan had long since departed for his night's engagement at the restaurant. Rosie opened the door to his heavy knock, wonderingly, and was met by a transformed "Cousin Mike" wearing a wide smirk on his battered face; and on the rest of him, good clothes.

"Who is it?" inquired Old Ruffo from his chair by the stove. By that time the door was shut and Mike Santangelo was standing in the middle of the room, his hard derby in his big hands. He stood just in front of his interrogator, but Old Ruffo could not see him. Old Ruffo was stone blind.

HE HAD caught the American Disease—forty years too late. The Land of Promise. Gold Pieces on the streets waiting to be picked up. A Free Country, The United States of America! Liberty there; proclaimed by a statue, right there in the harbor to assure fellows like him.

He was a painter, of sorts. By this means he had for a number of years knocked out an adequate if somewhat irregularly distributed living in Naples. Pictures of Capri, of Vesuvius, of beggars, of the street gamins, all salable—when Inspiration was working; hence the irregularity. Only himself and Rosie to take care of. It had been easy enough in those days before The Disease got hold of him. Then nothing would stop him. Rosie, just thirteen, had no objection to offer. Ruffo painted hard. It took many *lire* to get even a steerage passage to New York.

He had used up all his pictures. He brought none along. He had been in New York only a few days, hardly settled in the same tenement where he was now entertaining Mike Santangelo, when the offer came, through a chance acquaintance, to go to work. Pick and shovel work it was, paying four-fifty a day. He took it. This would be a chance to get something ahead. Then he would settle down and paint once more.

He worked steadily, his muscles improving daily. Six weeks he labored. Saturdays were half days. It came to twenty-four seventy-five a week; close to a hundred and fifty dollars for the six weeks. Ruffo had never made so many *lire* in his life in three times that period.

Then a blast exploding prematurely, before he had had a chance to get far enough away from it, had taken his sight.

He could never use even a pick and shovel again. He could never paint. Never again would he see Posilippo, the blue sea off Capri, his Rosie, already Madonna—like in those black days.

Then there had been a windfall. Old Ruffo could not understand it to this day. Rosie herself had not understood it—at first. She did now, though!

The windfall was ushered in by a breezy, reassuring, and very magnificently garbed young gentleman, who announced himself as The Philanthropist, Ritola. Ruffo must have heard of him, or the girl perhaps? No? Remarkable! Extraordinary! Well, they hadn't been over here very long, of course. That would account for it. But, to explain, to get down to the reason for this visit! He would bring money, much money, innumerable *lire*; perhaps, maybe, as much as three hundred and fifty, even four hundred dollars! Yes—The American Law. No—Signor Ruffo had made no mistake in coming here, even though his sad accident—it was, truly, devastating, that! But—again, to business; the Signor had only to sign—here yes. The girl could hold his hand; guide the pen—yes. Good! That was all, for now anyhow, but he would be back, very soon, yes, he, The Philanthropist, Ritola. A smile at Rosie which displayed most of the thirty-two perfect teeth in The Philanthropist's handsome mouth, and then this good angel was gone. Rosie, her heart fluttering a little—she was nearly fourteen and fourteen is a good age, in Napoli—heard his rapid, accurate footsteps as he negotiated, one after another, those flights of stairs.

True to his promise, several evenings later, The Philanthropist, Ritola had climbed the four flights, lighting the dingy little room like a veritable

sunburst. The Philanthropist wore a startling and very beautiful outfit of brand new clothes, Rosie noticed, her heart once more fluttering a little.

He produced money, long, green money, even more than he had said he might bring. Six hundred American dollars, he counted out under her eye, handed to her father.

There was only a paper to be signed; that was all. The Philanthropist produced this—an official-looking document; arranged it, Rosie holding his fountain pen in her father's palpitating hand, as he scrawled "Enrico Ruffo" on the dotted line. Rosie could not read the many lines of American language which this document contained. She had not been here long enough to know more than a few words which she had picked up; words like "go-on!" and "all-right," and a few others. But Rosie could read figures. The American figures were the same as those at home in Napoli. She saw figures, just above where her father was laboriously setting down his signature. She read: "$1,000."

"B-but—this isn't a thousand dollars," she ventured, very timidly, to The Philanthropist.

That gentleman showed his beautiful teeth in a disarming smile, a smile of rare, of tolerant, beauty. His Italian was a little hard to understand. He was second-generation Italian. He explained, however. Of course it wasn't a thousand—One Grand. That was always down in the paper, but—a lot had to be 'laid out' to get anything. If it had not been for him, The Philanthropist, who delighted in these good deeds, they would have had nothing. Was it not he who had come to them? It was. And if he had not interested himself—he made a significant gesture. They would have had—just nothing at all. They had six hundred now. *Sia fatta la volonta di dio!*

Nevertheless Rosie preserved a lingering doubt, a doubt which persisted even through several chance meetings, on the street near home, with The Philanthropist, Ritola.

And nowadays—had she not been here three years, going on four?—she could speak English, fluently. She was good an' wise to that cheap crook Ritola. Philanthropist! Owned a quarter of a pool-room. Was mixed up, too, in a music publishing racket. Philanthropist!! That mutt had gypped poor old pop out of nearly half his Compensation, that was all. Well, there wasn't anything you could do about it now, Old Stuff. *Sia fatta la volonta di dio!* Only, she guessed, God hadn't had much say about that rotten deal. No.

Cousin Mike Santangelo put his hard derby hat down on the floor, sat down, gingerly—he weighed more than two-hundred—in a chair, looked at Old Ruffo. He began the conversation. . . .

"I guess maybe I ain't been a very good relation! But so far they ain't been any way I could do nothin'. That's why I come in now. I got some thin' that'll make things a lot easier. Ya see, it's like this. I guess ya know me an' a feller named Laporta makes it pretty good with our stand. Yeah. We gotta bootblack stand together over near Chatham Square. Now this here guy needs a new place to doss-down in, see! I was thinkin' you could rent him yer extry room, where the Russillo guy sleeps. Vito Laporta takes the room nights; Russillo takes it daytimes. Vito pays you good. I seen to that already. It don't cost you nothin' extry, havin' the two of 'em, 'cause Vito ain't eatin' on you. He's eatin' outside. Dossin' here only, see? Whaddye say?"

It was another windfall, the first in three grinding years. There was no objection, no argument whatever.

THE VERY next morning, Vito Laporta, who, Rosie admitted to herself, "always acted like a gentleman" towards her, moved in with a small trunk and two valises, one of them extraordinarily heavy. Before joining up with the Carbone interests, Vito Laporta had been a moderately successful lone-operating second-story man, and he had kept his tools. Out of some lingering sense of Latin sentiment no doubt. Besides, you never could tell when you would need them again some time.

It was, really, from the date of Laporta's advent as a lodger that Rosie Ruffo's troubles began in grim earnest. For from that moment when his sidekick was duly settled in the Ruffo household, Cousin Mike Santangelo abruptly began to play the role of constant visitor. If Laporta happened to be there when Cousin Mike dropped in, that fact did not interfere with his seeing a good deal of Rosie. If Laporta was out—which was most of the time—then Cousin Mike saw even more of her, if possible.

And Cousin Mike, though somewhat crude, as befitted his chosen profession of muscleman, was nevertheless, a fast worker. He had native wit sufficient to make him understand that with a girl like Rosie, it was marriage—or the gate! Any compromise between these two extremes of a

courtship would mean a quick knife between Cousin Mike's large, thick ribs.

Rosie found herself on the defensive from the very beginning of Cousin Mike's advances. Cousin Mike might be a somewhat belated Benefactor. That, indeed, was his quite definite point of departure for his overtures to the desirable Rosie. Had he not brought them Vito Laporta? He had. And just when they needed some such lift as Vito's regularly-paid weekly doss-charge so opportunely supplied. Well, then? Didn't that give him, Cousin Mike, a footing? Unquestionably it did. And Cousin Mike used that footing daily.

He cluttered the premises in and out of season. Here was a perfectly good Juliet, and Cousin Mike played with gusto the role of Romeo to that Juliet. The only differences that Rosie could see were three: In the first place the original Juliet, of Verona, liked her lover. Secondly, the original Romeo, likewise of Verona, was Some Fella. In the third place, the Romeo of antiquity had been a Straight guy—Rosie hadn't been here for three years goin' on four—without learning a few things. It was quite plain to her that Cousin Mike was different; in fact that he was so crooked he probably wouldn't know what to do with a Straight Flush! Speakin' of flushes, Cousin Mike brought many of these to his little cousin's clear olive cheeks. Cousin Mike was pretty crude, a roughneck, if there ever was one.

The courtship went on uninterruptedly, to Rosie's increasing devastation, for the best part of two months. Then, quite suddenly, there came an interruption. Vito Laporta didn't come in one night—nor the next day.

In the course of the afternoon of that day, Rosie had learned why. Vito had been pinched for a job. There followed a quick trial. Even the long arm of the redoubtable Lefty Carbone hadn't been long enough to get him clear this time. So said the gossip of the Quarter. Then the Ruffo's gentlemanly young lodger took a trip *via* The New York Central Railroad to a place called Ossining, and Vito, "up the river," began to do a Stretch, which meant that The State of New York would be for some time responsible for both his board and lodging.

Cousin Mike had shown up on the evening of the day after Vito had failed to come home. Cousin Mike had hastily packed his pal's belongings, hiked out the small trunk, the two valises, including the heavy one. Then he had returned to offer explanations. These, to the effect that Vito had been "framed," left Rosie cold. She knew a stall when one was sprung on her. This was one. She did her best not to show Cousin Mike Santangelo—Holy Angel that name meant—huh!—that she could see right through the stuff he was spilling to her and poor old Pop, about Laporta. She said very little during that explanation—that Song and Dance of Cousin Mike's.

But the financial cloud of Laporta's enforced absence, it seemed, was not to have the silver lining of Cousin Mike's corresponding absence. No! Cousin Mike deftly turned that catastrophe to his own ends. He made them a proposition. Pop would like to get back to Napoli. So, too, would Dan Russillo. The steam heat was raising Ned with that old fiddle of his. It hadn't been built for steam heat. They never had any steam heat in Cremona. No. Not them Old-Timers. It took Jack, a lot of the long green to get back, and, without more of the long green poor old Pop wouldn't be able to do much even back there in Napoli; be one a' them street beggars—that's what he'd be, even though Dan Russillo had had an invitation from the Director of the Opera Orchestra back home in Napoli to come back and play with that outfit. No. Ya couldn't expect young Dan to take care of them. That was where he, Cousin Mike, came in, get it?

He, Cousin Mike, had Jack, plenty long green. That bootblack-stand had been a big moneymaker. Cousin Mike had always been of a saving trend of mind, not like some of these guys, shootin' their jack right an' left. He, Cousin Mike, would willingly put up the Jack to take 'em back—yeah, all of 'em, includin' himself! Why not? What was there here, compared to what he had heard tell of Napoli as a place to live? Why, ya could live a month there on what it took here to get by for a coupla days.

Poor Old Ruffo thought, Rosie could see, as she looked anxiously at his blind face, that Heaven was about to smile on him once more! Young Dan, too, was deeply intrigued by the proposal—to save the precious fiddle; to be playing real music once more, and in the Orchestra of the San Carlos Opera at Naples.

Of course there was a catch. Naturally. There was a reward for Cousin Mike—another Philanthropist!—mixed up in all this generosity. Rosie could see it coming, long ahead; knew what

the reward was to be. Yeah! Right the first guess. Rosie's olive cheeks were burning a bright crimson now. Cousin Mike was coming out with it, in his crude way, straight to the point, and The Good Lord help you if you didn't happen to like it!

Yes, she, Rosie Ruffo, was the Reward. She was to marry Cousin Mike and that would put him in the position he craved so earnestly, the position of Family Benefactor. They would all go back to Napoli, on him, Cousin Mike. He'd take his wife and his father-in-law back—and Cousin Dan thrown in. Of course, Cousin Dan would pay him back after they got over there outta what he'd be makin' in the Opera Orchestra—take all the time he wanted on that, too. He, Cousin Mike, wasn't no Tightwad—Naw!

IN THE ensuing argument, which could be heard on all five floors of the tenement-house, it was three men against one little girl. Dan, of course! That was easy enough to understand—where that little guy stood. Something for himself; and even more for that fiddle of his! Rosie could pass that. After all, Cousin Dan was an artist. She didn't blame Cousin Dan.

And poor old Pop—well, Pop was to be excused all right, all right. Poor old Pop hadn't ever seen Cousin Mike. Cousin Mike himself, naturally, had the most to say. He had put his stacked deck right smack down on the table now, and he argued openly and vehemently, at great length, with all the reasons, for what he wanted. Yeah! Get married now, right off, that was the thing to do. Then he would be in a position—

Rosie listened, getting in a word edgewise when she could manage it. She grew desperate. There was not a loophole of escape for her. She saw clearly the real cleverness of it all. Mike, she surmised, had not the slightest intention of going to Italy. No. Once married to him she would have to do what he told her—an Italian husband! They were all alike. Was she not surrounded here, by husbands like that and their docile wives and families? Could she not remember clearly enough how it had been back there in Napoli? The husband was the Boss, the *Padrone*. What Mike was fixin' to do, of course, was to get her tied up to him without any recourse. Then—maybe, she guessed he would, if only to get rid of them both—he'd ship Pop and Cousin Dan back, and she'd never see old Pop anymore, and—if Cousin Dan didn't take care of him—she visualized him, and shuddered, as a blind street beggar back there in Napoli. . . .

Rosie temporized. For one fleeting instant the possible solution of taking the other Philanthropist, Ritola, flashed through her mind. Ritola at least looked like something, wasn't a Roughneck like this one, a Muscleman! But she put thought away from her almost as soon as it came into her beleaguered mind. Ritola wouldn't do, any way you looked at it. The only comfort in that course would be that Mike would probably manhandle him, send him or take him for a ride. Then she'd be the widow Ritola right enough, but—free and all, she'd be right back again where she was now—and refusing Mike meant going back on Pop. It was tough.

She stalled. It was the only thing she could do.

She got up, faced the three of them, her face burning crimson now, her lovely eyes flashing fiery sparks. She pounded for emphasis with her dainty little right hand knotted into a little hard fist, on the old table. She had to have time—some time. You couldn't come and spring anything like this on a girl and expect her to decide it right off. She must think. She was going to think. It was her right! She was going to think right away. Cousin Mike must go—now, right off. He could come back in three, four days. Meantime she must be left alone. She hadn't anything against Cousin Mike. Only—he must beat it now—three, no, four days. Then she'd tell him one way or another.

She finished her ultimatum, fled to her tiny little bedroom, locked the door behind her, flung herself on the bed and wept violently.

This did her good. She heard the drawn-out endings of the conversation among the three men; then Cousin Mike heavily taking his departure. That crisis was past, anyhow. She had a few days before her. She tried, deliberately, to recover somewhat her emotional poise, to think clearly. And then suddenly she sat up, her eyes wide, sitting on the edge of the little bed, she straightened her rumpled hair. Why hadn't she thought of that before? Why, oh why? Well—there was time enough, Rosie guessed, time to tell all about it to that other Cousin, the one who *wasn't* a muscleman and a crook—Cousin Pomponio Bene, who sold Italian provisions out in the country, in a place called Westchester County!

Rosie finished fixing her hair before her looking-glass. Then, feeling better as the idea grew upon her,

she unlocked her door, kissed poor old Pop as she passed his chair. He was huddled down in it, now, thinking, thinking. She got hold of a dozen sheets of writing paper and the pen and ink. . . .

It was in the early afternoon of the second day following her writing the long letter to Cousin Pomp, up there in Porterbridge, that Rosie was called from her bench in Di Salvo's paper-flower workroom by no less a person than the *padrone*, Di Salvo himself. There was a gentleman, here Di Salvo smiled into his walrus mustache. He looked kinda like a greenhorn, the gentleman. He was waiting to see her in the office.

Her heart suddenly fluttering, Rosie went to the little office where Signor Di Salvo presided over his wage slaves. She did not recognize Cousin Pomp in this obvious greenhorn. Troubled, she took him, as he doubtless intended she should, for some additional Italian relative come without notice to camp upon the resources of the Ruffos! It was not until he had got her outside, down the two nights and onto the greasy sidewalk—around a corner, in fact—that Rosie recognized who it was behind that rosebud-embroidered necktie, under that Garibaldean felt hat. Cousin Pomp's smile, he had teeth even more beautiful than Ritola's, brought the dawn of recognition to a rapidly gladdening heart. She threw her arms about his slender waist when she fully realized that the Champion had really arrived on the scene, in response to her woebegone summons.

Cousin Pomp talked rapidly. He sketched in what he had been doing since he had arrived at The Grand Central, at nine-fifty-two; mentioned his trip down to Chatham Square on the Third Avenue El; his scrutiny of Santangelo, himself unseen, from across the street, while the Muscleman held down the bootblack-stand. He showed Rosie, Cousin Mike's advertisement for the sale of the stand clipped that morning from the current issue of *Il Popolo d'Italia*; mentioned his visit over in Mulberry Street to New York City Police Headquarters, with one Francesco Aiello, head of a certain squad which operated exclusively among The Italian settlements; an old friend of his, Signor Aiello, one of the best. Then Cousin Pomp, having accounted for the past four hours of his time, got down to Brass Tacks. Would Rosie do just as he told her?

Ah—she would. *Bene!* Listen, now, with all fervency!! Rosie was to go back, as soon as Cousin Pomp had finished these instructions, and get what was due her from the *padrone* in the workroom. Yes—she was all through with Signor Di Salvo and paper flowers—through for good! Get her time, yes. That secured, she was to start in on the really difficult, the strategic part—yes, to prepare Pop—and young Cousin Dan—for the next step. Cousin Pomp lowered his voice, placed his lips close to his little cousin's beautiful shell-like car. He spoke many, many words, in lucid Neapolitan, into that ear. Meanwhile Rosie nodded, again and again, her eyes, as Cousin Pomp could observe for himself, seeming to grow bigger and brighter with every minute of that conversation, to grow until they were superbly, incredibly large and brilliant, and—glowing, soft.

Now and again she turned those glowing eyes upon Cousin Pomp, and at these times, Cousin Pomp could not help observing her lips; moist, parted, the lips of a Madonna, true, but also, well, this was business, a job, and one that had to be done just right. Cousin Pomp mustn't let those eyes, those lips, that olive skin with the crimson undertone, distract him. Cousin Pomp drew his intensive instructions to a close.

"And the truckman—out of the telephone book, remember, from Long Island, or Jersey City—Jersey City would be best, probably. O.K.? Got it

all straight? Good! *Bene!!* Now—again—listen:

"Ritola—*exactly* how does he look? Try to draw me a picture of him, his clothes, his feet, especially his face, don't leave out anything!"

Rosie concentrated on Ritola. She was not, for nothing, the daughter of Old Ruffo, once a painter of pictures, descendant of a line of painters, artists! She "drew" Ritola; painted in his features, his characteristics; dressed him, head to foot; sketched in little *nuances*, small finishing touches—his smile; the way he slanted his eyes without moving his handsome head; the way his hair was brushed; the usual angle of his hat.

"To tell you the truth, Cousin Pomp," she finished, "he don't look much different from you!" She made determinative gestures with both hands, the thumbs extended. "The outside looks, I mean, Cousin Pomp, like you on the outside, inside, I guess, a rotten crook—different from you, that way, Cousin Pomp. But—good lookin', all right, all right! They call him—lissen, Cousin Pomp, they call him 'Valentino,' see?"

Cousin Pomp nodded. He had it, all right. He knew he could pick the Philanthropist, Ritola, out of a hundred chorus tenors. Briefly, enthusiastically, like an accolade, he embraced his little Cousin Rosie.

"Great, kid," he remarked. "Beat it back inside now, and get your time, and then go on home to Pop and Cousin Dan. Do your stuff right, now!"

Rosie slipped away, and the greenhorn started for the general direction of Chatham Square.

ROSIE could not be in two places at once. She had her part of it, she clearly understood, to carry out, and how. But, if she could, as a somewhat fluttering little heart apprised her, have followed her strong inclination and sneaked about half a block behind Cousin Pomp to watch him do his stuff, she would have seen a newly landed Neapolitan greenhorn sidle awkwardly up to the great muscular bulk of Cousin Mike The Holy Angel as he blacked shoes near Chatham Square. She would have heard, had she been able to get near enough without herself being visible to Cousin Mike, a very interesting conversation.

The greenhorn began, tentatively, by producing the clipping from the Italian Daily newspaper. Yes, this was the stand all right; this was Mr. Santangelo the owner; yes, the stand was for sale all right, six hundred smackers, like givin' it away it was. Yeah. Partner went an' died on Mr. Santangelo; couldn't attend to it. Didn't want another sidekick. Ruther sell it, for cash; get a little jack ahead even if it was givin' the stand away.

Then the greenhorn began.

Six hundred dollars, it was a terrific sum, *per baccho!* A fella could work hard for a lifetime in Napoli and not get much more than that together, even when—the greenhorn drew himself erect in military fashion—one had worn the black shirt, stood in with *Facismo!* Six hundred—a little fortune, truly! Four hundred and fifty, now, there was a sum, the greenhorn showed the edge of a stuffed wallet, which might be considered a goodly sum, the savings of grinding years. Besides, the greenhorn, another straightening of muscles, was not—ahgggh! he spat contemptuously—from Messina, nor from any such place as Cannitello. No. He was a city fella himself, Napoli is a city; some place too; the veritable tomb of Virgil on the summit of its Posilippo—even this New York could boast no such distinction as that. . . .

The argument was on. It progressed by geometrical proportion in intensity. A crowd began to gather. The non-Italian members of this group of intrigued spectators expected momentarily the knives, the stilettos, to be produced. The argument rose and fell in rhetorical cadences. It brought in Bacchus and various other historical or mythological personages. It called upon The Company of Heaven. . . .

It was the greenhorn, at the precise psychological moment, who changed its note, who dropped the heroics, began abruptly to wheedle.

He was, after all, a poor fella, a mouse in a strange oil-bin. He had four hundred and fifty, no more; save for a few *lire* on which to keep body and soul tied together until something turned up. This stand would meet with his approval, at that price; he would hand out forthwith; he stood there at that instant, prepared to make the exchange, the saving of a lifetime, and he was no longer young—he was twenty-eight!

Then, suddenly, another note. How—the *signor* would pardon the thought but—how could he, an abject greenhorn, tell? If only he could test the value of this stand, now! Ha—*Baccho!* A real proposition! Listen, now, *signor padrone*, listen with fervency; the proposal was from the heart, *in pettore*, between two good and honest compatriots, attend.

He, the greenhorn, would hand the *padrone* a five-spot, free and clear, yes, then and there, for the privilege of using the stand until nine that evening. It was now three, a little after. Six hours, more or less. The *padrone* could easily lock up his *pasta*, his brushes, his shoelaces. The *padrone* appeared incredibly industrious. He could take a vacation, and at a monetary profit, for the rest of the day, with a light heart! He, the greenhorn, could not steal the stand. It was too heavy even if he were a thief, which God forbid! Then, he, the greenhorn, could test the stand's alleged earning capacity for himself. The greenhorn shook an enticing five under Mike Santangelo's thick and battered nose.

The *padrone* fell. He could not, he saw clearly, lose. He took the five, parked it in his soiled jeans. He locked up his paste, his extra brushes, his laces and accessories, all but just enough for the greenhorn's experiment. He sauntered away, most of the crowd melting away with him at this unexpected peaceful ending to what had promised so interesting a diversion.

The greenhorn, looking after him, saw a large, squarely-constructed person, an Italian, detach himself from the outer edge of the curious, saunter after Cousin Mike Santangelo, follow him one block uptown, to where Santangelo turned to the left. The large, squarely-constructed Italian sauntered around the same corner. The greenhorn breathed a long sigh of satisfaction, which his little cousin, Rosie Ruffo, sitting at that moment with her lovely cheek against her blind father's, her arm about his neck, her ripe lips speaking softly into his right ear, could not hear. The large, squarely-constructed Italian was that same Francesco Aiello about whom Cousin Pomp had told his little cousin earlier in the afternoon. Francesco would make his pinch farther away from Chatham Square, as arranged. Cousin Mike would not be available—could not be bailed out, even, until after nine tomorrow morning, for the next sixteen hours at least. It should be enough, even to spare.

The greenhorn settled down to the blackening of boots, the oiling and subsequent polishing of russets, one after another as the customers took the chairs, quite as though never before had he done anything else but work for the improvement in appearance of both black and brown boots. His supple back bent humbly, his slender, capable-looking hands flashing back and forth as he worked and polished, and rubbed, and plied cloths, on and on and on. Dusk fell at last, and with it came a certain customer. Once again, though internally, silently this time, the greenhorn blacking boots there near Chatham Square, heaved a great sigh. He leaned, as though somewhat weary, his face drawn into an expression of deep sadness, against one of the brass camels which, six in a row, served to hold up the soles of the customers' boots and shoes. He looked, gravely, into the handsome olive-skinned countenance of the gentleman, who was gracefully climbing up into the central seat, placing the soles of a pair of pointed-toed uptown shoes on the rests—Ritola, there could be no mistake after little Rosie's exhaustive description—The Philanthropist, here, to the life, in person, in the middle chair. *Avanti!*

IT WAS this that the greenhorn had been patiently waiting for. He knew that Ritola and Santangelo had been watching one another like a pair of cats for the past two months; that news of the apparent change of ownership of the stand would sooner or later make its way to Ritola. The bargain, sealed by the passing of that five-spot, had been conducted in the merest whisper. Outwardly it had been intended to look as though he had agreed to take over the stand; had paid down an advance. Now, with Aiello on the job—it had not been difficult to arrange for Santangelo's arrest for examination, on one of the "dragnet" sections of the N.Y. Penal Code. Santangelo would be out of the way at the very least until nine the next morning, and, the sooner Ritola showed up well; here was Ritola, looking as if he'd like to ask a few questions.

The greenhorn started in on his left shoe. Between the operations of a preliminary rub-off, the oiling, the application of the polishing-paste, the greenhorn heaved deep, resonant sighs. Halfway through, he turned up to his somewhat overdressed customer a piteous face.

"Whassamatter, bo?" inquired The Philanthropist. "What's got ya goin', huh?"

The greenhorn paused, his brush poised at an angle against one shining pointed shoe. Words poured from the greenhorn, encouraged by this unmistakable evidence of a patron's kind sympathy.

He had been gypped—thasswhassa-matter! Gypped—proper, by that— He poured out an eloquent description of Cousin Mike Santangelo

which made Ritola quiver and lick his shapely lips.

Yeah—gypped—sunk. Five hundred—for this stand! Everything he had—the last *soldo*, the savings of years, and he—one who had worn the Black Shirt. Business—had he not been at work for hours, the best part of the afternoon?—was—rotten, punk. He had been taken in, deceived, stung. If only— Well, there was no use repining. But—it was pretty tough. For, only a couple of hours after he had taken on this white elephant, the middle of that same afternoon, he had been sent for—for the very job he had been after, had hoped, in these hard times, almost against hope, to secure. He had given up hope, two, three days before. Then, led by the devil himself—the greenhorn spat significantly—he had been talked into buying this lemon, this beast of a bootblack stand, and a couple of hours later that job had broke for him. Standin' here, breakin' his back, he was losin' money, good long green, hourly. There wasn't a possibility of the stand's bringing in more than four dollars a day. The job—he could still get it by showing up tomorrow morning. The greenhorn, almost tearful now with his emotion, began again, in a new set of choice Neapolitan vernacular terms, on that rascal Santangelo!

Suddenly—as he had done with Santangelo himself, the greenhorn changed his tone. He looked up with a dawning, a naive hope, into the fascinated face of this patron with the lavender handkerchief, the slanted pockets on his braid-trimmed coat, the fawn-colored spats.

Maybe, just possibly, a fine gentleman like this patron would be able to do something for a poor deluded greenhorn like him. The stand—it was not such a bad stand—if only there were not that job, that six-a-day, that would not wait beyond tomorrow. . . .

The Philanthropist, Ritola, caught it the way a trained seal catches a fish! He had barely been able, all through the greenhorn's successive monologues, to slip in a word edgewise. He knew perfectly well that this stand would bring a Grand, granted only a few days to locate the proper purchaser. It had been advertised only for a couple of days. This greenhorn knew nothing of its earning capacity; its suitable sales price. Unquestionably that *cattivo* Santangelo had wanted the quickest of quick turnovers; maybe planning a getaway; must have been, of course; only Frank Aiello from headquarters had been on the job too smart for that. The Philanthropist, Ritola, like the rest of the various wise ones of the neighborhood, was well aware that Santangelo had been pinched that afternoon, earlier; was now in The Tombs. Here was a chance, fallen in his lap. Chees'! It was a good thing he had come when he did, before this goof blacking shoes here had spilled the works to anybody else—Detorno, the real-estater for instance!

Ritola descended from his chair, stood beside his dear fellow-countryman. His second-generation Italian got itself vastly jumbled in his eagerness to swallow this bait. Five hundred!! Cripes! It was finding it in the gutter.

Yes—his heart was even then, at the moment, palpitating with violence of sheer love and sympathy for this fine fellow who had, unquestionably, been badly hooked, gypped out of his eye-teeth. Santangelo was—well, everything that had been said about him. More—if there were any more things to call him. He, the Philanthropist, Ritola was the name—would not stand by and see that villain get away with any such rotten work—to take such an advantage of—no doubt a personal friend and follower of the great, the incomparable, Mussolini! Never. *Impossible!!*

But, he must wait, ten minutes, fifteen at the outside! Banks were closed now—see, no more than sixty, seventy dollars were in his possession at the moment. He pressed the seventy on the greenhorn, the guarantee of his speedy return. Stand here, do not move away a foot. Back in ten minutes—fifteen at the outside. "Wait—do not go away!! And with this parting injunction, the greenhorn staring stupidly at the wad of bills in his hand, the Philanthropist, Ritola, rushed away and around the first corner to the right.

He was almost disheveled when he returned, three or four other gaily-garbed youths at his heels, twelve minutes later. He could hardly speak, Italian or any other language. With shaking fingers he counted out the rest of the price of the stand across the greenhorn's palm: Five fifties, seven twenties, the rest in nondescript, mostly soiled, tens, fives, and one-dollar bills.

The count was correct. The greenhorn, his eyes moist with gratitude, called down the blessings of Heaven's company upon The Philanthropist, Ritola, to the broad grins of the accompanying youths; then, with head high, yellow shoes creaking, Garibaldean bonnet at a new and rakish

angle, set off into the deep mazes of the Italian Quarter and was lost to view.

"Chees', you pulled sompthin' that time, Ritola!" remarked one of the Philanthropist's satellites, examining the three newly upholstered oak chairs, the polished brass, the six haughty camels holding the six footrests on their double humps. Ritola smirked blandly, tried one of the drawers underneath the seats.

"Yare—I was makin' such a quick jump I didn't even get the keys from this boob!" he announced, smiling. "Well it's easy nuff to getta locksmith to open 'em."

TO A FULLY occupied Rosie Ruffo, the arrival of Cousin Pomponio Bene about seven o'clock that evening was as a ray of sunlight after a week of heavy clouds! Three men were in the small living room when Pomponio Bene knocked on the door. One, of course, was old Pop, one was a seemingly rather puzzled Cousin Dan Russillo, the third, a total stranger, was the boss truckman. This last person seemed in a state of annoyance.

"Everything's in the truck, Cousin Pomp," explained Rosie, "an' this-here is the truckman. He's been waitin' to find out where to take the things."

"Yeah, an' I ain't gonna wait no longer!" broke in the truckman. On him Pomponio Bene bent a remorseless stare. He motioned to the door.

"Come with me," he vouchsafed, and led the way without.

He reentered the room three minutes later, returning a stuffed wallet into an inside coat pocket as he did so.

"That's all fixed," he announced. "Hello, Cousin Enrico. Glad to see you looking so well. It's Bene, Pomponio Bene. The two shook hands, old Ruffo smiling for the first time in many days. He had always thought well of this young relative.

Dan Russillo drew Rosie aside.

"Who's this greenhorn?" he inquired. "What's he got to do with it? Is he one of Mike's push, or what?"

"Nothing to do with Mike, Cousin Dan." The greenhorn was replying in person. "It's just the way Rosie's been telling you—with a few little differences maybe. The main difference is that Santangelo's got nothing to do with all this, get me?"

"B-but," stammered the somewhat abashed violinist, "I thought Rosie was gettin' married first thing in the mornin', an' we was all goin' back home on the ship tomorrow or the day after. I chucked up my job an' everything!"

"O.K.," returned the greenhorn. It's the *Adriatic*, and she sails at seven tomorrow morning. If I was you I'd get goin' an' be on board tonight. Here's your ticket. Say '*addio*' now, and get started, you and the fiddle. I'm looking after the rest of the folks." Dan Russillo stared at the green third-class ticket, marked conspicuously "Alien Tax, $8.00, Paid. S.S. Adriatic," with a lot of fine print underneath. He turned once more to face this inexplicable greenhorn who spoke with every turn and phrasing of a Neapolitan, just landed.

"I don't get it all," protested Cousin Dan Russillo. "If Rosie ain't marryin' Mike—how come this?" he indicated the ticket still in his hand, "and all the rest of it, the truck of stuff goin' to a ship an' all that, huh?"

Pomponio looked away from the questioner before he replied. He looked straight into the eyes of his little cousin, Rosie Ruffo. What he saw there seemed to him satisfactory. In fact he nodded his head twice before he replied.

"Rosie ain't marrying Mike Santangelo, tomorrow morning, or any other morning, Cousin

Dan," he explained softly. "The stuff on the truck isn't goin' to any dock. It's on its way right now, all paid in advance, to a place called Porterbridge, up in Westchester county, where I live. Rosie isn't marrying Mike, no! Rosie's marrying, er—me, Cousin Dan, first thing in the morning, soon as Cousin Enrico here can sign his 'waivers' on her at the License Bureau up in Porterbridge. The office opens at nine tomorrow morning, and as soon as *you* get started for the ship, *we're* startin' for Porterbridge. I got a taxi down there now, eatin' its engine off at the rate of ten cents every four minutes. That's goin' to take us to The Grand Central. That's why I'm anxious to have you get started, see?"

Cousin Pomponio Bene stepped over to where, in the total absence of furniture, old Ruffo sat precariously on the edge of a soapbox.

"Here, Cousin Enrico," said he, "hold out your hand. I'm counting four hundred dollars across your hand, a fifty, another fifty, three fifties, four, five, fifties; five twenties; four tens; two fives—that makes it; just right—what this Ritola guy held out on you when he collected your compensation three years ago. It's all right, Cousin Enrico. He paid it to me this afternoon, of his own free will. I got interest, too. That went into Cousin Dan's ticket for Italy. It's really your present to him." Old Ruffo's shaking hand closed on the bills. A tear slipped down his cheek. He reached out the other hand, felt for, found and pressed his relative's hand. "The Will of God," he murmured, "it is being done—my son."

"So now, I guess you see what it's all about, don't you, Cousin Dan?" inquired the greenhorn. Dan Russillo nodded dully. It was too rapid for him. He was an artist, not a man of action like this unknown, queerly-dressed new cousin. He shook hands with old Ruffo, then with Rosie, finally with the greenhorn. He clutched his violin to his narrow chest. He approached the door.

"*Addio!*" said he, and went through the door and closed it behind him. The three could hear his light, rather shambling footsteps, on the narrow, carpetless stairs, one flight, two flights.

Pomponio Bene looked at his little cousin Rosie. Her eyes were like stars, her olive cheeks aflame with a flood of crimson color. The greenhorn stepped towards her, opened his arms. She stepped into them.

"*Carissima!*" murmured the greenhorn, the last thing before his mouth was, for a long moment, otherwise occupied.

They disengaged themselves from each other at a sound from old Ruffo. They looked towards him.

"What is it, daddy?" inquired Rosie. Old Ruffo stood up, unsteadily. He was badly oriented without the familiar furniture about him.

"It is not good to keep the automobile waiting below, at that rate," said old Ruffo. "It is different in Napoli. Come, let us get started for Porterbridge. It is not good to remain here any longer than necessary."

"You said it, pop," assented Pomponio Bene and opened the door into the dingy hallway.

POMPONIO BENE'S partner, James Maguire, glanced up at the big clock on the wall of Bene & Maguire's prosperous store in Porterbridge, Westchester County, New York. The clock said ten minutes to twelve, noon. Pomp was cutting it kind of fine. He had said he would be back at noon. Well, if he was late, it would be for the first time. Pomp had never missed a trick in the four years that he and Jim Maguire had been pulling together as partners. A clever guy, Pomp was. Pomp was O. K. Machiavelli! That's what Pomp had said. He had to go to New York to do a Machiavelli job! Jim Maguire had puzzled over that word until he had bethought him to ask his daughter Veronica about it. Veronica had told him who Machiavelli was. Veronica was educated. A smooth guy, a real wop, not a Scotchman, as Jim Maguire had thought possible from that first syllable. He was a guy who had lived a long time ago and left his name as a synonym for goin' at things slick, smooth, kind of underhand. "Machiavelli" meant gettin' there by a roundabout way—the way a lot of these wops went at things.

Well, Pomp was being kind of roundabout, Jim guessed, getting back this time. It was Saturday, and the Store's busiest day, and Pomp was the salesman of the two partners. The clock said six minutes to twelve. James Maguire and the two clerks stepped on it. It was one great little business he and Pomp had built up here. It paid to educate your kids. Look at that there Veronica! Knew about this here guy Machiavelli, an' all.

Pomponio Bene entered, ushered in a young lady. Boy! A wow! Who might this be? Jim Maguire turned a final glance at the clock, a look of relief on his face. It was three minutes to twelve.

Pomponio Bene walked over to his partner, leading the Wow by the hand. “Meet the wife, Jim,” said he. James Maguire stared, swallowed, grinned broadly, then held out his big hands.

“The Lord love ye!” he murmured. “Tell me the works!!”

The three of them walked into the small office in the rear of the grocery.

They sat down, Rosie smiling happily. Once more urged thereto, Pomponio Bene rapidly summarized his doings in the big city. Veronica had been right about that wop. Jim had not been entirely free of a suspicion that his educated daughter had, maybe, been chucking a bluff, a learned bluff. “Machiavelli” was finishing his story. He did not look in the least like a greenhorn now. He looked, outwardly, not unlike the Philanthropist, Ritola. In fact, he might have doubled, clothes and all, for Valentino himself.

“One part of it I had to miss, Jim.”

“What part was that?” inquired Maguire. He was intrigued.

“What happened this morning when the Carbone crowd got Santangelo bailed out, and went down and found Ritola’s gang holding down that stand. I’ll bet there was something doing. I’m going through the papers this afternoon to see. And Jimmy, I’m betting on ‘Cousin Mike.’ Yes, sir! My jack goes down on that bird. Why? Because—well, he’s one of the family, Jim, and—they’re all artists.

“Yes, sir—my money goes down on ‘Cousin Mike’.”

“‘Artists—is right,” remarked James Maguire emphatically as he disappeared through the office door to attend to the needs of Mrs. J. Pluffington Erskine, who, with her Pekinese and a footman in close attendance upon her, had just descended from her limousine to lay in a six month’s supply of olive oil, and to secure enough Parmesan cheese and broccoli for the entertainment of her weekend guests. . . .

THE END.