

Brandeis Madeline

# Little Tony of Italy



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**Little Tony of Italy**

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### PREFACE

When I began to write these stories about children of all lands I had just returned from Europe whither I journeyed with Marie and Ref. Maybe you don't know Marie and Ref. I'll introduce them: Please meet Marie, my very little daughter, and Ref, my very big reflex camera.

These two are my helpers. Marie helps by being a little girl who knows what other little girls like and by telling me; and Ref helps by snapping pictures of everything interesting that Marie and I see on our travels. I couldn't get along without them.

Several years have gone by since we started our work together and Marie is a bigger girl – but Ref hasn't changed one bit. Ref hasn't changed any more than my interest in writing these books for you. And I hope that *you* hope that I'll never change, because I want to keep on writing until we'll have no more countries to write about – unless, of course, some one discovers a new country.

Even if a new country isn't discovered, we'll find foreign children to talk about – maybe the children in Mars! Who knows? Nobody. Not even Marie – and Marie usually knows about most things. That's the reason why, you see, though I sign myself

*I am really only  
Marie's Mother.*

## CHAPTER I

### TONY AND TINAS

It was love at first sight.

It happened as Tony was sauntering along a noisy street in Naples. One of the noisiest, oldest, and dirtiest streets.

Cries, songs, laughter, scoldings filled the air. And smells! But not the smell of roses.

Tony's brown hands were stuffed in his ragged pockets. A never-mind whistle was on his saucy lips.

But suddenly he stopped. He planted his legs apart and stared. There, on the steps of a church, she sat. Her beautiful, pitiful brown eyes looked up at Tony.

She had a bewitching face. It was a white face; thin and rather sad.

"Hungry?" asked Tony.

Then, without waiting for a reply, he added, "Come along. I'll buy you something to eat."

He jingled coins in his pockets. His mouth curved at the corners. He had black eyes and they gleamed.

They started off together, when, all at once, she stopped and would go no farther.

"Come," urged Tony. "Don't be afraid. I have money. See? I begged it of the Americans at the big hotel."

He drew the coins from his pocket and showed them to her. But she only stood and gazed at him with those mournful, brown eyes. Tony's black ones snapped.

"Avanti! (Forward!)" he cried. "What makes you stand like a donkey? See, I have enough to buy you all the food you can eat. I am clever."

He smiled roguishly.

"I cry before the foreigners," he continued. "I rub my stomach, so! I say, 'Ah, I die of hunger!'"

He made a frightful face and patted his stomach.

But she only looked at him and did not move. Yet there was admiration in her eyes.

"Then," he went on, "they feel sorry for me and they say, 'Poor boy! Beautiful boy! We must give him some money!' So they do that!"

He laughed and showed his white teeth. But not she. There was something very serious about her.

Tony had a temper. Angrily, he now stooped and picked her up. She did not resist. In fact, her fluffy tail wagged heartily and she began to lick his face.

She seemed to be saying, "I am forbidden to go with you. But if you take me, what can I do?"

Tony bought meat from a street vender. He put her down and fed her out of his hand. She ate hungrily. Her little ribs showed plainly through the dirty white hair of her body.

When she finished, Tony picked her up again. He should have taken her back to the church steps. She belonged to the Marionette show around the corner. She was a trained dog.

But Tony did not know this. He only knew that he loved the little dog very much, that he could not live another day without her.

Determinedly, he tucked her under his arm and started toward home.

He stuffed the remaining meat inside his shirt. It was not a very clean shirt, anyway, so a little meat did not make much difference.

Tony was an orphan. Nobody ever said to him, "Take your bath!" "Have you washed your ears?"

He lived with an old woman in the back of a very old house. Everything was old on this street. Everything but the children – and there were many of them.

It was a poor and crowded street. People sat outside their doors all day long. They worked and played and ate outside.

But now Tony ran inside quickly to look for the old woman.

"Look! Look!" he cried. "I have found a poor, lost little dog!"

The old woman was deaf.

"The dog is hurt?" she screamed. She glared at the frightened animal which lay quite still in Tony's arms.

"No!" yelled Tony. "I found her and I am going to keep her!"

"You are not going to keep her!" shrilled the old woman.

Then she peered more closely at Tony.

"What is that?" she asked. "Ah, meat inside your shirt! You have been feeding animals again. Ah!"

Her mouth fell open. A light of recognition came into her eyes.

"Dio Mio!" she gasped. "It is the trained dog of Guido, the Marionette Man! You have stolen it! Ah, Madonna, now you are a thief!"

Tony shrank. His face grew almost as white as the dog's. A thief! Of course, Tony knew that often he did not tell the truth. But then, it was sometimes much easier to make up falsehoods. And much more fun! Besides, he never told stories that would do anyone harm.

But to steal? That was a different thing.

He had not known that the dog belonged to the Marionette show.

"You are not satisfied with telling lies," went on the excited old woman. "But now you must steal besides! Come, you child of Satan!"

She threw a tattered shawl about her shoulders.

"We are going to take the dog back to Guido!" she announced.

She led Tony away briskly. She was a witch-like old woman. But still, she had cared for Tony since his parents had died and left him alone.

She had cared for him in giving him a home and something to eat. But that was all. She had not tried to teach him the things that real parents teach their children – things like the beauty of truth. Perhaps if she had done this, Tony might have been different.

As it was, he was a lying little rascal with the face of an angel. He had no thought but for song and story – and, of course, for animals!

They found Guido at his tiny theatre. The old woman pushed Tony up to the Marionette Man, the dog nestling in his arms.

"Here is your dog, Mr. Guido!" The old woman's voice was sharp like her nose. Tony, who liked beautiful sounds, hated to hear her talk.

"This – this – lost child of a thousand devils brought it home," she croaked. "What will he do next? I am disgraced!"

Guido took the dog from Tony's arms. Guido was dark and oily. He smiled. But Tony did not smile. Two big tears stood in his eyes. His rosy mouth did not curl. It trembled.

"So you love my Tina very much, yes?" asked Guido. He laid his hand on Tony's little brown cap. "You would like to own her, eh?"

"What do you say?" screamed the old woman. "Talk louder! I cannot hear."

"The boy would like to own the dog," repeated Guido, louder.

"He would like to own the world!" shrieked the old woman.

She started to drag Tony away, but he escaped her and ran back to Guido.

"Let me stay with you!" he cried.

Then he lowered his voice so the old woman could not hear what he said.

"The witch is cruel to me," he whined. "She beats me every morning. Ah, I am not happy."

"What is that? What is he saying?" squealed the old woman, straining to hear.

But Tony kept his voice low.

"Let me live with you, sir!" he went on. "I am a good boy and always do as I am told!"

Tony's guardian took hold of the Marionette Man's sleeve.

"Please, sir," she implored. "You must not believe the tales Tony tells you. I am sure they are lies. I have been good to him. But each day he comes home with pockets empty. Yet I know he has begged money from the foreigners and has spent it on the way home."

Guido gave Tony an amused look.

The old woman continued, "Always animals!" she groaned. "This stupid child would feed every cat, dog, goose, and donkey while I starve!"

In a way, the old woman was right. Tony did just this with his money. He spent it on food for stray animals.

Or, sometimes he gave it to beggars who sat on church steps. They were not so fortunate as he. For he was beautiful to look at and people always believed his sad tales. He was a splendid actor.

He also knew that the old woman had enough for herself. So why should he bring home his pennies when men and beasts starved on the streets?

But he did not put it this way to his guardian. It was so much easier to turn his pockets inside out and say, with a roguish smile, "Niente! (Nothing!)"

"How would you like me to take the lad to live with me?" asked Guido, the Marionette Man.

"Heaven protect you, sir!" cried the old woman. "You do not know Tony!"

But here she was wrong, for Guido did know Tony. He had often watched him on the streets, begging. Such a clever child would be able to help in the Marionette show.

"Let me have him," said Guido, pleasantly. "I am not afraid of little boys who do not tell the truth. I will teach him as I teach my little trained dog, eh?"

He laughed and looked into Tony's eyes. Tony smiled at him and brushed away the tears.

"Yes, I will come to live with you – and with the little dog," he said. "Then I can be with her always!"

"Yes, indeed," agreed Guido. He turned to the old woman. "Are you willing?" he asked.

"Willing?" she cried. "Do you ask one who suffers with toothache if he is willing to part with the aching tooth? He is a rascal and cares nothing for me. Indeed I am willing to let you keep him. Yet –"

She hesitated. A softer expression came over her face.

"You must promise to be good to him," she added. "His mother was my friend. When she died she left him in my care. For her sake, you must promise to treat Tony well."

"I shall treat him as if he were my own," replied Guido, the Marionette Man.

## CHAPTER II

### TONY AND THE BALILLA

Several weeks passed. Tony was living with Guido.

Each day the Marionette Man sent him to the hotels to beg. Each evening he had to help with the show. He set the tiny stage and dusted the theatre.

If he did not do his work properly, Guido would smile and say, "No supper tonight for lazy people!"

This would not have mattered so much to Tony if it had not been for Tina. But when Tony did not eat, then neither did Tina.

The small scraps that Guido threw to the dog were not enough to keep her alive. So Tony always divided his meals with the friend he loved.

Today, as usual, Tony, with his dog, trudged along on his way to the hotels. Once there, he stood outside of one and waited. Two foreign ladies appeared at the door. Immediately, tears gathered in Tony's eyes. He ran up to them eagerly.

"Ah, dear ladies, I am a poor, orphan boy!" he moaned in Italian. Then he burst into English: "No mudder! No fadder!" he wailed.

The ladies looked at him pityingly. But just then the hotel manager came out.

"Go along!" he commanded Tony. "You are not allowed here. Run!"

He shooed Tony as if he had been stray chickens. Tony scampered a few feet away. When the hotel manager had gone, he again began to make mournful signs to the strange ladies.

But now they only laughed and shook their heads, for they knew what a scamp he was. So Tony laughed, too, and began to sing good-naturedly. A Naples street boy is like that.

The ladies drove off in a carriage and as they passed they threw money to the rascal. You see, nobody ever took the trouble to explain things to Tony. Foreigners enjoyed his pretty acting, which only spoiled him.

For several hours Tony stayed around the hotels, dodging hotel managers, and crying his way into the hearts of strangers. Then, he started toward the place he called home, walking along the broad drive that faces the Bay of Naples.

Naples is built like a giant theatre stage. The shore is where the plays take place. The shining Bay is the vast blue audience.

Out, facing the shore, is the famous Castle of the Egg. Many stories are told about this historical building.

It was once the home of Lucullus, a Roman general who was very fond of eating.

One legend tells that the poet, Virgil, put an enchanted egg between the walls of the castle. So long as this egg remained in its place, the city of Naples was supposed to be safe.

But the real reason for the castle's strange name is, no doubt, its egg-like shape.

High up on a hill of Naples is a park of rare beauty. From here one looks down upon the island of Nisida. Like the Castle of the Egg, this island was once the home of great Roman generals. Today they are both prisons.

But let us go back and find Tony. He now turned into the crowded part of the city where the noise and the smells begin. He felt more at home there. He stopped and bought a meal of fresh fish for Tina at a small stand.

Then he stuffed himself full of macaroni and candies. At last he had only a few pennies left.

A boy in uniform had been watching Tony. He was dressed in olive-green breeches and black shirt. He wore a small cap with a tassel on it.

He belonged to the Balilla, the Italian Boy Scouts. The Government is directing them in sports and work of all kinds. They are growing up to be strong and loyal to their country.

"Hello," said the boy to Tony.

"Good-bye," said Tony to the boy.

He began to saunter off.

"Wait," said the boy. "I would like to speak with you."

Now, every young Italian hopes to join the Balilla. So, of course, Tony did, too. But how could a little beggar, who had hardly enough to eat, expect to belong to such a grand company?

Tony did not even want to talk with this modern son of Italy.

"I must go," he mumbled.

But the boy walked over to him and began to speak earnestly.

"I just noticed that you were very hungry," he said. "Why was that?"

Tony's eyes gleamed angrily. "Because I had eaten too much!" he snapped.

What right had this fellow to detain and mock him because he was poor?

"I mean no harm," said the lad. "I only want to help you. Do you know that you may join the Balilla if you want to?"

"I?" inquired Tony.

"Yes, you, or any other boy who wishes to join."

"But I have no money to pay for the uniform," said Tony.

"If you cannot pay, the State will give you a uniform. Every boy in Italy should belong to the Balilla."

As he said this he saluted. His arm shot out stiffly, the palm of his hand exposed. He drew himself up like a soldier.

"It is fine to march with a band," he went on. "The State will help to educate you and will send you to a seaside camp in summer."

"A poor boy like me?" Tony's eyes were wide.

The other smiled. "Have you never heard how the Balilla started?" he asked.

Then he told Tony about another poor boy who had lived in Genoa years ago. When the Austrians attacked his city, he threw a stone and started an uprising. The enemy was driven away.

"That boy's name was 'Balilla,'" explained Young Italy. "Before he threw the stone, he went forward with the words, 'Shall I begin?'"

Tony's face shone with pleasure.

"Shall I begin? Shall I begin?" he muttered to himself. Why not? It would be glorious to march through the parks, waving banners. He would study hard and learn to be a soldier.

But then, Tony thought of the training and discipline. He did not want to be trained. He wanted to run wild and beg money of foreigners.

And what of Tina? There would be no place for a little dog in a military group of boys.

Besides, Guido would never allow him to join. Guido needed him.

But suppose he should run away from Guido? Oh, then he felt sure that the Marionette Man would starve Tina.

Tony always saw that the dog had enough to eat. It was he who cared for her, dressed her in her fancy costume and put her through her little tricks between each act of the puppet show.

She slept with Tony and did not have to shiver outside any more. No, Tony could not leave Tina!

"Will you come with me now?" asked Young Italy. "Will you begin?"

Tony wiped the traces of macaroni from his mouth. He looked straight at the boy in uniform.

"I do not wish to join," he lied.

Then he ran off.

When he reached home Guido asked, "Where is the money?"

Tony handed him two pennies.

Guido laughed. "The rest! Come, that is not all!"

"It is all," said Tony.

He was not even thinking of what he was saying. He was thinking only of the Balilla and of the words, "Shall I begin?"

"If you do not give me all the money, you and the dog will get no supper tonight!" growled Guido. "Come, how much did you make?"

"Shall I begin?" muttered Tony.

Guido looked at him curiously. Had he lost his wits?

"What are you mumbling about?" asked the Marionette Man.

Tony shrugged his shoulders. "I should lie if I told you!" he answered.

This was Tony's favorite expression. It means "I don't know" in the language of Naples. But in Tony's language it meant exactly what it said!

## CHAPTER III

### NIKI

Italy! When you hear the word do you think, as I do, of beautiful paintings and music? Of organ grinders, macaroni, and marionettes?

The finest little marionette actors (or puppets) are made in Italy. Naples is where they have been most popular.

Today there are few left. Motion pictures have come to Naples as to every other city in the world.

Guido's theatre was a small place with crude, wooden benches. Tony helped Guido work the puppets. Mrs. Guido played the squeaky piano.

But the marionettes were really handsome. There were Kings and Queens in velvet and purple. Knights in armour.

Tina performed between the acts. She amused the audience while the scene was being changed.

She would walk in on her hind legs, a ruff around her neck. She would throw kisses and nearly topple over backwards.

She would turn 'round and 'round in a sort of old-fashioned waltz. She might have been a white, furry merry-go-round but for the pink tongue that popped out so frequently.

When she finished her part, she always ran straight to Tony. While he worked a puppet with one hand, he untied her ruff with the other. He knew she disliked the stiff thing.

This afternoon the theatre was well crowded. It was Saturday. As Tony lifted Tina up on the stage, she turned and licked his face. Then, out she waltzed and the people began to clap.

When the clapping stopped, a child's voice suddenly piped up, "Oh, it's Niki! Papa, Papa, it's Niki!"

There was some laughter and whispering, and everyone turned to look.

Tina made her final bow and her part was over.

After the show, as Tony was putting away the marionettes, a gentleman and a little girl came to the back of the stage. They approached Guido.

Tony heard angry talk between the two men. However, it did not interest him until he heard the girl say, "I know it is my dog! I want my dog."

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