

Marco received word that his brother, Antonio Romeo, was coming to visit. Antonio was returning from America where he had been living for the past four years. Rosa sent for all of her children to come pay respects to their uncle. The house was soon filled with the entire family, all talking at once; the men debating issues, the women “cooing” over the babies; children were running and playing together outside under the trees. The family was always happy to gather together and bring each other up on the latest news.

Everyone was so please to see and welcome their *Zio* Antonio, especially Pietro; Antonio was his godfather and he always loved the man who paid extra attention to him on his visits. He was so proud to see his uncle looking very handsome and prosperous in his fancy suit and fedora. Pietro had never seen such fine clothing. When Antonio took off his hat and handed it to Pietro, the boy asked if he could try it on. “*Si, va bene*”, his uncle said. Pietro put the hat on his head, tilted it to the side and ran his right hand along the edge and winked at his Mama with a smile and that twinkle in his eye. All the children thought he was so silly, but he strutted around feeling like his uncle – handsome and prosperous.

Antonio was younger and taller than Marco; he carried himself very dignified but with an air of arrogance, rolling his handlebar mustache between his fingers as he talked to family members; looking at them through heavy lidded eyes almost with a look of contempt.

He brought little gifts for the women; the children squealed with delight when he gave them each a coin from America and the men relished the *Avanti Toscani* cigars, the American made small dark cigars Italian men enjoyed so much and that hard-working Calabrese men could not afford. He handed picture postcards of New York City to both Marcello and Pietro; one showed Central Park with many people dressed in fine clothing on a Sunday afternoon. Another showed a picture of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 57<sup>th</sup> Street with automobiles on wide paved streets in front of large magnificent mansions. Everyone marveled at these pictures and started asking all sorts of questions, as they gathered around to have a look. Antonio asked them to wait and he would answer all their questions and tell them all about New York.

It was a beautiful, warm afternoon, so everyone gathered outside in the shade of the trees. Rosa placed goat cheese, sausage and crusty bread on the table for all to enjoy; while Marco poured wine for the men. The questions were coming from all directions as everyone wanted to hear about the country so far away. Antonio raised his hands and said, “*Basta, basta*”. He sat at the table, with his glass of wine, lit his cigar and started telling his stories of how the people lived in America and the opportunities that were available to any young man eager to work hard. Everyone was engrossed, especially Marcello and Pietro. Antonio spoke for a long while, painting a picture of a delightful way of life; telling of people riding in automobiles, streetcars and trains. He failed to tell the truth of the crowded tenements and the sea of humanity that was known as “Little Italy” in New York City. When speaking of employment opportunities he failed to tell them that the jobs that were available were not easy. Uneducated Italian men were discriminated against and given the dirtiest jobs no one else wanted. They were relegated to collecting garbage, digging tunnels under the rivers and building skyscrapers and bridges - they were laborers who worked long, hard hours for a meager wage. This was not the picture Antonio was describing.