

SANTA MARIA MAGGIORE

BY STEWART WHITE



Q UONCE upon a time there was a boy and a city. As for the city, if you were trees, you were silhouettes, and pretended to have very dark-colored shadows, and were very full of birds; and if you were gardens, you had fountains and dusky bypaths, and square, low, yellow buildings, and your natural features looked just artificial enough and your marble statues just natural enough to be neither nature nor art, but something much more charming; and if you were streets, you were narrow and winding and unexpected, and lighted only by rare lanterns; and if you were the lanterns, you stuck out from the walls on iron arms; and if you were churches, you were rich and big and dim and impressive; and if you were priests, you wore long red or lavender or black or brown or white or party-colored gowns, and wandered about the narrow streets in flocks; and if you were the sun, you shone warm and bright all day, and tried to set as near as might be behind a great soaring dome; and if you were the dome, you were much loftier than the skies; and if you were bells, you were innumerable and musical, and given to tolling at all times of the day and night; and if you were soldiers, you either wore three-cornered hats and long azure cloaks and looked dignified, or round tarpaulin hats with flowing cock's plume and short dark cloaks and looked jaunty, or stiff derby hats with a tricolor and a single long feather and looked funny, or a miscellaneous variety of less important toggery and looked ashamed; and if you were rich people, you drove funny little dog-carts rapidly around corners in a beautiful park, being careful to have your mustache at forty-five degrees, or your hat and veil well over your nose; and if you were poor people, you sat on

long stone steps in the sun, or dickered for vegetables, or otherwise had a good time; and if you were hackmen, you drove very small baby-carriages and wore brigands' clothes; and if you were their horses, you carried many red and glittering and jingling things to catch the tourist's delight; and if you were the tourist, you consulted red books; and if you were the red books, you knew more about it than ever I will; and if you were the city in general, you were very old and dirty and interesting and incongruous and lazy; and if you were the people, you were perfectly satisfied to be a great big comic opera with all the costumes and stage-settings; and if you were the sky, you were blue, blue, blue. For the city was Rome.

As for the boy, his name was James Madison Griggs.

His coming to Rome was purely fortuitous. In fact, he did not know that it was Rome. He had crawled into a peasant's cart at a little seaport the night before, and had been awakened by officials poking him and the vegetables at the gate of the wall. They were appraising the city customs, but he did not know that either, and he thought they looked enough like policemen to warrant an insulting "face" and dance when he had withdrawn sufficiently. After this he looked about him. A small boy presenting himself, James Madison Griggs asked him a question.

"Soy, kid, what's the name of this way-station?" he inquired through the corner of his mouth.

"Non capisco Inglese," replied the other, showing his teeth in a friendly smile.

Whereupon James Madison smote him sorely for being a Dago, and marched on with his hands in his pockets and his cap on one side. Near the center of a large square rose an obelisk like that in Central

Park. Beyond it was a rectangular building with columns, on the top of which hovered a row of colossal statues. So graceful were their poised attitudes, so airy the arrested gestures of their hands and feet, that they seemed to have descended for a moment from the upper air, and to be about winging their way again before the beholder had more than caught a glimpse of them.

"Gee!" remarked James. "Get on to the mugs!" After which he spat skilfully through his teeth.

He discovered that he was hungry, and so set about encompassing his breakfast. This he conceived to be not difficult, because he shrewdly surmised the Dago character to be the same the world over. He placed himself before a little shop in front of which was displayed a variety of breads and fruits. Then he danced up and down and screamed and pointed to a spot accurately in the middle distance until the attention of the visible world was directed in frantic speculation to the spot; whereupon he swiftly seized provisions and departed. Quite unexpectedly he was pursued by a creature with a cocked hat and a long cloak. In the ease of his escape he had time to reflect that he had probably been mistaken in his police diagnosis of the officials at the gate.

Near the base of another obelisk he sat down to eat. After the meal he settled himself comfortably on the stone step, and scowled at the gentle children who gathered about him at a respectful distance. Oh, he was a very tough youth!

In moments like this he gloated over the thought. He had been the terror of the village until authority gave him up. He had "done stunts" to the city school until the city school had to rid herself of him in self-defense. Private tutors passed as telegraph-poles pass a train. Corporal punishment merely improved his circulation. Then he ran away to sea, to the consternation of everybody and the fatigue of the police, who vainly tried to look him up. His parents grieved. Their friends rejoiced. The captain of the vessel cursed, for he could get absolutely no work out of James Madison, even with a rope's-end. The harder he whipped, the more stubborn became the terror; but as the captain possessed a certain proud skill in the manipulation of his weapon, James was made

uncomfortable enough to desert at the first port. That happened to be Civitavecchia. Therefore Rome.

The sun shone warm and yellow against the square irregular stones of the broad piazza before him. It was grateful, this sun, after the winter chill of the sea. He stretched his legs straight out in front of him, pulled his cap down over his eyes, thrust both hands into his trousers pockets, and began to whistle at the sky. A heavy two-wheeled dray bumped slowly by, its driver occupying a sidewise hood perched atop. It was drawn by pure-white oxen with long horns. Various people sauntered here and there across the middle distance. The broad-eaved roofs of the square sulphur-yellow houses showed in pleasing complement of color to the azure of the heavens. A number of children who had been regarding him went away. One, a clear-skinned little girl with a bright waist and a contadina square of cloth on her pretty head, approached timidly and offered him a pansy. He stopped whistling.

"Go 'way, kid!" said he.

At the sound of his voice the little girl suddenly broke into the rarest of smiles, showing all her beautiful white teeth. She sat down beside him at once, and laid the pansy on his hand.

James Madison, flattered at the attention, changed the tilt of his hat from his eyes to one ear, and deigned to take the flower. Whereupon the little girl smiled again.

"Molta bella," said she, in her baby tones.

"Betcher life!" replied James Madison Griggs.

He fished about in his pockets until he discovered a broken bit of coral which he had laboriously "swiped" from the cabin of the second mate. This he tossed nonchalantly to his companion, with the air of a prince conferring largesse.

"Take that for your good looks," quoth he.

The little girl seized it with rapture.

"Mille grazie, signor!" she cried in a gurgling over-note of delight. "Sono obbligata alla vostra gentilezza."

She nestled up close to her new friend and took his hand in both her own. He looked down on her with a half-amused, half-tolerant kindness.

"Blame' if you ain't a 'fectionate little kid!" said he.

She smiled up at him happily.

"Mi chiamo Tessa," said she, pointing one small finger at her breast in vigorous pantomime, and repeating the name several times.

"Tessa?" asked he, understandingly, indicating her.

"Sì, sì, sì!" she cried, delighted.

"Jim," said he, gravely, touching the region of his stomach.

"Zscheem," she parroted, with a silvery laugh.

The other children had returned, and were regarding the two delightedly.

"Ecco Tessa qui, ama l'Inglese!" cried they, in derision.

Tessa looked at them with wide, troubled child's eyes a moment, and began gently to cry. James was on his feet in a moment.

"I don't know what you Dagos had th' nerve to say to her," he said threateningly, "but you got to come off — quick!" Whereupon he spat through his teeth again, preparing for battle.

A great bell behind him began to clang solemnly. The group in front scampered suddenly away, leaving him and the little Tessa alone in the sun-soaked square, alone with the heavy vibrating notes of the booming bell.

"'Fraid-cats! 'Fraid-cats!" cried James after the retreating hosts. He felt a soft tug at his arm, and, looking down, met the melting eyes of little Tessa fixed on his.

"Vieni nella chiesa, Zscheem," she pleaded in her gentle voice, and began to urge him past the obelisk to a great stone building reached by broad stone steps.

"I don't know your game," said James, "but I'm with you, from marbles to mumps."

They mounted the steps, crossed a stone platform, entered a great stone vestibule, pushed aside a heavy hanging curtain of leather, and James Madison Griggs suddenly found himself struck small, as though he had been enabled to look at himself through the wrong end of an opera-glass.

The place was vast and cool, and very, very rich and silent. There were many great columns, standing as still and solemn as pines in a woodland, but they were hung with heavy stripes of crimson edged with gold. There were deep recesses back of the columns, but because of the gleam there, too, of the same gorgeous colors,

they were not dark. Above the columns were quiet frescos, graceful figures of white marble, soaring arches of white stone; but the frescos glowed with the tints of the masters, the marble figures were girdled or sandaled or diademed with purest gold, and the soaring arches were incrustured with gold and precious stones. The upper air was peopled. Saints, angels, demons, virgins hovered there in great variety of poise, all arrested for the instant to hear the Word of God before they continued on the rapid way their attitudes suggested. Above them was a square gold-and-white ceiling—far off, farther than the sky.

These things James Madison Griggs saw, and the shadows. They were everywhere, these shadows, stealing to and fro, wavering, lingering, hiding, concealing, revealing, never still, trembling like the souls of those condemned.

As he and the little Tessa entered the leather-curtained door, the latter bobbed ludicrously down on her knees for a moment, and then arose, dragging her companion after her down between the columns. A hundred or so people were wandering idly here and there, looking somehow Lilliputian.

"Gee!" said James Madison Griggs to himself. "It's a church—a Dago church!" He then looked about him with reviving confidence, for he had the tough boy's scorn of churches and things religious. A priest in a little square box eyed them as they passed.

"Choice old fake!" said James.

But, for all that, it was a church; you could recognize the Sunday feel to it. So James whistled out loud.

Now James knew very well that a whistle inside a church at once spoils the church. He knew this because he had once tried it. On that occasion the congregation had promptly disintegrated from a congregation into angry individuals demanding punitive spans. The Sunday feel had vanished from the air; the religious awe had evaporated before present wrath; in fact, the church, as a condition of mind, a peace of spirit, a religious institution, a what you will, had temporarily but completely disappeared before the iniquitous sibilance of Griggs. So now James whistled.

Then, with an overwhelming wave of awe, he realized that the whistle had not affected the church in the least. The people

wandered idly here and there, looking somehow Lilliputian; the graceful marble figures, the frescoed throng, the solemn columns, the square gold-and-white ceiling farther off than the sky, the shadows stealing to and fro, wavering, lingering, hiding, never still, trembling like the souls of those condemned—all these continued on their way, unhasting, untarrying, stilly earnest, grandly sure, to that greater glory of which they alone seemed to feel the uplift, the grandeur of which they alone but dimly reflected to the world. It was a church in spite of the whistle. It would continue a church, vast and cool and richly silent, though riot should attempt to shake its peace.

They turned now sharply to the left. A massive canopy, as great as the dwelling of a man, held up by twisted bronze columns twined with gold, supporting four grand prophets in flowing garments and long of beard, opposed itself to their further progress. The four prophets seemed ever about to stir in the ascent, as though they too had paused to hear the Word, and must then away. Beneath the canopy tall candles burned. Beneath the candles stood an altar. Beneath the altar was a crypt of gold and precious stones, wonderful beyond words; and here the most solemn shadow, the most glorious light dwelt—the shadow of a man's death, the prophetic light of a resurrection to come.

A railing barred their way. Tessa knelt. The people imperceptibly and silently gathered. They found themselves hemmed in by the throng. James Madison Griggs felt distinctly uncomfortable and just a little angry. Like most healthy-minded boys of his age, he disliked to have this sentimental side of his nature touched, just as a racoon does not care to have the end of its nose rubbed. He knit his brows, and stared at a mosaic picture in the dim back of the vaulted chancel—far back, so far back that the chancel itself was large enough for a church. Long lines of dusty light slanted down from the narrow windows high up in the curve. One of them fell on an ivory face, suffering, strangely pitiful in the dumb agony of a tortured soul translated through the mastery of a cunning hand. Near the brow was a single point of light. After gazing intently at this for a few moments, his sight became mesmerically dazzled, so that the surroundings resolved themselves into an intruding gray mist, and he could

see only the face, suffering, strangely pitiful. It fascinated him.

Then a murmur dragged his attention to the chancel. Through two doors on each side filed a processional of men gorgeously robed in vestments stiff with embroidery. At their head paced two boys swinging covered brass vessels at the ends of long chains, and from the vessels issued clouds of sweet smoke that perfumed the air and whitened the long shafts of light from the narrow windows. The smell was that of the mystery which haunted the changing shadows. One by one the figures of the procession passed the little rail, ecclesiastical, medieval, rustling softly with the noise of heavy silks, silent, ceremonious, until they had all defiled before the ivory face, bending the knee before the suffering and the pity. Then the shadows of the mystery came rushingly across; the sorrow of the ivory face, the perfume of the censers, the silence of the great far-off abode of the saints and demons and angels with the attitudes of pause—all these cleaved the stillness in the grand vibrations of an organ, and a clear soprano voice arose as the voice of the upper air.

"Gloria in excelsis Deo!" it trilled; and from the chancel the motionless figures, gorgeous in the panoply of Rome's glory, chanted back in the roll of an under-bass: "Pro nobis, domine."

"Et in terra pax hominibus," sang the voice of the upper air.

Outside a cloud crossed the disk of the sun, and the body of the church became dim and indistinct. The pillars wrapped themselves in shadows, the far-off ceiling in the dusk. The boy, stealing a glance behind him, saw only the great multitude of angels, like a flock of white birds, standing out in the purity of their tint against the dimness, poised as though to flutter down about him from an undefined region of which he could make out only the mystery and the awe.

But now the voice of the upper air, clear, sweet, causing tears, was soaring on higher and higher, cleaving the stillness, which clung lovingly about it. One by one it surmounted the silences; one by one it shook free from the shadows; one by one it passed the separate and solemn mysteries of the twisted columns, and the four grand prophets, the frescoed throng, the graceful marble figures, and the far-off gold-and-

white ceiling farther than the sky, until at last it rode clear, triumphant above them all, glorying, chanting the pæan of joy and light and life. Then the sun came out again, and all was abruptly still.

A very old man, dressed all in red, was holding out something with an appearance of command. The multitude of people sank to its knees. James Madison Griggs stood for a moment bewildered; then, feeling the deprecating tug of Tessa's hand on his, he too knelt and received the host.

The people arose. Down the length of the chancel filed the long recessional. Then, when once again the church was still and empty, the boy yielded to his companion's bewildered importunities. They followed the multitude into the square.

Some of them lingered to chat near the obelisk, others wandered away down the side streets. Little Tessa, discovered of her mother, pressed his hand.

"Addio, buon signor," said she; but he did not hear her. An ox-cart clattered by; he did not see it. The broad-eaved houses and the sulphur-yellow roofs showed in pleasing complement of color to the azure of the heavens; he was not aware of it. A voice finally roused him.

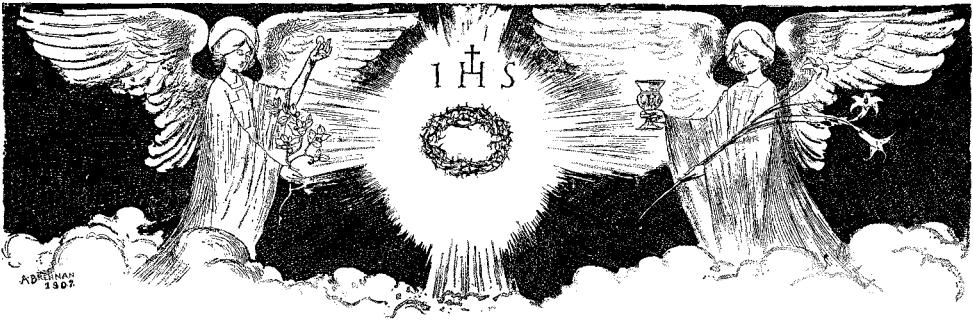
"So here you are, you little devil," it said.

He turned to see the captain of the ship standing over him—a short, thick-set man with steel-blue eyes and a grimly facetious cast of countenance.

"Run away, did you?" the captain began again, and then hesitated because of something he saw in the boy's face. "Why, what is it, sonny?" he inquired with some solicitude.

The boy arose, passing his sleeve across his eyes; then he placed his hand pleadingly on the captain's arm.

"I want to go home," said he, "to my people."



THE LITTLE WEAK CHILD

BY ANITA FITCH

MY little son, my little son,
In heaven canst thou rest?
And which of all his children does
The High God love the best?

Thou art too weak to stand all day
And glorify his name;
Ah, pray him let thee stray awhile
And play some foolish game.

Thou art too young to know him great,
So whisper to him this:
Thou art just big enough, sometimes
To hold and fold and kiss.