

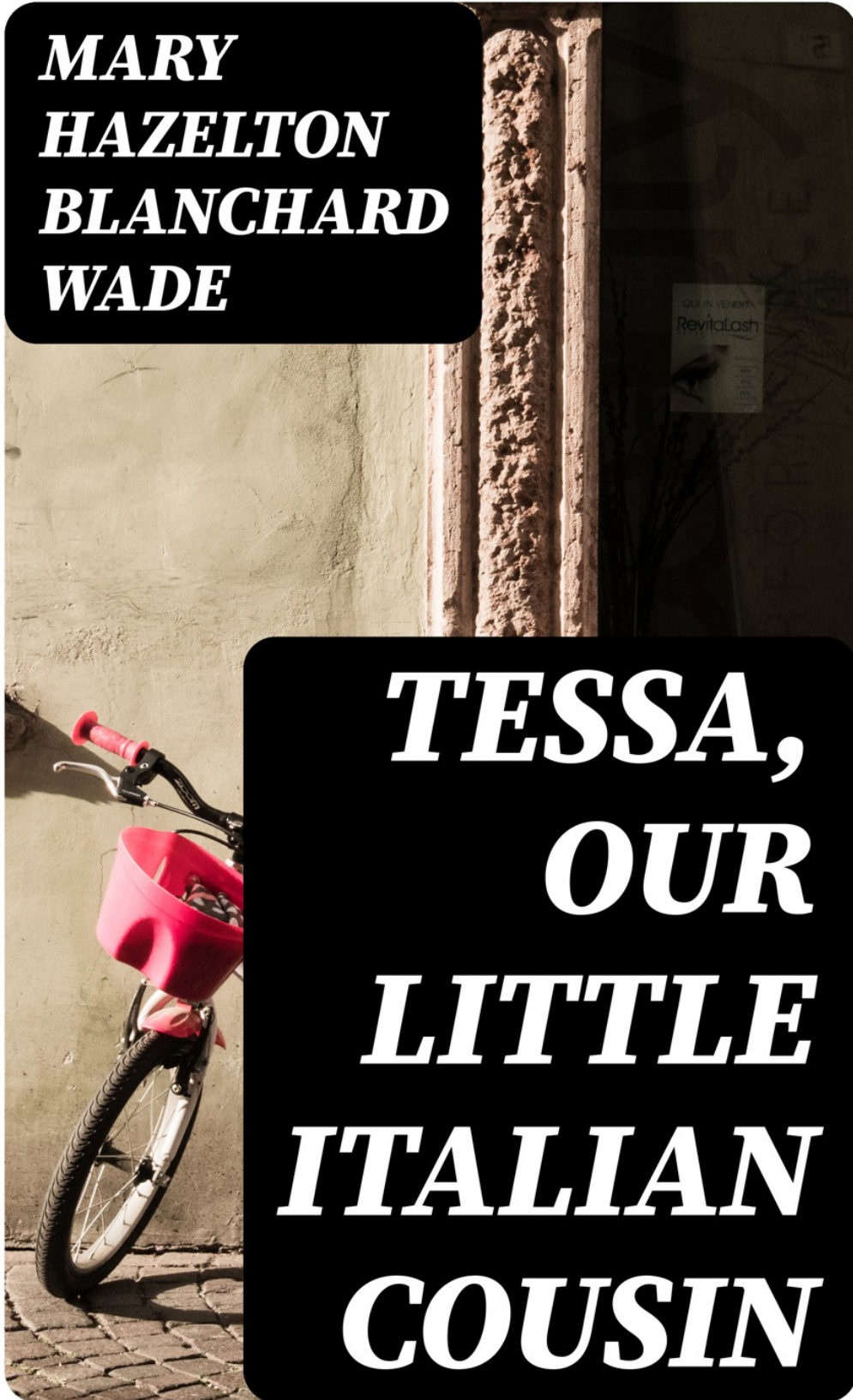
**MARY
HAZELTON
BLANCHARD
WADE**

**TESSA,
OUR
LITTLE
ITALIAN
COUSIN**



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Tessa, Our Little Italian Cousin

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Preface

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MANY people from other lands have crossed the ocean to make a new home for themselves in America. They love its freedom. They are happy here under its kindly rule. They suffer less from want and hunger than in the country of their birthplace.

Their children are blessed with the privilege of attending fine schools and with the right to learn about this wonderful world, side by side with the sons and daughters of our most successful and wisest people.

Among these newer-comers to America are the Italians, many of whom will never again see their own country, of which they are still so justly proud. They will tell you it is a land of wonderful beauty; that it has sunsets so glorious that both artists and poets try to picture them for us again and again; that its history is that of a strong and mighty people who once held rule over all the civilized world; that thousands of travellers visit its shores every year to look upon its paintings and its statues, for it may truly be called the art treasure-house of the world.

When you meet your little Italian cousins, with their big brown eyes and olive skins, whether it be in school or on the street, perhaps you will feel a little nearer and more friendly if you turn your attention for a while to their home, and the home of the brave and wise Columbus who left it that he might find for you in the far West your own loved country, your great, grand, free America.

TESSA
Our Little Italian Cousin

CHAPTER I.

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TESSA

"THERE comes babbo! There comes babbo!" cried Tessa, as she ran down the narrow street to meet her father, with baby Francesca toddling after her.

The man was not alone,—Beppo and the donkey were with him. They were very tired, for it was a hard trip from the little village on the hilltop to the great city, miles away, and back again. The donkey was not of much help on the homeward journey, either. Poor little patient beast! he was getting old now, and he felt that his day's work was done when he had carried a load of nuts and vegetables to Rome in the morning. But when he had to bring Beppo back again, he felt a little bit sulky. So it was no wonder that he stood quite still every few minutes and did not seem to hear his little master scold.

"Get up, Pietro, get up. We shall be late to supper," Beppo would say, but the donkey would not move till Beppo's father used the whip. He did not strike hard enough to hurt the poor creature, though. Oh no, the kind man would not do that, he was too gentle. But he must make the donkey know the whip was there, or they would never get home.

When they had crossed the wide plain and reached the foot of the hill, Beppo got down and walked. It was too hard on Pietro to make him carry even a little boy now.

They came up the narrow road slowly till they reached the village. And just as the sunset spread over the sky, and

gave a glory even to the stones, Tessa caught sight of them.

"My darling Tessa," said her father. "My dear little Francesca." Tired as he was, he took the two children in his arms and hugged them as though he had been away many days. Yet he had left them at five o'clock that very morning.

"We have good news for you, Beppo and I," he went on.

Beppo laughed till the high, pointed hat nearly fell off his head.

"Oh, yes, good news," said Beppo. "You cannot think what it is, Tessa. May I tell her, babbo?"

"Yes, my child," his father answered.

"You are to go to Rome to-morrow with babbo and me. The great artist who buys our fruit wants to see you. He thinks he may want you for a model. And me, too, Tessa, he wants me! He will put us both in a picture. Babbo said you also had long hair, and that we look much alike.

"Only think, Tessa! he will pay babbo for letting him paint us. And mother shall have a new dress, and you shall have some red ribbons. We will all have a feast. Say, Tessa, is there a nice chestnut cake waiting for our supper? I am so hungry."

The boy's great black eyes sparkled as he told the story. His long hair hung down over his shoulders, under the odd pointed hat. He was a beautiful child. It was no wonder the American artist wished to put him in a picture.

But Tessa was beautiful, too. The artist would not be disappointed when he saw her. Her skin was clear, but like the colour of the olives which grew on the old tree behind her house. And now there was a faint pink blush in her cheeks as she listened to Beppo's story.

They were very happy children, but oh, so poor, you would think if you should visit them in the old house where they have always lived. It is no wonder they like best to be outdoors.

The house is all of stone, and the floor is made of bricks. It seems dark and chilly inside after leaving the glorious sunset. The plaster is blackened with smoke and age. In some places it is broken away from the wall and is falling down.

But there is a picture of the Christ-child hanging over the rough table, and the children do not think of the dingy walls. It is home, where a loving father and mother watch over them and guard them from harm.

See! the table is spread with the simple supper. There are the cakes made from chestnut flour mixed with olive oil, and of which Beppo is so fond. And here is milk from Tessa's pet goat. Beppo runs over to the stone fountain in the middle of the village and fills a copper dish with fresh water, and the little family sit down to their evening meal.

The mother hears the good news, and claps her hands in delight. But what shall Tessa wear? It troubles the good soul, for Tessa has no shoes, and both of her dresses are old and worn.

"Never mind, never mind," says her husband, "don't trouble yourself about that. The artist says he does not care about the clothes. He was much pleased with Beppo's cloak, however. He says it will be fine in the picture. Let Tessa wear her wide straw hat and her old clothes; that is all he asks."

"But how will she manage to travel so far? The child has never before gone such a distance from home," continued

her mother.

"She is not heavy. She can sit on Pietro's back between the panniers. I will not load them heavily to-morrow, and then Pietro will not complain. And when we come home at night, Beppo can walk, I am sure. He may be tired, but he is a stout lad, my Beppo is. What do you say, my boy?"

Beppo was sure he could get along. He was only too glad to have Tessa's company.

"But think, babbo," he exclaimed, "it is not for one day that the artist wishes us. It is many, many, before the picture will be finished. We can manage somehow, I am sure. I am nearly twelve years old now, and I am getting very strong."

"But what will mother do with me away all day long?" said Tessa. "Who will take care of the baby while she works in the garden? And who will help her pull the weeds?"

"Bruno shall watch Francesca. He will let no harm come to her, you may be sure. Besides, she can walk alone so well now, she is little care. As for the garden, there is not much more to do at present. It almost takes care of itself," said the mother.

"Yes, Bruno can be trusted," said the father, "he is the best dog I ever knew."

As he heard his name spoken, the sheep-dog came slowly out of the chimney-corner. He wagged his tail as though he knew what his master and mistress had been saying. Beppo threw him his last bit of cake and Bruno caught it on his nose, from which it was quickly passed into his mouth.