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## Antona

The Story of a Strike and the Way It Was Settled.

By AGNES G. BROGAN.

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The strike at the steel plant had lasted long. Vaughn, the assistant manager, went in his automobile to investigate the temper of the strikers. He was received by a hooting crowd. A giant Italian raised a stone and held it poised high above his head.

"Throw it, Andrea!" screamed the voices, and then down the steps of a tenement building came a flying figure—a girl whose dusky hair fell about her face as she ran.

"Andrea," she called breathlessly, "remember Nickola!"

Unquestioningly the men made way for her as she rushed through the crowd and leaped into the automobile, then stood directly before the man whose life was threatened, protecting him with one small outstretched hand.

"Wait!" she cried. "Wait! And then it seemed to Vaughn that a miracle happened, for the desperate mob instantly obeyed her imperious call and by a common impulse moved farther back into the roadway, leaving a clear path before.

"Andrea," the girl repeated sobbingly, "oh, Andrea!" And in silence the giant replaced his stone and followed the others.

As she stood panting, one hand pressed closely against her heart, the picture was indelibly stamped upon Vaughn's memory—the small white face with its great dark eyes.

Down the rickety stairway, clattering upon his crutches, hobbled a crippled Italian boy. "Antona!" he called. "Antona!" he called.

The girl's face was transformed by a loving smile. "It's all right, Nickola," she called reassuringly. "I will be with you soon."

"And now," she asked of the waiting men, "will you let us go? This person is here for your good. Can you not trust Antona?"

As though in answer the crowd quietly dispersed, and she turned to Vaughn. "I am going to ride with you until you have passed through the dangerous section," she said. "Start at once, for their moods change quickly."

The factories and houses had been left behind when the girl again spoke. "You will be quite safe now," she told him. "Let me get out, please. I must go back."

Vaughn stopped the machine at her bidding and bent over to look into her eyes. "I am inexpressibly grateful," he said, "for the great service you have done me, while I marvel at the power you hold over those desperate men."

"I love them and do things for them all," she answered simply, "and down here in this part of the world we repay our kindnesses just as truly as we receive our wrongs."

"You say 'we,'" the man interposed quickly, "but you are very different from the others."

"That is only because I have had the schooling and training which they have missed," she answered. "In thought and feeling I am still a woman of the people and sooner or later, as you have learned, demand payment for my kind deeds. What reward shall I claim from you, Mr. Vaughn?"

"I am eager to show my gratitude," he replied.

She stood up before him, and her glowing color deepened. "If you are sincere in that," she said quietly, "then end the strike at once."

The man looked up in dismay at this unexpected request. "You ask an impossibility," he said curtly. "I am but the junior member of the company, and even if I were willing to yield to the unreasonable demand of the men whose cause you champion there are others in power higher than myself."

The girl spoke in a low, passionate tone. "You and I both know," she said, "that they will do exactly as you advise. All has been left to your judgment. Your agents, or whatever they may be called, have not been giving you correct information regarding the origin of this strike. This time the workman's cause is just, and I will tell a few truths which it will be well for you to know."

Vaughn sat fascinated, watching her flashing eyes and impulsive gestures as she eloquently portrayed the misery and poverty in the lives of the men who had threatened him so short a time ago. Tears filled the girl's eyes. "And there is Nickola," she continued. "It was his father who would have crushed you with that great stone today. His temper when aroused is terrible. In a fit of rage he threw the baby Nickola downstairs, and that is why he must walk on crutches always. Since then Andrea's life has been one long effort to make amends to the boy, and because I try to make Nickola happier there is nothing I may ask of Andrea that he will not do. When Nickola is in want then the father turns savage and cruel. Many nights since the strike began has the boy slept and wakened hungry, for one must plan cleverly indeed to thrust charity upon these two stubborn people. Oh, promise me," she said tremulously, "that this strike may end."

Her voice thrilled him strangely. "You do not understand," Vaughn said gently, "all that is involved. We have a principle to maintain. The demand for increased wages is of no consequence."

"Then," she answered breathlessly, "if the men go back to work, apparently agreeing to all your conditions, will you later pay them what they have asked of you?"

Vaughn smiled. "We would willingly comply with that peculiar arrangement, Miss Antona," he replied, "but these people of yours have refused any compromise."

"The girl stepped down into the road-

way and shook her head in mock despair. "The men would be much more easily influenced than yourself, Mr. Vaughn," she said, and then he gave the desired promise and regretfully watched the little figure until a bend in the road hid her from his view.

The next day, without explanation or mention of any agreement, came the surprising news that the workmen had surrendered, and when Vaughn returned to his private office after a lengthy consultation with the senior members of the company he found a very small boy with crutches beneath his arms standing near the doorway, his mournful eyes shining out weirdly from the thin, wan face. "Ira note from Meester Vaughn," he said, with a soft Italian accent, "from Mees Antona."

The neatly folded paper contained but three words, "Remember your promise," and Vaughn replied as briefly, "I have remembered."

Through the busy days which followed the girl's face, with its wonderful dark beauty, haunted him continually, and he was possessed of an overwhelming desire to hear her voice, perhaps now in commendation, and at length he determined to visit upon the following day the crowded street near the factory. It was really necessary, he told himself, that he should learn what effect the settlement of the strike had upon the lives of the people, and Nickola could tell him where to find her.

This particular evening he had agreed to accompany Freddie White to the opera. It was very high class opera, and Vaughn was exceedingly bored until his roving eyes, glancing into an opposite box, rested unbelievably upon the piquant, glowing face of Antona. Clad in a white silken gown, with sparkling jewels at her throat, she leaned forward, listening with rapt expression to the music. Vaughn caught his friend's hand in a crushing grasp. "Who is that?" he demanded.

Freddie winced; then his gaze followed Vaughn's. "By Jove!" he said pityingly. "We all succumb sooner or later to Miss Norton's undisputed charm, but to be bowled over at the first glance, old man, is unusual."

"Who is she?" Vaughn insisted, and Freddie drew a long breath.

"Well, to be exact," he answered, "her mother is the acknowledged society leader, her father an inexhaustible bank, while Miss Antonette herself dispels us and our superficial pleasures. We merely have rare glimpses of her. She is interested in settlement work—noble purposes and all that sort of thing. The poor and miserable of a certain section regard her as an angel upon earth, and good reason they have to do so. Pretty names they have for her. 'Little Mother' is one, and she seems to understand the queer beggars and to like them too. Hang it all, Vaughn, I'd be an Italian laborer myself to gain that girl's approval!"

But his friend did not smile. "Will you present me after the performance?" he asked eagerly, and Freddie willingly complied.

"Prepare to be snubbed, agreeable as you may consider yourself," he said by way of friendly warning. But Miss Norton was very gracious to Vaughn, and the astonished Freddie, after standing unnoticed for some time in the rear of the box, presently withdrew. Vaughn looked admiringly down into the girl's dark eyes.

"I have been trying to decide," he said, "whether I most admire a white satin gown or one blue woolen dress which has a scarlet tie."

"It all depends," she replied, "whether you prefer the beautiful things of life to the useful ones."

"A combination of the two," he said seriously, "is good indeed to see."

She smiled and turned to seek the members of her party, who, seeing her evidently engaged, had drifted away.

Vaughn laid the dainty opera cloak across her shoulders.

"The wheels of a great factory are moving again," he said slowly. "Hundreds of men leave their doors each night to go home to happier families. There is no more discontent, and it is all because of you."

The girl looked out and far beyond the moving throng. "I am so glad," she said joyously, "to find, though untill you spoke I had not thought of all that it means to so many, for I seemed only to see Andrea coming home with his great arm filled with packages. Little Nickola would meet him at the head of the stairs; then a never to be forgotten supper would be served upon the wooden table near the window, and," she added softly, "it is all because of you."

"Antona," the man whispered tenderly, "Antona!"

She laughed a little unsteadily. "Yes," she said, "you may call me by Nickola's translation of my name. It is a privilege which only you may share with him."

"You were kind enough to act as my escort upon one memorable occasion," Vaughn reminded her. "May I now return the favor?"

Miss Norton looked in the direction of her waiting friends and nodded to them with a conciliating smile, then placed her hand upon his arm. "You may if you please," she said.

**The Hat Straw Crop.**  
The greater part of the straw employed for making summer hats comes from Italy. To obtain a suitable straw for this purpose the wheat is sown as thickly as possible in order that the growth of the plant may be impoverished as well as to produce a thin stalk. The Italian wheat blooms at the beginning of June and is pulled up by hand by the roots when the grain is half developed. Should it be allowed to remain in the ground a longer time the straw would become too brittle for the purpose for which it is grown. Uprooted straws to the number of about five dozen, the size of the compass of the two hands, are firmly tied together in little sheaves and stowed away in barns. After that the straw is again spread out to catch the heavy summer dew and to bleach in the sun. When the product has been sufficiently bleached it is put into small bundles and classified. The last step is to cut it close above the first joint from the top, when it is again tied up in small bundles containing about sixty stalks each and is then ready for the market.

—Harper's Weekly.

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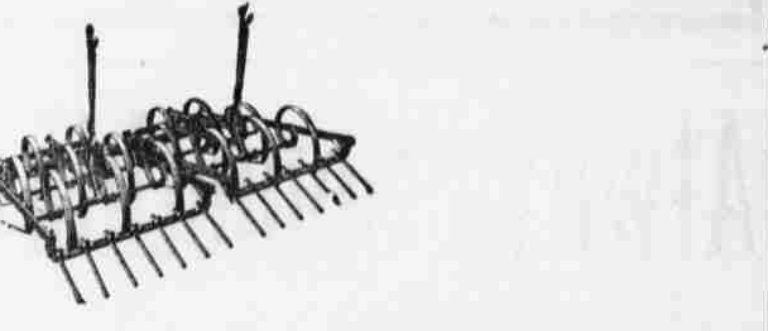
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