



Angela Irene Giani at 16

Prologue Due

Angela

Late Winter 1889 to Summer 1914

*And breath by breath, beat by beat, life moved forward
See into me, blow away the merest veil
Live long enough to sing my testament written on a
translucent heart
For though the winds of change come now bitter and
hard
My hands cast away ruined grapes
Hold, then choose the finest pears
My beloved!
I, your Nonna
Gather and hoard the best
Just for you*

“Mamma le potta, le potta, le ...”

Angela and her cousins stopped singing and jumping on the huge feather bed which held the sleeping form of their Nonna Giuditta. They woke her every morning while she pretended to be asleep. Then, secretly, they shared the steaming sweet and creamed café robusto Piccolina always brought. It had to be a secret from their parents because the Giani family believed that too much café robusto stunted one's growth. Tall for most Italians, the Gianis didn't seem to be affected. However, the parental decree, was given a half-handed abeyance, every morning by Piccolina, in cahoots with Nonna Giuditta, who thought no hearts could start without it. Truth be told, most of the children's was milk.

“What's the matter with her?” a cousin whispered. “She's not moving.

“Nonna! Nonna!” five-year-old Angela cried.

“Run for Piccolina,” someone called out.

Just the night before Giuditta had requested only *fagioli* for supper. At bedtime, in fine spirits, the 81 year-old matriarch shared the long tradition of nightly prayers with all her sons and their wives. This night, as with hundreds of others, the ritual had never altered since Giuditta and Luigi held their first born. They recounted stories of the old days, and then, she had kissed each goodnight, wishing them all sweet repose.

Today, when the children had gone to wake her ...

“She’s gone in her sleep, and God rest her merry and good soul,” Piccolina whispered, as she tidied the bed sheets, holding back tears. Giuditta was the only mother she’d ever known.

Ringed by their parents, the stricken children watched, relieved that they hadn’t caused her death. “Now, come and kiss your Nonna goodbye,” Piccolina ordained. “And wish her a speedy journey to heaven, where she is surely going to be with Nonno Luigi and Our Heavenly Father.”

The old Signore had continued a year past Angela and Maria Giuseppa’s miraculous



Angela (top, 4th from right) at her Florentine School ~ 1899

survival. He had caught a cold in the lungs and had died just two days past his 83rd birthday. Piccolina had closed his eyes, as she now did with Giuditta, content that now they were together in death as they had been in life. Their children were easy in their minds that they had been good children, taking comfort that their beloved, venerable parents had lived long and well, and had died with dignity and no fuss.

“To go in the sleep,” voiced a life, “the answer to a prayer.

Angela listened and knew it was good and right.

A year later ...

“Piccolina,” began one of the mistresses who sat in the warm kitchen. “The mourning period is over. This supper tonight will be a celebration of the lives of our beloved parents, Giuditta and Luigi. They would wish it.”

“It is an honor to your beloved parents and to me, Signora,” said Piccolina, who’d risen to her full height, squaring off her large shoulders.

The evening meal, which would be a huge event, pleased Piccolina, who had been quiet far too long. She would cook it all, leaving only the most mundane tasks to her bevy of kitchen helps.

Piccolina’s produce suppliers provided Sicilian scallions and cucumbers, over which she crumbled Gorgonzola. It, along with Genova salami, sliced so thin it was transparent, would begin the repast



Angela 13 With Cousin ~ Cassano Magnago ~ Giani Family Home

“Look at these tomatoes!” she cooed to the washer woman, as she took a succulent orb into her hands and smelled it. “Perfetto! Ruby jewels absolute!”

The whole bushel would be smothered in oregano and butter, then topped with bread crumbs and baked. She soaked the bitter lettuces for the *ensalata mista* in cold spring water to ensure crispness and had just the right soured red wine for the dressing. The olive oil was from the trees of angels. *Mezza Zuppa de Fagioli*, now smiling on the massive wood stove, was made from her home grown beans which had been picked, shucked and hoarded last fall. Large as a finger joint, speckled brown and white, their earthy heart took soup to heaven. From the root cellar, she fetched down a blond, sweating moon of *Parmigiana*. The butcher came himself to supply veal shanks for the *Osso Buco*, and when Piccolina had turned every piece, sniffed, pinched and squinted at him to see if he had any reservations, he was finally allowed to store the booty in the larder. Later, they would be seared in butter, smothered and simmered in onions, garlic, tomatoes, white wine, and spiced with celery, carrot and bay leaves. Fresh cut parsley and rosemary came from her indoor kitchen garden and lay in heaps to be included in every dish and pinned over every Giani’s heart. In long tradition, taken from the family’s early French roots, the wearing of it stood for the forever memory of the mother and father.

She started the *Risotto alla Piemontese* herself, using livers from newly killed chickens. Rather than prepare rougher country breads, she ordered the freshest loaves from the town’s best baker and chose wines from the ample cellar. The Gianis had gone into the wine distributing business several years ago, and under the watchful eye of Giuseppina Maria Giani, Bernardo’s

second born. Her shrewd head was crammed with mathematics and business and, at only 17, she had turned this newest business into a real money maker for the family.

Into the afternoon the preparations marched. The entire kitchen was a blur of energy with Piccolina, a wild Lucifero biting at its heels. The children and men were shooed away, hoping for the usual affectionate handouts, drifting in on the aromas spreading through the whole domicile.

By evening, in the vast dining hall, white damask tablecloths embroidered with large intricate “G’s,” were thrown over long wooden tables scrubbed raw daily. At seven, the noisy brood of over 40 children were always fed first. Their parents visited them in their apartments after supper to say good night, to read or tell them stories, and always hear their prayers. Then, dressed for dinner, 28 adults, all wearing the fragrant rosemary sprigs over their hearts, went downstairs at nine, for the second feeding of Piccolina’s perfection.

Quietly, all the children, except the young ones and babies snuck out of their beds.

Angela sat with her sister Vittoria, brother, Carlo, and numerous cousins on the darkened part of the stairs to watch the honoring meal for their Nonna and Nonno, now looking down at them from heaven. Proud, of their brilliant sister, they both craned their necks to catch a glimpse of Giuseppina, who was now included with the adults. Many toasts of deep ruby *rosso* were drunk to their memory throughout the merry evening. The laughter of their parents, still lingering over the meal and the aroma of pungent cigar smoke drifted up the stairs. When the adults broke into song, the children rested their heads on each other and crooned along in hushed



Giuseppina Giani

tones. As the evening progressed, stories of those dear old ones were shared, which brought tears, clapping and bravos above, below, and in the kitchen . When Bernardo rendered a particularly melodious serenade to Maria Giuseppa, his besotted children forgot themselves, cheered and clapped loudly for the performance.

“What is this!” thundered Giani. “Where is this audience who should be in bed!”

And then, in a surprise rush, the hold up poured out of the room sweeping their children into their arms, murmuring dark threats as they were again tucked into their beds.

The Giani compound was rarely quiet. Many nights, the children, who played dozens of instruments, got together and gave concerts for their parents. They wrote, crafted and performed plays, poetry readings, fairy tales, or rendered hosts of vocal or instrumental solos. A presentation always delayed bedtime. As a result, the children became talented experts at music, performances, and delay. Angela, whose voice was flatter than a frog croak, was very accomplished on mandolin and violin. Since showing one of her drawings took no time at all, she practiced her instruments diligently and received praise from her cousins for the duration of melodies and compositions. A most valuable instrument, a violin, with a clouded past was purchased for her on her tenth birthday.



Giani Women and Children ~ Maria Giuseppa (Lower Left) ~ 1897

“That man buys her everything! She’s a spoiled, indulged child!” expressed a Giani wife to Maria Giuseppa, who only rolled her eyes to heaven.

“She shows talent,” stated another. “Especially at drawing, spoiled or not.”

The most anticipated day for the household always occurred the first Monday of every month. Then, the gentle Percheron beasties, great, great grandsons and daughters that made the original trek over *Monte Bianco*, were hitched to the gaily painted wagons, now turned from Giani and Sons Moving Business to Giani Family traveling Monday Laundry. Cousins would be thrown atop the mountain of wash, or placed astride the horses and into the countryside the entourage would go forward, a sphere of chatter, noise, singing, threats, squeals and joy. It was there that Angela was reunited with her prima mamma, who was still employed by the family for certain duties. Standing in the middle of the stream, the women would beat and scrub, singing folk songs to the beat of their toil, often hiking and knotting their dresses round their waists. Clothing, bath, kitchen items and heavy monogrammed sheets were spread on every bush and hung from every tree. Groomsmen stayed far enough away so as to not involve themselves with the woman’s work, but not so far that they would miss the leg show in the stream. Some of the men and older Giani children took to the mountain trails for an all day hike. Meanwhile, back at camp, washing complete, next came the laundering of the naked, screaming, protesting little ones. They were dunked into the freezing, clear streams, while women dug into small ears, shampooed hair, and rubbed shivering bodies raw with the amber bars of laundry soap. After the ordeal, when towels and hugs had soothed distress, a grand picnic would be spread on blankets. Ample rounds of Bel Paese, Fontina, and Gorgonzola cheeses were cut. Thickly sliced Italian bread was layered with Prosciutto cured ham, Mortadella, veal loaf, breakfast tongue, or Genova salami,

hot with embedded green pepper corns. Leftovers lay in inviting playing card designs on white crock platters. Sturdy white plates were piled high with black olives, thinly sliced tomatoes, drenched with olive oil and soured vino. Then came the fruit and nuts, and perhaps, just perhaps ... the promised reward for the bathing ordeal, “*Biscotti Tortoni*,” the celestial concoction of macaroons, crushed almonds, heavy cream, dark rum and maraschino cherries.



orte d'ecceso,” death by failing to push away from the picnic blanket, they’d all lie down for *un piccolo sonno*, a little nap. Later, if the sun had cooperated, everyone joined in the folding and sorting of the fragrant laundry. Evening, under a pale moon, while mandolins serenaded, children lay curled into the arms of the family servants, older children and mammas. Angela fell asleep in the happy security of the swaying wagons, lullabies and the sweet smell of linen.

The new century dawned.

Angela, the apple of her father’s eye, had grown into a wild child. She had inherited the Giani looks. Tall, thin, ramrod straight, a narrow long nose reminiscent of the French genes, cut her thin face. High cheekbones accented the dark, penetrating eyes of her father, Bernardo.

“She’s smoking cigarettes, and cigars ... and pipes!” moaned Maria Giuseppa to her smiling husband. “She chopped her hair with stable scissors! She rides horses like a man in YOUR pants! Now she says that she’s going to take her paints strapped on her back and climb Gran Paradiso ALONE.”



-9-Nonno's Monkey.Prologue DUE

“I’ll find her a guide, a hiking group, ” offered Bernardo, himself an avid mountaineer. “She’s something Maria! Just to think of the miracle.”

Maria Giuseppa threw up her hands.

two weeks, and came home sunburned, of all things, and deliriously

happy. She’d slept in the open on the ground, and had abandoned both

the group and the guide, a week into her sojourn. Alone, she’d painted

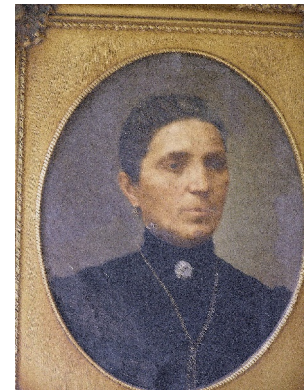
from morning to night, hiked, and slept under the stars! The next year, she

vowed to do Monte Bianco. The town eligibles were always after her, but

she spit on them, hooting she loved her horses more. Maria Giuseppa just

rolled her eyes, and refused to be reminded by Bernardo she had shared a

similar personality when she was young.

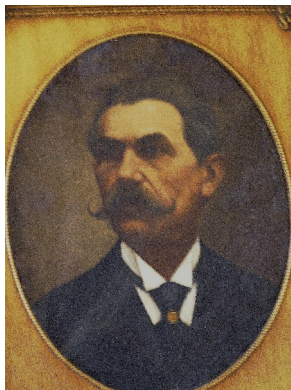


Angela's Painting of Her Mother Maria Giuseppa Giani

“Too wild to handle,” all the men had finally said.

Even for the Giani’s, she

was unnerving.



Angela's Painting of Her Father Bernardo Giani

Her huge artistic talent

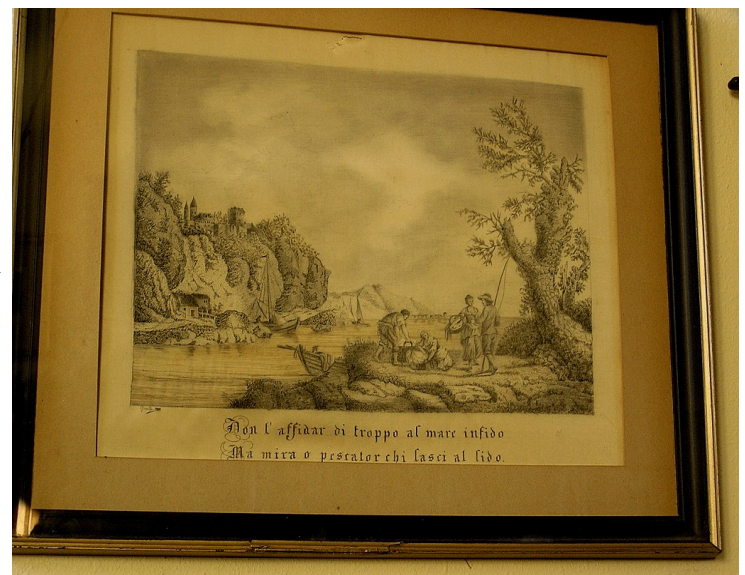
blossomed and diversified. At sixteen, she created an

intricate stitching, done on ivory silk, using only

black thread, which depicted the laundry outings of

her childhood. This won first prize in a prestigious,

highly competitive Italian art competition. It looked



Angela's Stitchery ~ Ivory Silk with Black Thread ~ 1900

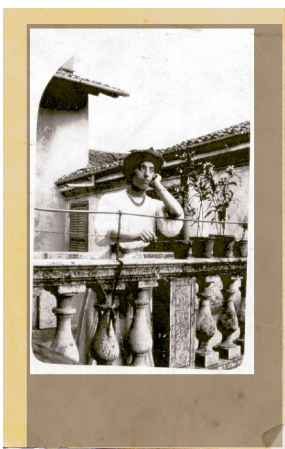
more like a very complex pencil sketch, or detailed lithograph, rather than an embroidery. She completed oil paintings of Bernardo and Maria Giuseppa that same year. Deeply classical, in the style of the old masters, they almost breathed.

. “A friend came for a visit,” Angela related, laughing to one of her schoolmates. “Papà’s painting was by my studio window facing front of our house. The man kept yelling Bernardo! Answer me! He thought my father was avoiding him and he was insulted!”

Off to a Florentine college bent on a major in fine arts. Often in the morgue, she dissected bodies to learn the arrangement of muscle on bone, under blue-veined skin. Bernardo and Maria Giuseppa resigned themselves to having another old maid. After all, who would marry this fiercely independent and brilliant, now 21 year-old woman? And her sister? The beautiful Giuseppina was over 30, and still unmarried. Fate would yank these independent sisters off their solitary paths. Vittoria Giani, wheelchair bound for three years because of Multiple Sclerosis, died May 28, 1901. Now 25, older brother Carlo Luigi had taken a commission in the Italian Army.



Angela ~ The Wild Child at 20



*Angela at her Gallarate
Villa ~ 1902*

By 1905, the Giani clan were beginning to go their separate ways, wanting separate homes and lives of their own. The children married, many obtained rare degrees - architecture, doctors of chemistry, philosophy and law. A strangeness, a distance fell over the once vibrant family, headed by Luigi and Giuditta. Bernardo was left to manage the lion’s share of the

-11-Nonno's Monkey.Prologue DUE

moving business, still housed in the monastery and began a wine distributing business as well. Even he, the last to go, finally moved his family to more modern apartments on Via Manzoni, in Gallarate, just a few miles south. Piccolina refused to accompany any Giani, although every one had begged, and pleaded, saying they couldn't manage without their "Capo Dello Stato." Saying she was too old to change at 79, she wanted to keep her rooms off the monastery kitchen, grow her large garden bursting with flowers, vegetables and herbs. There was also the care of the groomsmen still employed by the moving business, which now also delivered wine for Bernardo. Driving daily with her father to Cassano Magnago, Giuseppina, brilliant at organization and math, fluent in four languages, kept the books, scheduled moves and managed the office with her father.

Somewhere between Piccolina's morning caffè robusto and nighttime prayers, the single 33 year-old office manager was attracted to a young stableboy, twenty-two year-old Enrico Santo De Bernardi, eleven years her junior. Devilishly handsome, with a smile that would have warmed the most frigid of hearts, he was charismatic and intelligent, despite only four years of education.



*Enrico Santo De Bernardi (22), Giuseppina Giani (33)
Married ~ September 10, 1905*

He'd come down from Arsago Seprio, a small village north of the Giani compound. Because he had an uncanny way with stone construction and wild horses, Enrico found work with the Gianis.

Enrico and Giuseppina's courtship and elopement to Milano on September 10, 1905, was the biggest scandal of the decade. A month

later, Maria Giuseppa died of Influenza, at 53. Some said it was the fault of the willful Giuseppina

who'd married a farmer. Eight months and fourteen days later, their first child, a daughter was born, while the old crones counted on their fingers.

“Premature? She’s fully formed. A bastard! That Giuseppina, at thirty-three - and still doing ... She pushed her mother into an early grave!”



*Angela, Her Niece Maria &
Nephew, Dino at the Beach
~ Adriatic, 1908*

Maria Bernadina Angela De Bernardi was born in March, but her records were changed to show May 27, 1906. The ruined reputation of Giuseppina, drove a wedge between the rest of the Gianis, who viewed this vulgar union to a peasant as a dissolution of the hierarchy to which they belonged. Bernardo Angelo Giorgio, came April 20,

1908. By 1910, Angela lost her beloved, doting father

Bernardo, with influenza, and her sister, Giuseppina, of

septicemia “childbed fever,” giving birth to a third child, a still born daughter.

Feeling great pity for the two little motherless children, Angela married Enrico

in December of 1912 in a quiet ceremony in Gallarate, Italy. The family always

whispered that he was a handsome devil, and she’d

been secretly in love with him from the beginning.

Perhaps it was his way with horses, his confident demeanor, or his huge,

good humor which could cool the most tense of situations within the

emotional Italian world. But, like the Catholic script written for the Holy

Mother, Angela, along with the vast bulk of Italian women, liked being a

martyr. The whole arrangement satisfied everyone. The old mustached

maldicenze, gossips, quit their wagging tongues, and the Gianis breathed a



*Maria Angela Bernadina
~ 1906*



*Nonna at the Adriatic ~
1907*

deep sigh of relief that finally she'd gotten somebody, and was now the step mother of two sad little children. The wild child entered the acceptable loop of life, in a way. Enrico was to them, and would always be a peasant. The newlyweds moved to Arsago Seprio, into the bosom of the De



Angela Has a Family ~ December 1912 ~ Maria and Dino

Bernardi clan, while Angela tried to manage the moving business after her Giuseppina's death. It was going badly. Some said she was an artist, and certainly nothing like her dead business oriented sister. Some said she couldn't manage any business from 20 miles away, and besides she was a newlywed, besotted with that merda shoveler. Others stated that Bernardo had spoiled her so, she'd never learned discipline. Since the rest of the family received a share of the moving business profits, they were not so inclined be generous in their opinions of her business acumen. But, Ford's

horseless carriages were fast replacing horses and changing Italy's life style in the bigger cities. Now with her only brother in the Italian Army, she had no one left. Angela and Enrico decided to find a better life in another country.

The most essential thing to Enrico was how well Nebbiolo grapes would grow, since he had dreams of becoming a vintner. After endless discussions with others who had emigrating relatives, Angela's constant searches in geography books, and incalculable talks with travelers and each other, their final choices were written on slips of paper, folded and dropped into a crystal

bowl. The selections were: USA: Mendocino Wine Valley, California; Connecticut because some paisanos of Enrico were there, upper New York State; South America: Chili, Argentina; and finally, New Zealand. The couple was tense as Angela riffled their destiny and reached a trembling hand into the bowl.

And the winner was ...

Connecticut, USA.

Angela and Enrico sold the business, and their home, and began the packing that would take them away from their “Old Country” forever. There would be the trunks for immediate use, and the ones that could be



The DeBernardi Clan~ Arsago Seprio 1912

shipped cheaper, coming later, sent by Carlo Luigi. Two years would pass before that would happen. Using some of the profits from the moving business sale, Enrico purchased spaces on the Duca D'Aosta, that would leave from Genova July 7, arriving in New York on the 21st, 1914. And so, they climbed aboard, tearfully calling goodbye to a few Gianis, accompanied by old Piccolina, who still stood erect like steel, a small but telling distance away from the entire clan of good natured De Bernardis. Enrico put his hand over his heart, taking strength from bundle which contained the strongest cuttings from the grape vines he'd wrapped in wet handkerchiefs. Raising his hat with the other, he bid goodbye to a world he would never see again.

