

## Chapter 28

Tonight the Madonna made a miracle to help me. Listen what happened.

You know Mis' Bliss, the new housekeeper, she all the time comes in the kitchen, and such a fussing she makes. She's a kind lady, she never scolds nobody, but she wants everything made with such fussing that she makes me really dizzy. For thirty years I've done the cooking when the cook's away, and she thinks I don't know how? She has to help me? Well she came in the kitchen tonight and she was fixing the leaf on the salads, and fixing the dish for the potato with the parsley, and decorating this, and decorating this. I got so nervous I forgot all about those tomatoes on the stove. When I smelled them they were all caught black on the bottom. I didn't know what to do! All those tomatoes-lots, because we had forty people tonight. Oh, I was brokenhearted. I put that kettle in some cold water, and I was tasting, then Mis' Bliss was tasting. Those tomatoes tasted terrible burnt. Mis'Bliss said, "Well, it's too bad, but we can't help it. We'll open the can of peas, that's all."

I was almost crying-what a sin to waste all that good food. And I started praying the Madonna. I prayed with all my heart, what I can do to make those tomatoes come good again. All at once it came [end page 241] in my mind to go in the pantry and get some of that black spice--clover, cloves? I put some of that clove spice in a clean kettle with that tomato, and some sugar too. Then I cooked it up a little and I tasted. I could no more taste the burn--it even tasted good. I said, "Oh, Mis' Bliss, taste now! Just taste!"

She tasted and she said, "Well I don't know, but I don't think I taste the burn.

Then she tasted again and she said, "It's good, It's all right after all."

Just think how I was thanking the Madonna that she put in my mind about that clove spice! I never in my life heard to put that stuff in tomatoes. But when I told Mis' Bliss the Madonna made that miracle, she looked at me funny, like she thought I imagined. But that was true! The Madonna is the mother of us poor women. She helps us all the time. In the old time there were more miracles than now, but I see lots of miracles-in Chicago too. The Madonna and the Saints, they all the time make miracles to help me out. I all my life keep the good faith and the strong religion, that's why.

One time I saw a great miracle the Madonna did. She didn't make the miracle for me, but I say it anyway. Oh, I told the whole world that story--I told everybody. The residents in the Commons, and the residents in Hull House, and the residents in a lot of those other settlement houses in Chicago, and all the women in the Mothers' Clubs know that story.

One society of Sicilians they were making the festa with the stands to sell the pop and snails and they had those gamble things and the big fireworks and all like they do. Then Sunday afternoon they took the Madonna from the Church of the Addolorata and made the procession all through the streets. It was that Madonna with the Baby in her arms.

Well, that Sunday afternoon I came to the Commons to make the supper for the residents like I always do. And one of those nice new residents came in the kitchen after and dried the dishes for me. So I got done early and I came out to

go home. Right there by the corner of the Commons the procession was stopped and the men from the society were all running around to gather up the paper money to pin on the ribbons of the Madonna. That Madonna was beautiful and [end page 242] so big it took eight men to carry the platform. So the procession was standing there and here came the streetcar on the street in front. I saw it that the motorman had the intentions to go past--he didn't even slow down--so I said it's no use to run, I've got to wait for the next car. That motorman went half past the corner, then bang! He stopped that car so quick he made the people fall over themselves, His face was white like the ghost, and his eyes so big. He held up his hands together toward the Madonna. Then he was blessing himself, and he kept on fast making the cross and all the time looking to the Madonna. I looked to see what he was seeing. And there I saw the Madonna all light and more beautiful than she was. Beautiful! And her eyes were looking at that motorman.

I said, "I'm going to take that car! I'm going to talk to that motorman!"

I ran across the street and climbed on the car. When I came on the front, there that motorman was standing with his arms hanging down still looking in the face of the Madonna. When I asked him about it, he said, "Did you see it too! Did you see!"

I said, "Well, I don't know if I saw what you saw, but I saw the Madonna all beautiful and shining, and I think she looked at you."

"Oh, me lady, me lady," he said. (Sure he was the Irish--he all the time kept on saying "me lady.") "You saw it? Oh, but you didn't see it like I saw it! She made me stop the car! She turned her head and commanded me! But those eyes--I

can never forget!"

The officers from the society had to come and make that motorman go, or I guess he wouldn't go yet.

The feste and the processions in the old country, in Lombardy, oh, I used to love them. In Bugiaro everybody was reverent to the Madonna and the saints, even us little children. Our mothers hung out from the windows all what they had beautiful--the red shawl, the yellow silk bed quilt, the best sheet with the lace on--all what they had--to decorate the street. Then a lot of men came from Milano and put up the stands in the piazza and sold everything like a carnival. They had some gambling things too like in this country, and show people came and walked the tightrope. Everybody had a grand time. [end page 243] But when they carried the Madonna out from the church, all was quiet--everybody was reverent. But the feste the Italian people make here in Chicago, me, I think with Father Alberto, it's not right. It's not right to take the Holy Madonna out in the streets of Chicago where so many people have not our religion. The American men smoke and chew and keep on the hat when the Holy Virgin goes by. That's not right! Father Alberto doesn't like it that they take the saints and the Madonna on the streets of Chicago. But never again will they take the crucifix. Never since that terrible punishment God sent the boss of the Sicilian society. Everybody was telling about that a year after. He's that big, black man with the pop-out eyes. He was living in the rooms behind when I was living in the front of that red building across from the Commons. Joe, they called him. Joe, he was the president of one of those Sicilian societies. He was the whole

thing, like a boss. And that man liked to make a big show. He wanted to make a grand festa on the streets. So the society had made a big, big crucifix, painted up beautiful-all red blood coming down the face, and the cross to look like gold, and everything beautiful. Those men took the crucifix by our priest in the Italian church and the priest blessed it. Then they made the procession. Oh, the streets were decorated wonderful-they looked like heaven, with all different colored electric lights. And there were the stands to sell the snails, to sell the pop, to sell the pieces of watermelon, and all kinds of gamble things. And the fireworks, I don't know how much those fireworks cost! You could hear them five miles away. The streets were chuckful, packed-down with people when they carried the crucifix. Twelve men it took to carry the platform, and three men did nothing else but pin the money on the ribbons. So much money! (But I guess the society spent all on the festa, anyway.)

So when they were through they had no place to put the big crucifix, and they asked Father Alberto if he wanted to take it in the church. Our priest said he would take it but they must not come back to take it on the streets again. So all right, all right. And Father Alberto put it up over the altar in front. But then Joe decided he'd like to make another festa. He went by the priest and said he was taking out the crucifix. Father Alberto said it was not right, but Joe wanted it [end page 244] anyway. "You take it out, you keep it," said the priest. "You can't bring it back here."

So they made another big feast, and when it was over Father Alberto said no-what he had said, he had said, that's all. So then they went by the priest in the

Irish church. The Irish priest said he'd take the crucifix if they wouldn't come back and take it out again. So all right, all right. But next year, just the same, Joe came back and said he was taking the crucifix. The priest said, "You take it, you don't bring it back here. It's not right."

So after the procession those men didn't know what to do. The Italian church wouldn't take it, and the Irish wouldn't take it. Joe said, "We'll keep it ourselves, that's all." So they made a shed, like a big cupboard, beside one building in the alley. But a terrible storm came and knocked the shed down. Joe said, "Now what'll we do? I'll take it in my own house."

Me, I saw with my own eyes when they brought that crucifix up the stairs and were trying to carry it into the little room in front. I even got the shock, Jesus looked so big! And here, even before they had it stood up, there came such a scream-the whole street below was one scream! And there they brought up the little boy of Joe-the only son he had-cut in pieces by the automobile. They laid that little boy dead on the table in front of his father.

Joe, his face went white like the blotting paper, but he shut his mouth tight.

He didn't swear one word. He just grabbed up the cover from the bed and threw it over the crucifix. He knew that he deserved that punishment. But think what a terrible punishment-his only son!

So then Joe went by Father Alberto. Father Alberto saw he was converted and had suffered enough, so he took that crucifix in the Italian church and put it way up next to the ceiling where no one can get it down. (But it burnt up with the church now.) And Joe never again made the festa. And nobody, nobody can take the

crucifix on the streets of Chicago.

Sometimes God punishes me too. He punished me when I did the fortune-telling in the teacup. I learned it from one lady that was working at the Commons, and I knew I could tell better than her, so I [end page 245] used to do it to make the entertainment. I just told the people to make fun. I said they're going to have luck, and I see a letter, and a little animal-maybe a cat-and this, and this.

But pretty soon I saw it, some of those ladies kind of believed me. Even one of the residents used to wrap up her cup and bring it to me. So one time I was trying to think what I could tell the priest in the confession and it came in my mind that maybe the fortune-telling is a sin. When I told the priest I made the fortune-telling in the teacup, but just for fun, oh, he almost licked me! I can no more tell all he said. "Just for fun! For fun you put the thorns on Jesus' head! For fun you make him die! For fun!"

"But no, Father! I don't say nothing bad-nothing strong. A letter, a little money, a party. Why's that a sin? "

He said, "No, you must not do it! You have to stop!"

After a while Tillie, that Irish lady in the dining room, she came with her teacup again and teased and teased. She teased so much I told her just some little thing to keep her still. Then I told her she mustn't believe, because if she believed, it was a sin.

When I told the little new priest in confession, oh my, oh mercy! He said, "You're a woman and I think you have more sense than that! You make a mortal sin! That's a mortal sin! You're half in hell already!"

"Oh Father, don't say that! I didn't know it was a mortal sin! I didn't know."

"Yes," he said, "and you've got to swear to God at the altar that you never again will do the fortune-telling. You've got to swear." He gave me the absolution, but he made me swear to God by the altar that I never again would tell the fortune in the teacup.

When Tillie came with her teacup, I said, "Never again. I'm sorry, but I can't. I had to swear to God." She's not Catholic, Tillie. She's a funny religion I don't know, but I wish you could hear how she cursed the priest that he won't let me tell her fortune.

So then one day I looked in my own cup. I saw there some railroad tracks and a big fat woman. I said, "That looks like me fallen down. That's really me."

And sure enough that night when I started home from my work, I stepped down too quick from the sidewalk and one foot twisted [end page 246] over. I fell down in the street and I got the sprained ankle. I can't get up to go on the streetcar.

A little boy came by with his wagon and he let me ride on that cart. He took me home, and there I had to stay two weeks. For two weeks I can't go to my work! You see it? That's the punishment I got from God. After I swore to Him by the altar, He wouldn't even let me tell the fortune to myself.

Another time I had such a terrible year-a most unlucky time. For many, many years all us poor women in the Mothers' Club in the Commons, we make the Christmas play. Twenty years I had been Saint Joseph in the Christmas play. Most times we went up on the stage and just acted those parts and some high-educated lady read the story from behind the curtain. But one year we had the talking

play. So they wanted a king to talk in Italian and they gave that part to me. I like to do the talking on the stage and Saint Joseph didn't have any talking. They gave that part of Saint Joseph to Mis' Stefano. But that year I stopped being Saint Joseph and was a king, that was a most, most unlucky year! My Maria died, my Luie had the operation, and my husband was sick with the gallstones. I said, "Never again win I stop being Saint Joseph! " And I sure never did. Some of those new teachers that come to the Commons just to teach the Christmas play they get cross with me-they want to give somebody else that part-but I don't let them. I say, "No! Twenty years I've been Saint Joseph, you don't give it to somebody else now! " To heck with those new teachers! If God wants me to be Saint Joseph, I'm going to be, that's all. I don't want another unlucky year like that time. Never again. [end page 247]