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"Chesco's" - July 1948....

On Bradford Street on the corner of a "Private Way". Left, parking lot behind Eastern Schoolhouse.



Coronet - May 1948

This is the story of Chesco, a little man with a great heart, who took pride in his lifelong service to others; his epitaph is one that few men, rich or poor, ever earn

# The Eternal Servant

by WALT ANDERSON



if I was a writer, there is one person in Provincetown I would want to meet even if I didn't meet anyone else. That's Chesco. Fact is, if you wander down Commercial Street and poke your nose into the A. & P. and the paper store, you're bound to find him. He's a little fellow but he always carries two market bags, full up."

I took her advice and found him, and he was worth finding indeed. He carried two bulging bags that threatened to split their seams and shower groceries upon the noisy excursionists who flitted like a horde of locusts over the little fishing town. Soon the Boston boat would start toot-tooting madly and they would scramble back on board, leaving the pier once more to the painters, the fishermen and the great white gulls.

Chesco set his bags down against a salt-stained bulkhead and idly rolled a cigarette. His deep-set eyes stared out over the fishing weirs that rose between the water and the sky, but it was ghosts he actually saw, the shadows of many yester-

IT LOOKED LIKE my luck was out. I had come to Provincetown in search of "interesting people" to write about, but the morning had been wasted in futile questing. On the town pier, artists stoically daubed on canvas and fishermen stoically cleaned mackerel.

The tangy New England sea rolled over the tiny beach, and in my ears rang the constant crying of the great white gulls. All this, however, was not what I had come to find in Provincetown.

At lunch I said as much to old Mrs. Gonzales, my landlady. Keenly she eyed me, then snorted: "Huh! Interesting people?... Now

days. Suddenly words spilled from him in a staccato pattern, moving and picturesque.

"My name, signor, is Francesco Ronga, but everybody here they call me Chesco. I have almost forgotten my real name. I come from Napoli, Bella Napoli says everyone, but to me it was never bella. A man with an empty belly does not have beauty in his eyes, and you will understand when I tell you I am the youngest of 24 children.

"Twenty-four mouths to feed, that is too much, signor, and Napoli is very poor. So when I have 12 years, they sell me to an Italian prince, of the family name Marchese, who lives in the palazzo and owns much land.

"No, signor, you do not understand. I do not mean I work for pay, like Joe Silva work here for the fisheries. I mean my family they sell me, like you sell a cow. I am a servant, and all I get is my spaghetti. Now I see it is little enough, but when I have 12 years it seems like—how shall I say—like Paradise, to have enough to eat, and every day. But the hunger it is too long, too long, and I swear some day I will have money and a palazzo like the family Marchese.

"What happens to me next is not so clear, for it is long ago and I have 70 years next Tuesday. But suddenly everything changes. The Marchese family they have trouble and they must sell the palazzo. I am not sorry. The Marchese family they live without love in their hearts, they are not good people.

"Then comes an American, very good man of the family Marvin, you have heard of him? He is the half brother of Mary Heaton Vorse,

who lives in the big house over there and writes many books.

"Signor Marvin, he buy many old things from the palazzo, and he buy me also. Signor Marvin, always he makes the joke about buying me; but he pays me good money for my work and I am satisfied. He is an artist and he paints many pictures. It is wonderful to make things with the hands, like Signor Marvin's pictures. Me, I have never gone to school, but the signor he teach me to read and write.

"My boss he is a very rich man, and always he travels in the yacht, and everywhere he goes, he takes me with him. It would surprise you, signor, to know the many places I have seen with these very eyes. I am a cook, I can do many things. And Signor Marvin he is like a father to me.

"Always I think that soon no more will I be a servant. I save my money, for I think one day to buy a little house and an automobile and so many things.

"Thirty-seven years ago we come to Provincetown, and Signor Marvin he say it is good, we stay here. I open a little restaurant, Chesco's Restaurant. I am a good cook and everybody comes, so many artists, Signor Hawthorne, Signor Bicknell, Signor Webster and so many others. And in my restaurant they organize the club of the artists. They call it the Beachcombers, you have heard of it?

"Always I want a little house. Now I have one. You would like perhaps to see it? . . . No, signor, I will carry the market bags myself. I do this every day for the neighbors. I live alone, I need nothing . . ."

Down at the East End we rang

bells and delivered groceries to the Enoses, the Silvas, the Fernandeses, and were thanked in harsh Portuguese-English that rang out like a curse and a blessing.

"Fine day. Will you pick up a package at the post office later?"

"Don't give Joey no candy, Chesco. Spoils his appetite."

"Take a look at the roses, Chesco. They just don't seem to grow for anybody but you."

But the last place to which we came was not a little house. It was a very large house, elegant within and without. There was a carefully tended flower garden and above it swollen bunches of grapes weighted down the vine. Chesco fingered the flowers tenderly.

"This is my garden, Signor. I work here every day. Come in the house, please, and look around. I must go feed the chickens."

FOR THE NEXT HALF-HOUR I roamed about. It was a treasure-house of antiques from every quarter of the globe. Labels spoke magic names: Casablanca, Samoa, Fiji. The great glass demijohns comprised the most complete collection I had ever seen. On the tables were scattered drawings, as if the master had just been showing them. More drawings hung on the walls. There were books in fine bindings and collections of prints.

In the room beyond were many closets. An elegant man's wardrobe was laid out, as if the owner had stepped out for a moment and would soon return. But who lived here? There was something about the place that didn't quite add up. Chickens in an elegant modern studio and . . .