

The Storyteller.

A TALE OF TWO WARS.

GIAN FANTONI and his wife Lucia came from Italy to Maryland early in the year 1856. They were very happy and hopeful, and the future seemed all bright to them.

Gian bought a piece of land, and he and his child-wife worked together in planting it with fruit, vines, trees and bushes—they were never tired of adding to the variety, as far as the extent of their real estate would allow.

Things went well with them. Gian learned the language of the country, and, to his great satisfaction, was in time made a citizen of the United States.

He studied the Declaration of Independence as few native-born Americans have done, and felt its spirit in his whole being.

He knew well, this keen, intelligent foreigner, that there was difference of rank here; he knew that this had to be, that there were such differences in every land and nation. But here there were no impassable barriers that kept generation after generation from aspiring higher than the accident of birth placed them. The difference here, he thought, was because of the varying worth of people themselves; according to their ability, their opportunity, and their range of intellect and strength.

He thought it well to be rich, because money was necessary to buy books, beautiful, refining surroundings, and leisure to enjoy and make the most of these advantages. But money could not buy happiness, content, and a good mind, capable of learning and understanding the life around one, and raising one's self to a higher plane; and Gian felt that he possessed these last-named blessings and was gratefully glad.

Lucia listened, with wifely admiration, to Gian's wise talk, but she sighed a little at times over mental visions of sunny scenes of her childhood. When Gian was happy and proud over his grapes or berries, Lucia recalled the songs of the grape-pickers in the vineyards of fair Italy.

Gian tried to teach her English, but she shook her head over its difficulties very soon, and said there was no music in it.

'I can never learn, dear Gian,' she said, in her sweet, sad voice. 'And truly I have no will to speak other than my own dear tongue.'

'How shall you make friends if you learn not the language of the country?' he persisted. 'There are few of our countrymen here, and you must learn to talk to people you meet!'

'I will talk with the eyes, with the hands to the kind people—and I have you. I want no one else! You can make all the friends, and I will talk to you, and tell you the thoughts in my heart.'

So Gian ceased to urge her, but he told her often what a glorious land it was for earnest, industrious people. She learned to say quite plainly, 'The glorious land of the free.'

In the meantime trouble between North and South gathered rapidly and darkly.

Gian was opposed to slavery. It seemed to him the one dark spot in the Republic. In his thoughtful way he studied both sides of the question, and determined that if war did break out he would fight for the Union.

'Every man should fight for his country,' he said to Lucia, 'and this is now our country—we have been transplanted, and thrive in the new soil.'

She nodded gravely, and kissed his hand. Her heart was filled with forebodings, but she kept a brave, smiling face, and never uttered a word contrary to his will.

The dreaded day came. War was declared.

Lucia was to go to Washington with Gian and remain there until the war should end, or Gian return. They heard that Maryland was likely to be cut off from communication with the capital, and Lucia would hear news of her husband more readily if she were in Washington. Besides, there was an Italian family there that Lucia would be welcomed among cordially.

So the pretty little house and fruit garden were disposed of, the money given to Lucia, and early in April they arrived in Washington. A short time afterward Lucia watched the troops march off with flags flying, drums beating, and cheers that prevented many a sob from being heard.

Every beat of Lucia's loving heart sent a wave of pain through her, but Gian's eyes were full of martial courage and high hope, and she gave him smile for smile, though her lips were white.

One of the women in the family Lucia remained with conceived the idea of selling fruit, nuts, pies, etc., to the soldiers, and Lucia joined her in this undertaking. She felt less pain when she was actively employed, and it pleased her to go among the soldiers. Hearing English continually she began to learn it very quickly, and she talked of Gian to any of the men who would listen. In this way she managed to send many a message to her husband.

One morning a young soldier bought her entire stock and distributed it among his companions. Lucia was distressed to find that she had not change enough to give him for the bill he handed to her in payment.

'It does not matter,' he said, when she told him so in her pretty broken English; 'keep it. See, little Italian girl, how much I care for money!'

He had taken a folded bill from his wallet, and pinning it on a post near by drew a revolver and shot at it.

Now, Lucia well knew the value of money, and of late she had seen much suffering among her neighbours for want of it; so she exclaimed against the young soldier's folly.

At first he laughed at her. Then he grew serious, and picking up the bill, which was not destroyed, but cut through, he began to examine it.

'You are right,' he said to Lucia, 'I will not act so foolishly again. And for your good advice keep this,' handing her the bill—'as a remembrance of me. You can get it redeemed—see, the denomination and signature are uninjured.'

She did not understand what he meant by the last sentence, but she took the bill 'for remembrance,' and then began to tell him about Gian. She begged him to tell him, should they meet, that she was well, and praying constantly for him. The soldier promised to do this, if it were possible, and Lucia went on her way.

Whenever a troop marched out of Washington, Lucia watched them go, with fervent prayers on her lips for their success and safe return, and for her husband.

She seemed never to tire of doing some service for the soldiers, and when they began to come back to Washington, wounded and sick, she hastened to offer herself to tend them.

When they were brought into the church she loved to pray in St. Aloysius' (which was used some time as a hospital), she was more eager to serve them than ever.

'The Lord is good to have you in He's house,' she would say to them. 'You surely come better some ways; either die good, or something good to you.'

Anxiously she scanned every face in search of Gian's. Three times she heard of him, of his bravery and kind thoughtfulness for his companions, and her heart swelled proudly.

She was so bravely cheerful, even when a long, weary time came that she heard nothing of her husband, that the sick soldiers grew to watch for her coming. Many a poor fellow had cause to bless her for her tender care and patience.

Lucia's money went quickly, for she spent freely, and since the coming back of the wounded she had ceased to sell dainties among the soldiers.

Finally a morning came when she had just enough money to fill her basket with fruit for the sick men she was going to visit.

That morning a large number had been returned, weak, silent and sad, to the city they had left in such high spirits.

Passing between the long rows of narrow cots Lucia came to a poor fellow terribly hurt about the head, his face covered with bandages and plasters. She thought he was asleep, and stood beside him for a brief, anxious examination. With a sigh of relief that she did not recognise him, she placed some grapes on the table near him, and was passing on.

'You do not know me then?' He spoke so suddenly that she was startled.

'There are so many,' she said, apologetically, after looking at him a few seconds. 'I do not know all, when they come back.'

'I remember you,' he returned, 'and I delivered your message to your husband.'

'Oh, oh!' exclaimed Lucia, and poured eager questions upon him, half in Italian, half in English.

He watched her face wistfully.

'You love him very much, don't you?' he said at last, as if her love was something to wonder at.

'Yes, yes, yes!' And Lucia clasped her hands vehemently to emphasise her words.

He turned his face from her.

'He was wounded,' he then said, 'only a slight wound, but the fever caught him, and his company had to leave him near Carrack's Ford. A family there offered to care for him, and promised to send him on here when he would be able to come.'

Lucia's eyes were dim with tears, but she was quietly and deeply thinking.

'I must go to him,' she said. 'Tell me how to get to that place.'

'If Annie had loved me like this!' thought the young soldier, half envious of Gian. But aloud he said:—

'How much money have you?'

Then the tears in Lucia's eyes fell over her soft cheeks, and she made an expressive and despairing gesture with her hands.

'I haven't any now, either,' he said regretfully. He felt very sorry for her. 'I thought there was nothing to live for, so I was careless of life and money.'

Suddenly a memory flashed across his mind.

'What did you do with the bullet-riddled bill?' he asked.

Then Lucia recognised him. 'I keep eat,' she answered, trying to smile.

'That was foolish, but I am glad you did now,' she said. 'You can still get gold for it—enough to take you to Gian.'

He explained to her how to go about having this done, and she understood readily.

It was a bill for fifty dollars. That would be more than sufficient for her needs.

The wounded man was greatly interested in her, and pleased to see her joy at the prospect of soon being with her husband. When she bade him goodbye he grew sad again, but the bitter blackness of his own selfish grief was broken up by his interest in Lucia's sorrows and her brave cheerfulness.

After weary travel and many adventures Lucia reached the house where her husband was.

'I am Lucia,' she said simply when the door was opened to her gentle tap, and the good woman who opened the door stepped back, and looked at her in wonder.

'It do beat all!' she exclaimed. 'Come right in, Mis' Fantoni. Your man said you was a-comin', but we didn't set no dependence on that. Set right down. You must be right smart tired.'

Lucia was worn and travel-stained, but she smiled on, in her bright way, that, together with her weariness, her youth and frail little figure, clothed her with a pathos that even strangers felt at sight of her.

Gian was raving in fever when she went to him. She laid her cool, firm hand on his forehead, and he grew calm and then fell into a light, refreshing sleep.

Under her unremitting care he recovered, and Lucia was the happiest wife in the United States when he was able to begin with her the life struggle for position and fortune once more.