

CHAPTER I

VANZETTI landed at Ellis Island in 1908, at the age of twenty. He had come from a comfortable, middle-class home in Villafalletto, province of Cuneo, in northern Italy, where his father was a substantial farmer.

As both parents were devout Catholics, Bartolomeo had a strict bringing-up. He attended the local schools until he was thirteen, when his father put him to work in a pastry shop at Cuneo. He remained there a year and a half and afterwards worked also in Cavour, Courgne and Turin as pastry cook and candy maker.

Six years after he left home, he fell seriously ill and returned to the care of his mother and sisters. He was then nineteen. During the years spent away from home, he had read and studied whenever opportunity afforded. It was during this period that he turned away from Catholicism and became interested in radical social theories.

His mother's death, which occurred about this time, after a lingering illness, left a deep and permanent impression upon Vanzetti. He decided to leave home again and soon set out for America.

His first two years in this country were spent as a dishwasher in restaurants in New York. Brief snatches of employment on Connecticut farms, two years in the stone pits of Meriden, Connecticut, and a period in

tals if they know just what a little cat knows. As for Zora, I know that she loves the cat, and is not cruel amongst it, but she played with it too much violently and insistantly, and so hurts and troubles it, with the well merited consequences that she knows now pretty well. I am sorry for her nose, but when I thought that the cat had anticipated my advice, I can't help but laugh. Tell Beltrando¹ that I received his callender; much oblige to him. I hear that the woolen mill has stopped to work, and you are without job. Certainly, owed to the high price of everything, and your familiar circumstances, it shall trouble you. But take it easy. After all we cannot become rich by the work of our arms. . . . Take this opportunity to enjoy sunshine and open air. . . .

I am glad for your good news. I too feel very well. Thanks for all.

Kisses to the children, best regards to Vincenzo² and all those who love me. Cheer up, be careful for your health.

P. S. One more order: If you have yet that callender with the world map, send it to me. I shall smile, in spite of the chain, in looking our gradual World's conquest.

¹ Mrs. Brini's son, who helped Vanzetti deliver eels to his Italian customers the morning of December 24, 1919, when Vanzetti was charged with participating in an attempted hold-up at Bridgewater, Mass. Beltrando was Vanzetti's chief witness at the Plymouth trial. He is a member of the Class of 1929 at the College of Liberal Arts, Boston University.

² Mrs. Brini's husband, an old friend of Vanzetti.

July 22, 1921. *Charlestown Prison*

MY DEAR MRS. GLENDOWER EVANS:¹

I was just thinking what I would to do for past the long days jail: I was saying to myself: Do some work. But what? Write. A gentle motherly figure came to my mind and I rehear the voice: Why don't you write something now? It will be useful to you when you will be free. Just at that time I received your letter.

Thanks to you from the bottom of my heart for your confidence in my innocence; I am so. I did not spittel a drop of blood, or steal a cent in all my life. A little knowledge of the past; a sorrowful experience of the life itself had gave to me some ideas very different from those of many other umane beings. But I wish to convince my fellowmen that only with virtue and honesty is possible for us to find a little happiness in the world. I preached: I worked. I wished with all my faculties that the social wealth would belong to every umane creatures, so well as it was the fruit of the work of all. But this do not mean robbery for a insurrection.

The insurrection, the great movements of the soul, do not need dollars. It need love, light, spirit of sacrifice, ideas, conscience, instincts. It need more conscience, more hope and more goodness. And all this blessed things can be seeded, awoked, growed up in the heart of man in many ways, but not by robbery and murder for robbery.

¹ Mrs. Elizabeth Glendower Evans of Brookline, Mass.

I like you to know that I think of Italy, so speaking. From the universal family, turning to this humble son, I will say that, as far as my needs, wish and aspirations call, I do not need to become a bandit. I like the teaching of Tolstoi, Saint Francesco and Dante. I like the example of Cincinati and Garibaldi. The epicurean joi do not like to me. A little roof, a field, a few books and food is all what I need. I do not care for money, for leisure, for mondane ambition. And honest, even in this world of lambs and wolves I can have those things. My father has many field, houses, garden. He deal in wine and fruits and granaries. He wrote to me many times to come back home, and be a business man. Well, this supposed murderer had answered to him that my conscience do not permit to me to be a business man and I will gain my bread by work his field.

And more: The clearness of mind, the peace of the conscience, the determination and force of will, the intelligence, all, all what make the man feeling to be a part of the life, force and intelligence of the universe, will be brake by a crime. I know that, I see that, I tell that to everybody: Do not violate the law of nature, if you do not want to be a miserable. I remember: it was a night without moon, but starry. I sit alone in the darkness, I was sorry, very sorry. With the face in my hands I began to look at the stars. I feel that my soul want goes away from my body, and I have had to make an effort to keep it in my chest. So, I am the son of Nature, and I am so rich that I

do not need any money. And for this they say I am a murderer and condemned me to death. Death? It is nothing. Abominium is cruel thing.

Now you advise me to study. Yes, it would be a good thing. But I do not know enough this language to be able to make any study through it. I will like to read Longfellow's, Paine's, Franklin's and Jefferson's works, but I cannot. I would like to study mathematics, physics, history and science, but I have not a sufficient elementary school to begin such studies, especially the two first and I cannot study without work, hard physical work, sunshine and winds; free, blessing wind. There is no flame without the atmospheric gasses; and no light of genius in any soul without they communion with Mother Nature.

I hope to see you very soon; I will tell you more in the matter. I will write something, a meditation perhaps and name it: Waiting for the Hanger. I have lost the confidence in the justice of man. I mean in what is called so; not of course, of that sentiment which lay in the heart of man, and that no infernal force will be strong enough to soffocate it. Your assistance and the assistance of so many good men and women, had made my cross much more light. I will not forget it.

I beg your pardon for such a long letter, but I feel so reminiscent to you that hundred pages would not be sufficient to extern my sentiments and feelings. I am sure you will excuse me. Salve.

1921. *Charlestown State Prison*

DEAR MRS. EVANS:

The "wake up" rings here in Charlestown at 7 A. M. but yesterday morning, the officer call me at six o'clock. "Go to put on your own clothes," he tell me with hurried way. I went and I found my old clothing horribly wrinkled. There were nobody at the work, at such hour, so, after a useless protest I was compelled to put them on as they were. Well, I was saying to myself, returning to the cell: There is, after all, something worse than this. Sure it was: On the table I found my breakfast, a cup of coffee, three slices of bread, two frankforts and mashed potatoes, all so cold as ice cream can be.

After such a breakfast, an official took me in the "Guard Room." The little chauffeur, an old officer, and the bravest one were waiting for me. I was chained with the last one, and all four left the room and went down to the street where the automobile was ready. Six or seven officers stood at the door, with their right hand near the back pocket, ready to protect me from any attack. One must be most ungrateful man of the world for not feeling quite reconoscent.

As the machine start I asked for tobacco. They stop at the nearest corner and the old officer went to buy some of it. A young policeman begin to speak with the remaining officers, he leaning himself in such a manner to put his head in the automobile. His eyes, dark and clear, look at me with an ill-concealed curiosity, and I perceive his wonder at my common harm-

less presence. Surely he had expected something different. Meanwhile I was looking at the people going up and down of the streets. I can tell which of them are employed and which are not by their way of walking.

The former went straight ahead as men who know where he want to go and when he must arrive. The second look around, above, and below, as a man who lost himself, and do not know what he has to do. Little farther I meet a little compatriot. He is a little fellow of the South, with yellow pale face dry by a copious dayly sweat, but his mustachs are well curled up. He is very petty, and it look like if he were the centre of the world. I cannot help but smile. I never see him before but I know where he go, what he thinks; his hopes. I knew him, as I know myself; probably better than myself. "Take that way; avoid civilization," the brave officer is now crying to the driver who obey silently. Surely enough this man hope that such high language is incomprehensible to me.

So we enter now into a Park the name of which I already forget, but the beauty of it, I will never forget anymore. If I were poet and know the metre, I would write a song of it in third rhyme. I am not a poet, but neither so profane to disturb such splendor with my poor ink. The concerned officer point to me a big brick building, saying, "It is the Fine Arts Museum." He point many other buildings saying that they are almost all a private schools. I was then regretting to have only a pair of eyes, able to look in one direction alone. I observe everything, the trees, the bushes, the

grass, the rocks, and the brook along the way, on which I was raptured. The drops of dew look like pearls; the sky reflects himself in the waters of the brook, and let one think that it is bottomless. But beauty over all tell to me a wonderful history of one day, far away, a day when the waters in a gigantic and confounded waves, left this place suddenly.

I look now to those which pass at my side in automobiles. But what a difference between these men that I meet now, and those I met a little while ago, a little far away going to work, or walking round about; what a difference! The big buildings had now give the place to a more modest ones, which become more and more rare, until only a little, humble, odd, funny houses, rise here and there from the accidentated soil. O, funny, humble, old, little houses that I love; little house always big enough for the greatest loves, and most saint affections. Here I see two girls of the people going to work. They look like to be sisters. Their shoulders are more large than those of the girls I meet a little before, but little curved. On their pale faces are lines of sorrow and distress. There is soberness and suffering in their big, deep, full eyes. Poor plebian girls, where are the roses of your springtime?

I found myself in front of Dedham jail. We enter. A little ugly Napolitan barber has such a care and zeal of my looking, as if I am the Mayor of Naple.

They locked me at No. 61. Now the news of my arrival is known by all the human canaries of the place. The poor boys do their best to give me a glance, a word, a cheer up. Little after I was brought to the

Court, protected by a numerous American Cossack, as if I and Nick were a Russian Czars.

At last we come back to Charlestown, and I have had the opportunity to look at the sky and see the stars, as in the old days at home. The workers were then coming back home. Still in their confused forms I can see the "little of abdom and much of heart" as Gori sang. One of them appear to be a Latin, strong and noble. This is one of those who will win the battle that the citizens had lost, I say to myself.

Few minutes after we stop in front of the Prison, and little after I found myself carefully closed in my room, where a supper, something like tea and coffee, boiled beef and mashed potatoes with few slices of bread, wait for me, all as cold as ice cream can be.

Early Spring, 1922. Charlestown Prison

DEAR MRS. EVANS:

Your welcome letter of the 27th Feb. was received. My delay in answering was due to causes indipendent to my will. I was very beneficiated by your last visit and English-lesson. In a letter received tonight, one Friend tells me that my English is not perfect. I am still laughing for such a pious euphension. Why do not say horrible? Nevertheless, I can made a better translation than the one in argument. I did it as I did for an experiment, to prove if an almost letterally translation is intelligible. I show it to some friends, asking them if they understand it. The answer was "yes," while it should have been "no," that I might

have remade the work with much profit and better result.

Of course, as the writing is beautiful in its original, and as I labored very much at the dictionary, so I was thinking to have accomplished something worth, and the disillusion was, as almost all disillatin, rather cruel. But when a poor one is surrounded by many great difficulties, the small ones appear always a joke to him, and after your visit I found myself in the best of the mood—that is, I was decided to do in the future as much more good than the much bad I did in the past.

I analized attentively the original—it is almost impossible intellectual pleasure—which for hours has made me forget myself, the cell, and the others sorrowy things.

I am reading an English prose translation of *Gitanzaly* by Rabindranath Tagore. Except the beauty of language, the wonderful style and grammatical correctness, there is nothing new, nothing of unknown in it. Of course, great sentiments, sensibility; a lyric pantheistic feeling of the great mystery of which we are a part. But nothing else.

I value more the natural sciences that give us little but positive knowledge—which teaches better than anything else the great epic wrote in every square inch of the universe. Emotions and sentiments are maibe the greatest part of life, but too often, when alone, they lead mankind astray. Not a word in all these Tagore's beautiful poetries about social problems. Maibe a remote, so to say, incitation to freedom. But what

one? He do not mention it. So his words maibe use by the Indian Patriots to excite the Indian masses against the actual, principal oppressor: England. But it would be a useless consummation, for India, with her cast of nobles and of priests, is simply criminal. Nor her people will enjoy peace and health before to annihilate this great social-injustice and shame.

Otherwise we Italians know from tragic experiences the results of the Fatherland Indipendence. After half century of such a bless, we are now facing this terrible dilemma, to throw down every things and rebuild upon other bases, or die. I suppose that you are informed of the present conditions of my native land. I know the details; they are horrible.

I am sorry for Nick [Sacco]. After a serious consideration I decide to not do the hunger strike now, although I am ready to recur at the hungry strike if and when it would seem reasonable to me.

Today the sun is glorious, and my cell more lighten and my heart more glad than the usual. The same I hope of and wish to you.

April 13, 1922. Charlestown Prison

DEAR MR. BIGELOW:¹

Last week I received *Vita Nuova* of Dante, that you sent to me. One could not be more fortunate than you in the selection of a book present, because I al-

¹ Francis H. Bigelow of Cambridge, Mass.

ways wished some secondary works of that great man. But, apart from the high estimation that I have in the teaching value of the book, your intentions give to it an inestimable value. In fact, a man in your condition, that spends and works for his sympathy and solidarity to a man in my condition, can only be moved by noble feeling and good-will. The fact that I have not the pleasure of knowing you personally, so adds to the agreeableness of your gift.

I hope I will yet be free, thanks to the generous solidarity of the many, but, anyhow, I will conserve zealously your book, as I do with the many other books and correspondence. If I have to die for a crime I never committed, I will send all these things to my father and sisters and brothers, sure that they will be much consoled.

December 25, 1922. Charlestown Prison

DEAR MRS. EVANS:

I was in thought for you, because I do not receive your missives. Your silence had made me fear of something wrong. I am glad after having learnt that it was due only to your work, saint work. I wish to you the sweetest rest, and may your good actions be spring of life for you as they are for others. I have also almost finish the reading of Mr. James' first volumes.¹

With affection your Bartolo.

¹ William James's *Psychology*.

December, 1922. Charlestown Prison

DEAR FRIEND BIGELOW:

Your long silence is always broken up by the presence of *Vita Nuova*. So, while toiling and thinking for answers to the many who, at this conventional date, had written me, I remembered you, and decided to write.

When one has passed through a trial as mine, and, amid such sorrows has had the comfort of such vast and deep human solidarity; when one has a principle, (liberty)—and at his side all the believers of liberty, and against him all the supporters of the tyranny, for him mankind is divided into two legions, and he loves as himself those who stand with him for the good cause. I think more, you have proved to be one of those of good-will. For this reason, I send to you in this tragic dreadful hour, the senses of my faith and of my gratitude.

April 14, 1923. Charlestown Prison

DEAR COMRADE BLACKWELL:¹

. . . . The really and great damage that the fascism has done, or has revealed, is the moral lowness in which we have fallen after the war and the revolutionary over-excitation of the last few years.

It is incredible the insult made to the liberty, to the life, to the dignity of the human beings, by other human beings. And it is humiliating, for he who feels

¹ Alice Stone Blackwell of Boston, Mass.

the common humanity that ties together all the men, good and bad, to think that all the committed infamies have not produced in the crowd an adequate sense of rebellion, of horrors, of disgust. It is humiliating to human beings, the possibility of such ferocity, of such cowardness. It is humiliating that men, who have reached the power only because, deprived of any moral or intellectual scrupols, they has known how to pluck the good moment to blackmail the "borgesia," may find the approbation, no matter if by a momentary aberration, of a number of persons sufficient to impose upon all countries their tyranny.

Therefore, the rescue expected and invoked by us must be before all a moral rescue; the re-valuation of the human liberty and dignity. It must be the condemnation of the Fascismo not only as a political and economic fact, but also and over all, as a criminal phenomenon, as the exploitation of a purulent growth which had been going, forming and ripening itself in the sick body of the social organism.

There are some, also among the so-called subversives, who are saying that the fascisti have taught to us how we must do, and they, these subversives, are intentioned to imitate and to exacerbate the fascisti methods.

This is the great danger, the danger of the to-morrow; the danger, I mean, that, after the Fascismo, declined from internal dissolution or by external attack, may have to follow a period of insensate violences, of sterile vendettes, which would exhaust in little episodes of blood that energy which should be employed for a

radical transformation of the social arrangements such to render impossible the repetition of the present horrors.

The Fascisti's methods may be good for who inspires to *become a tyrant*. They are certainly bad for he who will make "opera" of a liberator, for he who will collaborate to rise all humanity to a dignity of free and conscient men.

We remain as always we were, the partisans of the liberty, of all the liberty.

I hope you will agree my bad translation of Malatesta's words. They are words of one of the most learned, serene, courageous and powerful mind, among the minds of the sons of women through the whole history, and of a magnanimous heart.

May 6, 1923. Charlestown Prison

DEAR COMRADE HILLSMITH:¹

The reasons for my delay are many; but the principle ones are two. I expected to go to the court the 30th of April, and consequently, I have worked much in collaboration of our abdomadari [weekly],² which, I am glad to say, acquire continually more readers, and steadily grows better and better. The second, and more serious reason is, that your two letters are very contradictory to and against my personal opinions, beliefs, criterion and principles. They have provoked my Italian and my partisan impulses—my passion. So

¹ Mrs. Elsie Hillsmith, Ragged Hill Farms, South Danbury, N. H.

² Vanzetti wrote frequently during this period for an anarchist weekly, *L'Adunata dei Refrattari*, published in New York City.

I decided to wait for calm and serenity before to answer.

The price to perfection is high, sorrowful. I suffered more in making my conscience, than in facing my trial. I am a bitter polemist, a merciless theorist, and I know to cause to others much anguish. With my letters upon "Syndicalism," I am actually causing sorrow to many. The same comrade to whom these letters are dedicated, has written to me, "Your opinions upon the syndicalism are unjust." But he does not produce a single fact or reason in behalf of his affirmation; while one of the most intelligent and learned comrades in his article, "What shall we expect from another Anarchist Congress," has shown many facts that prove the veridicity of my assertion; he has said also what I intend to say in my 4th and conclusive letter on the topic.

Undoubtedly, the words that I am writing will disturb you, will cause your heart to ache. But, would you prefer my insincerity to my sincerity? To be sincere is not only my duty toward myself, my fellowmen, and my Cause, but it is also the only way that I have to not repay your love, benefits, and sincerity with deceiveness and villancy.

Of course, we Anarchists are so because we differ in opinions from all the other humans who are not Anarchists. All the enemies of the workers and of the human emancipation, when they speak to masses in order to vilify us, and keep the workers under exploitation of the capitalists, they tell the masses not to let the handed false doctrine influence their mind. The deceit of bad shepherds among the workers, and the

ignorance of the masses, has induced many sincerely but inexperienced friends of the workers to believe that we, proletarian vanguard of the Revolution, are mystified by false mirages and doctrines inoculated to our mind by the ill-intentioned propaganda of more educated rascals, propaganda blindly accepted. In verity, among us, those who blindly accept the propaganda does not exist. Why? Because we Anarchists; we, Peter Kropotkin, M. Bakunin, E. Reclus, L. Galleani, P. Gori, E. Malatesta, have been born in Prince's palaces, or in good mansions, and grown up in the Imperial Court, have been educated in the best colleges; we thought the same things that our enemies of the same social conditions thought; we have believed in the same things, acted the same acts.

And we humble worker Anarchists have been grown up without the confortation of the school, in poor houses, over working and suffering from the birth day on, we have done and believed as our enemy workers have done, believed and lived. We were as our enemies and adversaries are. Only by an incessant mental work, a long and terrible trial of conscience, we became different, as now we are. That is, we have analized, condemned, repudiated all conceptions, beliefs, the criterions and the principles that were inculcated in us from our infancy until the day of the beginning of our conviction.

I also believe that man has the faculty of reasoning, but that he can only exercise it upon what he can perceive, and by the way that he perceives. One cannot think in a language ignored by him. This is the cause of all the errors.