

The End of the Last Dance

By Abner Anthony



My friend, if you have never seen San Remo in the springtime, your life is as yet incomplete. It is then that we of the Italian Riviera really exist. Dio! It is quite futile to describe it—one can only live it. Let it suffice, however, when I say the Mediterranean is never as blue as it is then, air is never so soft, so sweet or the flowers so brilliant. It is Paradise, my friend, a garden of love where birds sing from dawn to twilight.

Mario De Stefani played first violin in the orchestra of the Hotel Bella Vista. He was a thin, undersized youth, with a profusion of black, curly hair and pale, oval face of the musician and student. He was born, I believe, near Naples, and like the majority of young Italians of the present day, an excellent musician.

Music to Mario was like the love of a beautiful woman—he lived for it alone, at first. Ah, but you should have heard him play his violin solo to the supper crowd at the Bella Vista. Dio mio! the bow between his thin, white fingers held them spellbound. And when he finished, my friend, the applause was deafening.

Early in May, Signore Rodolfo, the stout and amiable proprietor of the hotel, sent to Paris for two or three cabaret performers. He did this very much against his will and at the earnest request of his foreign guests, American and English, who were unhappy unless they had a vaudeville entertainment to give zest to their meals. My friend, it was an evil day when Rodolfo listened to them. I will tell you why.

There was sent to San Remo, Sonia Ribiera, a dancer from the Palais Municipal Hall in Paris, which had closed its

doors for the season. Mademoiselle Ribiera was exceedingly good to look upon. Her skin was so different from that of the girls of Genoa and Nice. Her lips—you can see I well remember—were a vivid scarlet, and wonderfully curved. When she danced, I can never forget it, her lithe, young body swayed to the melody of the strings like a joy-intoxicated fairy dancing in the moonlight. Ah, but she was exquisite, peerless! There were many who quickly realized this, and Mario was one of them.

The young man from Naples in all of his twenty-four years had never seen anyone like her. The first night she appeared, costumed for her dance, he sat staring at her, over his music-rack, with parted lips. It was as if he were gazing upon a beautiful vision, and when she danced, his subjugation was complete.

That night, high up under the roof of the great hotel, he fell asleep with her name on his lips.

Sonia craved admiration. When she saw the violinist of the Bella Vista's orchestra was casting adoring eyes upon her, she responded with heavy-lidded glances and demure little smiles that acted like champagne upon his romantic imagination. The dancer missed her Paris and anything in the way of a flirtation she welcomed at the moment. Mario, poor lad, did not know this. How could he? He thought his passion was being returned, and when he kissed her for the first time, one afternoon in the Roman Gardens, back of the hotel, all the worship in his Latin blood flared up.

"Adorata!" he murmured madly. "You will love me, always as I love you! You will love me forever—eternamente! Say it, swear it, piccina mia!"

Sonia, a little frightened, but thrilled by his ardor, laughed lightly.

"Saperletti!" she answered. "Of course. Have I not said it already, m'sieu? Have I not proved it?"

For the five weeks that followed, the youth lived in a heaven of his own making. Sonia, flattered at the worship and devotion that was hers, returned his love-making with all the acting she could conjure up for the occasion. When he clasped her to him and held against his heart, she even thrilled a little, and the kisses he snatched from her were flavored with the sunshine of the Riviera and as earnest as she could possibly make them. Ah, those moon-silvered nights of San Remo! They are made only for love, my friend, and no one knew this better than Mario. They were the happiest he had ever known or could know.

Then the inevitable occurred. Little by little glamour of it all faded away and Sonia failed to respond. The kisses she gave him were hurried. When he held her, she freed herself, gently but deftly. Poor Mario, none of this did he realize. To him she was still the exquisite creature—his first love—adored by him and adoring in turn. Too soon, alas, was he to awaken from his dream.

There came to the Bella Vista the wealthy Barone Antoni Scotti, from Rome, a short, stout Italian nobleman, bronzed by the sun of two continents and living only for the pleasure and enjoyment life yielded him. It chanced he had met the Ribiera in Paris, the season before and his delight in seeing her again was touching.

After her dance, that evening, at his table in a secluded corner of the dining-hall they resumed their acquaintance over a bottle of champagne, while Mario waited in the fragrant gloom of the gardens below and wondered why she did not appear.

"Well, mia cara," the Barone said,

filling her glass, himself. "We meet again in San Remo after many months. It is well. I had expected to remain here but one week—then Monte Carlo—"

"Quit! And now?"

He leaned across the table. "And now," he answered, "I shall stay until—until—you leave!"

"It has been very nice here," Sonia said pensively. "But I shall be glad to go. Dieu! one wears of a place, after a time, does one not?"

The Barone inclined his heavy head. "Certamente!" he answered heartily. "In your case, the case of one so charming, I would advise Venice . . . A gondolier on a moonlight night . . . you and I . . . eh, Signorina!"

It did not take very long for Mario to understand how matters stood. How could he help it? Scotti tagged at her heels like a fat and faithful watch-dog and his infatuation was common talk along the broad, white verandas of the Bella Vista. Indeed, Signore Rodolfo had to take the Ribiera aside and caution her to be more discreet. It did not look good, he said, to conduct a flirtation with a guest so openly. She laughed and promised.

My friend, when a woman has two strings to her bow, and when these same two strings come in contact, there is sure to be a discord. Is that not true? It was this way with the Barone and Mario, who, innocent of women's wiles, suspected nothing of Sonia and thought Scotti was trying to steal her from him.

He went to the Barone's suite, one morning and confronted him.

"The love of Sonia Ribiera is mine," he declared quietly. "She is not for you, sua altezza. Be advised, please, of this fact."

The Barone looking up from his morning paper stared in amazement, unable to credit what his ears had

heard. Then, at last when he finally did understand, the room shook with his mirth.

"Insect," he said, wiping the tears from his eyes, "report at once to Rodolfo and tell him I say your salary is to be doubled. You have given me the best laugh I have had in twelve years!"

Mario's face whitened and his voice, when he spoke, trembled.

"You have heard! If you persist I shall be compelled to—to—"

"Continue, by all means," Scotti said, as the young man hesitated to moisten his dry lips. "Your conversation is enjoyable."

Mario looked at him gravely.

"You see fit to jest. Very well—if you force your unwelcome attentions on Signorina Ribiera, in the future, I shall have to kill you!"

When he closed the door the Barone was still laughing.

Later, Mario met Sonia in the pergola at the water's edge and told her what he had informed the Barone.

"And," he concluded, "if he troubles you, I shall do what I have said."

"Mon Dieu!" the dancer cried, angrily. "Why did you say such a thing? He is my friend, my good friend! I knew him in Paris—before I knew you! You have insulted him!"

Mario silenced her with a gesture.

"That is true, but you have heard what they are saying," he replied, indicating the hotel back of them, with a motion of his hand. "I can not allow such talk."

Sonia jumped up.

"You can not allow it!" she said harshly, emphasizing her words with a stamp of her foot, "and who are you to prevent me from continuing my friendship with him?"

Mario steadied himself against the balcony rail.

"But—but—they say he loves you!"

She laughed cruelly.

"What of it?"

He looked at her, silent and stunned.

"What of it?" she repeated in a cool, level voice. "Am I compelled to care only for you? Dieu! We might just as well come to an understanding here—now. To be frank, monsieur, all is over between us. I thought you knew that, but it seems I must enlighten you."

The youth staggered and clutched the rail for support, gazing at her wildly.

"What—are you saying?" he whispered hoarsely. "Do you know what you have said! You can't mean—you doubt!"

She gave him an amused glance.

"I do, Signorina! You are a nice boy, but young. Some day you will learn, m'sieur, that a woman's love is the most fickle thing in all the world. Au revoir, and take it not to heart."

Dimly he heard the click of her high heels on the stone flagging. When he looked up she was gone. His head sank down on his arms, and when he finally raised it, minutes later, his dry eyes burned with a queer light.

II.

Sonia had introduced a new Spanish dance to the guests. Costumed as a cigarette girl in a gaudy shawl, and in her high-laced shoes, she danced a Castilian refrain to the music of castanets, a red rose between her lips. It was a languorous sort of dance, filled with the dreamy rhythm of Madrid and in it the Ribiera was at her best. It was her custom to glide to the table of the Barone, pause there, pirouette and then drop the rose from between her lips on his table, bow and run quickly off, followed by the rattling applause from the diners.

On the same evening that Mario's dream castle had tumbled down about his ears, there was a peculiar sort of tenseness in the air, preceding the

Spanish dance. You could only sense it, my friend. It was vague and shadowy but nevertheless, curious as it might seem, it was felt by all.

The usual opera selection completed, the orchestra began, pizzicato, the melody of the dance, and Sonia stepped gayly out and into the center of the floor, the customary red rose between her lips. Never did she dance as she danced that night! Dio! It was magnificent—incomparable! She was dancing for Scotti alone, and all knew it.

Round, round she whirled, accenting every other beat of the music with a stamp of her little foot and clacking her castanets in rapturous abandon.

At length she reached the nobleman's table. In a moment the dance would be over. Already you were pushing your plate aside so as to be ready to applaud. The rose fell from her lips on the table and the Barone smiled up in her face.

But she did not turn and run on as usual. Instead she stood there swaying. Then before one could catch a breath, she collapsed in a little heap at Scotti's feet.

III.

Over the room had fallen a hush. It was so still you could have heard a pin fall. This silence was suddenly broken by a voice from the musician's stand. It was Mario, leaning over, the same queer light blazing in his sunken eyes.

"Feel not her heart," he said calmly. "It is quite useless. It was poison—concealed in the stem of the rose. My compliments on your success, Barone. As she is, you may have her!"

Something glittered in his hand. There was a shout and the rush of many feet. But it was too late. There came the sound of a pistol shot, a sharp swift crack and the drift of acrid smoke.

The Call of Old Erin

By Elsie Endicott



H, John, darlint, that will not be the way to the hotel! Coom this way, this minute, you with the two feet av ye like mud cakes, for cause you wouldn't be after mindin' your Maria at the creek!"

Maria Maher, a gray haired, slender woman in black, seized the chubby hand of John Hartwell Nugent, Jr., but the five-year-old poked out a cunningly impudent red lip, and, twisting loose from her fingers, ran down the little street in front of the resort town's railroad station.

One end of the porch of the third unpainted house on the next narrow street was crowded with rustic ware—"log cabin" bird houses, hexagon shaped hanging baskets, cases and chairs. In a hanging basket, depending from the ceiling, some red brown leaves of shamrock grew thrifty, and from its handle a bit of faded green ribbon dangled, fluttering in the breeze.

The child ran up the steps. "What-chu-makin'?" he demanded in his soft

treble of the man who sat working at a bench, a cunningly put together thing of laurel and rhododendron branches, and gnarled and twisted roots.

"Oh, John, darlint!" protested the panting Maria. "You will be after pardonin' his impudence, sor—'tis many a day he is from a man yet!"

The worker, an alert little man of sixty, with limpid blue eyes, turned. "Sure," he protested, with an engaging smile, "is ut that I look like a body that does not know a child from a grown-up?"

When Maria returned in the dusk, with her charge, to the Mountain View, where on their way home from Florida little John's parents had stopped for the month of March, to play golf and bridge, she had tucked in her belt a bit of shamrock and her eyes were brighter than the stars beginning to come out over the mountain. It had been so long since she had talked with any one of her own age from the "old sod," and old Michael Bowers, the rustic furniture maker, understood and appreciated the things of her youth.

Very early the next morning after

their visit to the rustic furniture man little John reminded her, "The stick man said I could go on the mountain with him when he went for more sticks this morning, Maria!"

To his surprise Maria needed no urging. The little company had climbed more than two miles up the mountain road, past groves of laurel and patches of rhododendron before Bowers began to cut out his sticks and roots.

"Sure, there be plenty of shrubbery all-along," Maria wondered. "Why not get the timber closer by the town?"

Bowers laughed. "Plinty, indade, frind, but the closeby mountain sides belong to the man that owns the hotel where ye and the child's people do be stopping. And these rich wans won't let ye get a twig off their lands; no, not even if they have no use for it theisee's at all—at all! So I gather my wood af a frind's lands up here."

"'Tis the way they do things in Ireland, too," remarked Maria. Bowers smiled grimly. "There were lakes close where I were born and lived to my twentieth year, with many a meal o' fish in 'em, and my father and my mother livin' on pitatus the year

round! The landlord were kapin' thim lakes for his sportin' frinds. Sure, didn't I pass part o' me time in prison fer fishin' an thim lakes?"

"'Tis the fine bold lad ye must ha' been!" commented Maria.

Bowers laid down his grubbing hoe and looked at her with a whimsical smile.

"Sure, Michael Flanagan Bowers is the fine, bold lad yet, and ye know him well, and when the loneliness is not pressin' on him! Since I'm not young any more, and can't travel aisy from place to place, from wans state to another, I've got me a home to stay in, but sometimes I'm the lonely wan!"

"'Tis me that's tired of the travelin'!" commented Maria. "But a noorse must go with thim sh's workin' fer, an the rich ones must be eternally chainin' the warrum in winter and the cool in summer. You'd think they lived in prison houses, the little time they kape to their homes. Sure, I think 'tis fine to have a home to stay in, and had I a pot of gold I'd buy me one!"

"There's a crock of gold behind a deep pool in Donegal," observed Bowers, "that'd buy many a home!"

Maria sighed. "Don't I wish that crock of gold were in these two hands of mine?"

"I'll go get the crock of gold fer you, Maria," little John made generous offer.

"But the water in the pool—it's deep, deep down, little man," objected Bowers.

"Not over Maria's head?" persisted John. "She could wade and get it herself."

"It's over Maria's head, an' beyond the pool's a great snake, a hundred feet long, that lies by the creek day and night."

"I don't want the old snake, to get Maria!" wailed John.

"Hush, mavourneen, there is no snake and no gold! You must have been a fennachie in Ireland, the way you tell tales here," she said to Bowers.

"Would you believe me, an' I told you a tale that you might some day get a home, an' ye wanted it, without money and without price?" he asked.

That evening when Maria's charge was asleep she bent over him with wistful tenderness. "For all you're a terror the times," she whispered, "this

Irish fool's a lovin' you, and she'd hate to give you up, but—"

"'Tis the best cookin' I've ate since I left the old sod," Bowers declared wistfully the next time Maria and little John were out with him, and Maria produced a picnic lunch she had prepared herself. "When you are gone to the north, mavourneen, I'll get no more picnic dinners like these."

"For three words I'd not go to the north," burned in Maria's heart. "For the love of Mike, say thim, man!" she thought.

At the end of the week Mrs. Nugent informed Maria that in answer to a telegram in two days they would start for New England. That night there was no sleep for Maria, but it was near dusk the next evening before her mind was made up. Just before sunset she led little John past Bowers' house. His face lighted at sight of her.

"Is there anywhere I could be speaking to you without the whole town to be listening to, what we'd be saying?" she asked him.

High up on the mountainside Bowers stooped to gather a spray of the pink arbutus. "'Tis the pink av it lax leaves,

you're in your cheeks the day," he said to her.

"I want to tell you something, Michael," she quavered, unnoticing. "I—there was once a nurse gettin' old. She agreed on a paper shed stay with a pair until their child was 12, if then they'd give her \$2,000 above regular wage. If she left before that time she'd not get the money. But she met a man she loved, and she—she thought the man loved her—but he has not spoke. She—she has to go away. What ought she to do, Michael?"

Michael's blue eyes twinkled. He took hold of her arms and looked into her troubled eyes. "An' I was the man she was lovin', I'd say. 'Tear up the paper and take me, mavourneen. My home down there is achin' fer the all the time touch o' your feet. Take me, and ye'll never have sorrow in satisfaction for it."

The glory of happiness filled and lifted Maria. The sun had gone down, but on the far side of the river there was still a streak of gold on the tops of the mountains. She drew the paper from her bosom and, tearing it in bits, scattered them among the shining gables.

Changes Wrought by Misfortune

By Phil Moore



HAT appeared to have once been a magnificent old mansion had, through the reaches of commercialism, been turned into a busy little mart. The old house had become a candy shop. Beside the door dwelt a black and gilt sign. "Ye Olde Colonial Candy Shoppe." Nothing more or less. More was not needed, for everybody in the old coast town knew the quality of the candy behind that sign.

Much of the candy was made in the rooms behind the shop by an old candymaker and his wife, who also lived there. Mary Garner and her mother occupied the rooms upstairs. Mrs. Garner was almost an invalid, but she managed to get the meals and do a little dusting, and sometimes when Mary had to go out she came down and sat behind the counter. Mary tended shop and a great many times people who did not care much for candy went in there just to see her. Not because she was beautiful were they

curious concerning her—although she had looks that many a woman who owned a yacht and a limousine and a summer place might have envied—but because she who had once been rich and a belle and had come of one of the oldest families in the state was now presiding over a candy shop in the very town where her haughty ancestors lived.

Mary knew this, but she sold them candy as calmly as if she did not. Nothing could undo her composure. She had made one swift step from the past to the present in Ye Olde Colonial Candy Shoppe. Misfortune had overtaken her in a night. She had been in the height of her happiness; her debut still a topic of conversation; her engagement to Nicholas French just announced, when her father shot himself and precipitated the ruin of his affairs. The shock nearly killed Mary's mother, but Mary herself was braver. When she found that everything they had in the world belonged to somebody else and that the man she believed in had forsaken her and that her own head and hands must provide every bit of bread she ate in the future as well as

every necessity for her feeble mother, she stood up and squared her shoulders to the burden. The candy shop was an inspiration. She rented the old Doubleday house, whose situation made it desirable, and opened her business. A single season made her candy famous.

One day a most beautiful yacht came into the harbor. From the narrow street that twisted past Ye Olde Colonial Candy Shoppe Mary saw the funnel and spars and snapping pennon of the vessel. Somehow she thought of Nicholas French; he had almost passed from her mind as from her existence. The last she had heard of him he had gone yachting round the world.

She was not disconcertingly surprised when that afternoon she turned from her shelves to see him standing at her counter, the same courtly gentleman with the same selfish heart.

"How do you do, Mary?" he said, and held out his hand. She gave him her finger briefly. "Fine little place you have here! You're looking well. How is your mother's health?" He was embarrassed. Mary smiled a little.

"Mother is frail, but cheerful, thank you."

"Quaint idea, this shop!" French went on. "Mary—"

Another customer entered and then another. He had no chance to say more. So he bought a box of salted almonds and went away. But Mary knew that he would come again.

She did not want him to come again. He was not changed, but she was materially. She wondered how she had ever come to engage herself to him. It was not because he was rich, for then she had no need to covet riches. It could not have been because she loved him. "Girls are such fools," she thought. "He was romance itself to me. But he hadn't a spark of heroism in him. When trouble came he failed me. He went away and then he wrote that letter, so carefully worded, and yet I knew what he meant. He wished me to free him. And I did. I was more disgusted than heartbroken. No, I certainly did not love him, and I love him less now, because I see him more plainly. I would not trade my candy shop and present security for all he possesses. But, then, I shall

never have the chance."

That evening after the shop was closed and her mother had retired and the old candy workers had gone to sit beside their lamp, Mary went into the garden of the old Doubleday house to sit alone and breathe the air. It was a neglected garden, yet lovely still with its fringes of hollyhocks and mats of feverfew, columbine and love-in-the-mist. Mary sat down on the bench under the dwarfed sumac, with her face toward the harbor, which glittered with lights. The sound of a band playing there and the bells of the yachts came to her on the salt breeze. She clasped her hands behind her head and leaned back resting and dreaming.

Presently she turned her head and saw a man standing within ten feet of where she sat, looking wistfully at her. He was very tall and dark and strong looking. His head was bare, and his negligee shirt showed his magnificent throat.

"Fairland, isn't it, over there?" he said and pointed with his pipe. "Don't you wish you were there, Mary, where they're dancing and laughing? You

belong there."

"Oh, no, Dan, I belong here," Mary said. "Sit down." She made room for him beside her.

He crouched forward with his pipe between his hands, letting it trail its smoke into the air unnoticed. Every night he came up the steps from the house below and they sat together talking. They had done it for three years, and yet somehow to-night was not like all the other evenings they had passed together.

"That's French's yacht where all those lights are," he said. Mary did not answer. "Mother said she saw him going into your shop today."

"Yes."

"Mary! He didn't want just candy. He wanted to see— you. They say he's wild over you, and that's why he's come back. I heard him talking myself today on the wharf to Bert Merrilbert. 'I saw her,' he said. 'Heavens, Bert, what a fool I was to give her up. She's worth all the women I ever knew. And I'm going to have her now.' Those were his words."

Mary put out her hand and laid it ever so lightly on the big shoulder

nearest her. "Dan! Dan!" she chided gently.

He buried his face in his hands. "He'll win," he said. "I've always been afraid of him. He's got everything to win with. I haven't. I'm only the harbor-master—a fisherman's son to begin with. Love is about all I've got to give you."

"Love is enough," interrupted Mary. "Mary!"

"Dan!"

For a moment they looked into each other's eyes. And then she was in his arms.

"But I can't give up my candy shop even for you, Dan," Mary said presently. "You must take me, candy shop and all. I'm awfully attached to the candy shop."

He laughed. "God love the candy shop," he cried, "stnee it brought you within my reach!"

Too Suggestive.

Sandy Pikes—You didn't remain at de wayside cottage long? Gritty George—No, de lady was too poetical. She pointed over to de sunset and said de clouds reminded her of bars of steel. I thought it was time to beat it."