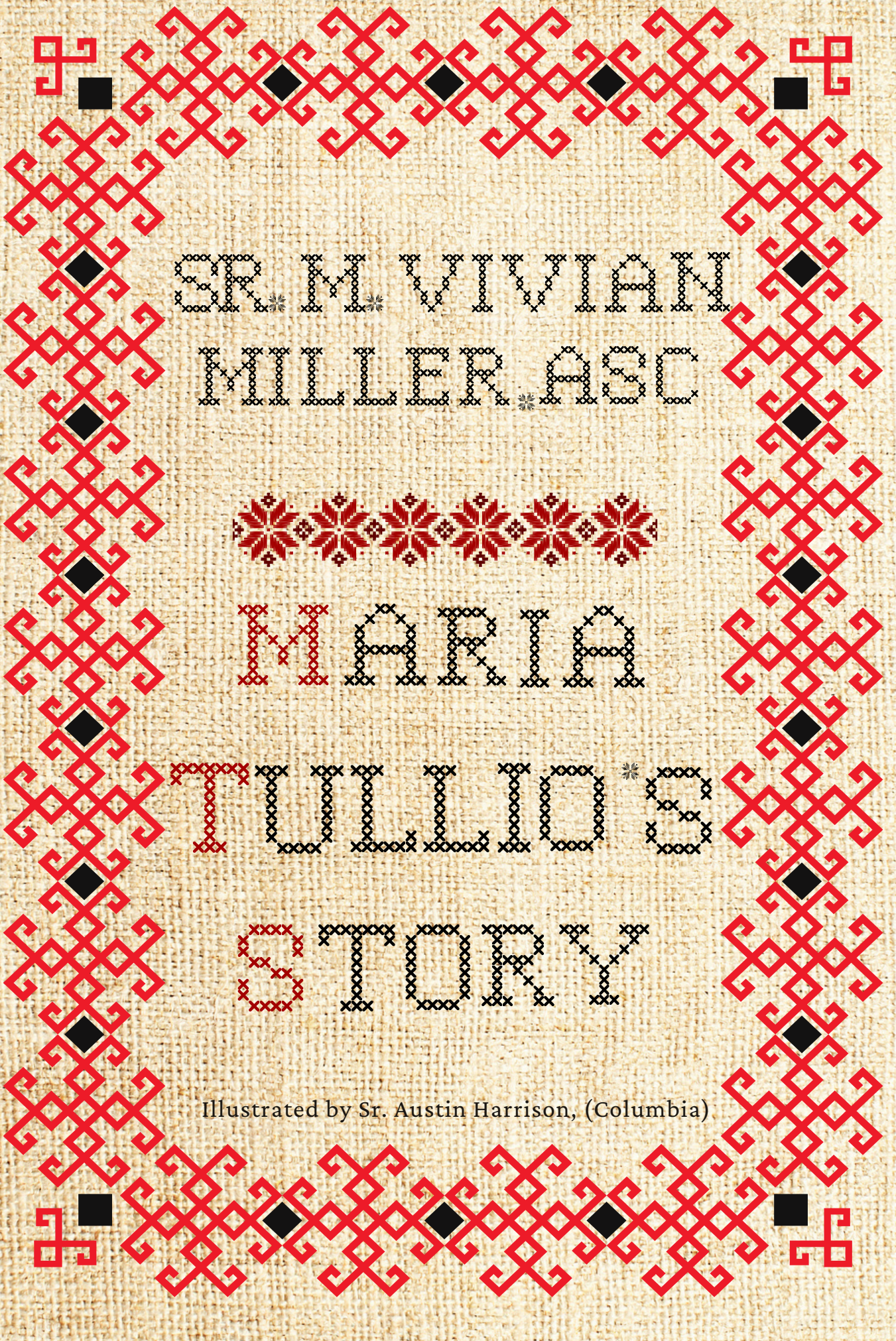




SR M VIVIAN
MILLER ASC



MARIA

TULLIO S

STORY

Illustrated by Sr. Austin Harrison, (Columbia)

Saint Maria De Mattias
Foundress of the
Adorers of the Blood of
Christ
Stories for the Young and
Old

ADORERS

OF THE BLOOD OF CRIST





My dear people, may I have your
attention, please?

Thank you.

Oh dear, now that you're all listening,
I almost wish you weren't.

I'm scared, I've never done this before.

Do you hear my knees knocking
or my teeth chattering?

Please try to ignore it.

Well, anyway, here you are—and here I
am... so let's get started.

I have been asked to tell you about my
very best friend:

MARIA DE MATTIAS,
and there's so much to tell.

I've been with Maria, most of my life.

I was born in 1813.

After my dad died, my mother had a hard time supporting
all of us little ones.

I was hired into the De Mattias home to help in the kitchen.

I think that was back in 1822 or so.

After a few years, they noticed our house was terribly crowded
so Mr. and Mrs. De Mattias invited me to live in their home.

Then when my mother died in 1831

I was sort of unofficially adopted
into the family.



I felt it a real honor to help in the DeMattias home.
Mr. was terribly important: a lawyer and for a time, the mayor of the town.
But at home, he was so very kind and gentle.
Mrs. was an elegant lady, and managed her household like a queen.
She kept her family dressed properly and stylishly...
(and she kept my clothes neat and clean, too).
But she wanted the girls to act like ladies all the time...
and sometimes that was hard on Maria who was so vivacious.
I was sorry when Mamma Ottavia scolded Maria;
but she scolded Antonio too, and sometimes even Michael.
Vincenza, the oldest girl, was just like her mother.



I hear that the De Mattias family had six other children who died
when they were babies. I guess that is why there was a space of 11 years between
Vincenza and Maria. Vincenza spent most of her time helping her mother and
didn't have time for her little sister. The two younger boys... well, they were typical
boys and they didn't want Maria tagging along either.
Dad Giovanni was concerned for his young daughter and wanted someone to
grow-up with her...
share in her fun, accompany her to town and such. That's how I became more of a
personal maid to Maria than a help in the kitchen.



Maria was confirmed when she was 13; and the next year she made her general confession and received Jesus for the first time. She often went to church, but she scrupled about receiving Jesus frequently.

I guess she noticed how sad I was because no one had prepared me for these sacraments. One day she called me, and some other girls in the neighborhood and began teaching us the catechism, and telling us lovely Bible stories. You should have seen the party she prepared for us on our great day. The priest then asked Maria to continue preparing young folks for the sacraments... so that is what she did.

Maria didn't treat me like a maid though... more like a little sister.

We had fun together. She was eight years older than I was... She was prettier too....and smarter.

I loved to comb her hair, and pile the curls up into all kinds of fancy hairdos. I loved her clothes, and liked to lay out her pretty dresses for our outings. She wore jewelry too, when we went out for walks in town, or to church. Everyone talked about the young pretty De Mattias girl, and wagered bets on which boy would be the lucky one to win her hand.





I remember the first year I lived with the De Mattias family. I was about 9, so Maria was 17, Vallecorsa had a mission. My, how we prayed.

Those missionaries had us in church most of the day, and again in the evening.

Everyone went—even Tony and Michael. The main missionary was a holy man

called DON GASPAR DEL BUFALO.

Maria really took everything serious. She talked to me a lot about wishing women could become missionaries too. I had all kinds of dreams at night, of me and Maria going all over Italy telling the people about God.

Little did I dream that all of this would one day come true.

There was a time after the mission when Maria really seemed confused.

She liked parties, dances and such... and I got to go with her, most of the time.

It was fun. But sometimes she would go to her room and stay there all day praying and sometimes crying.

We went to church a lot not just for Mass, but for extra visits.

Maria loved Our Lady much, and used to talk to her a lot in her room.

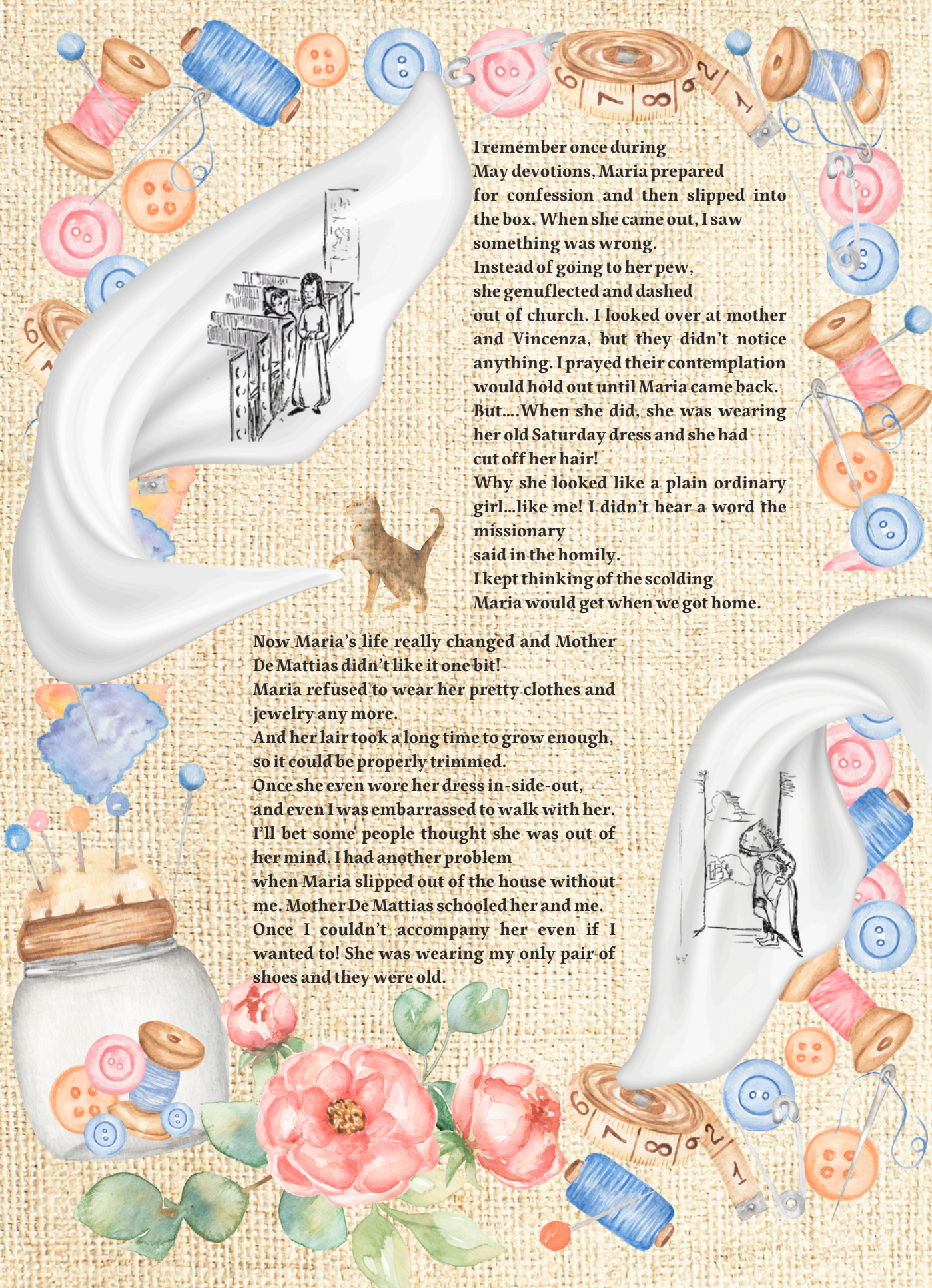
She had this pretty picture on the wall.

Our Lady seemed to tell Maria a lot too about the future...

(and would you believe it) she even taught her how to read!

I was glad about this, because from then on, Maria read a lot to me.





I remember once during
May devotions, Maria prepared
for confession and then slipped into
the box. When she came out, I saw
something was wrong.

Instead of going to her pew,
she genuflected and dashed
out of church. I looked over at mother
and Vincenza, but they didn't notice
anything. I prayed their contemplation
would hold out until Maria came back.
But....When she did, she was wearing
her old Saturday dress and she had
cut off her hair!

Why she looked like a plain ordinary
girl...like me! I didn't hear a word the
missionary

said in the homily.
I kept thinking of the scolding
Maria would get when we got home.

Now Maria's life really changed and Mother
De Mattias didn't like it one bit!

Maria refused to wear her pretty clothes and
jewelry any more.

And her hair took a long time to grow enough,
so it could be properly trimmed.

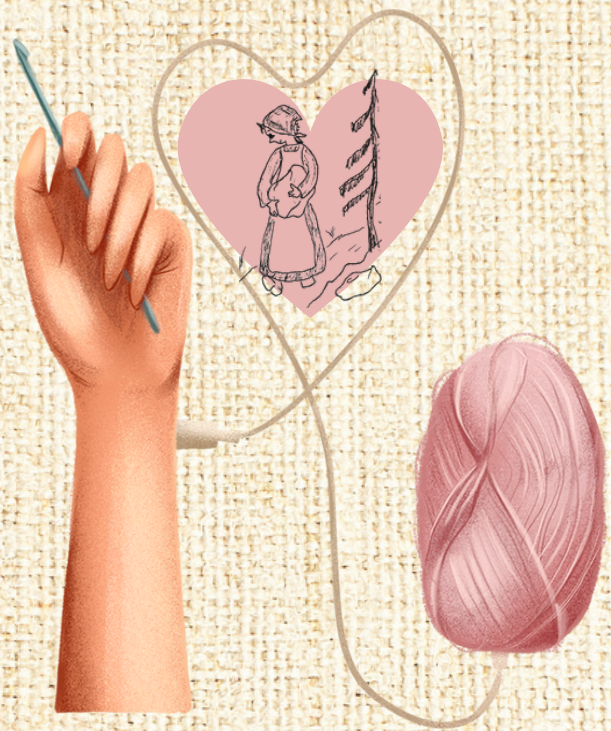
Once she even wore her dress in-side-out,
and even I was embarrassed to walk with her.
I'll bet some people thought she was out of
her mind. I had another problem

when Maria slipped out of the house without
me. Mother De Mattias schooled her and me.

Once I couldn't accompany her even if I
wanted to! She was wearing my only pair of
shoes and they were old.



You know the Precious Blood Fathers
 seemed to like Vallecorsa,
 and our town wanted them to stay.
 They agreed if they could have a house
 next to the Church....
 so the people got busy.
 Our priest asked everyone to help
 carry stones.... and processions were organized.
 I was very happy.
 I love this sort of thing, and common girls like
 me can do this without any talk.
 But was I surprised to see Maria
 in the procession too! I asked her how she
 managed, and she just said her dad
 came to her rescue,
 making her promise to carry her
 stones in her hat,
 and not to try to take the biggest ones.



Dad De Mattias knew this meant much to Maria, so he simply told the others to lay off.

One thing that worried Mother Ottavia, I think, was the fact that her girls did not seem to be thinking of marriage. Vincenza was never well, but she could have made a good wife to some young man.

She was already 35, and she just wouldn't go out.
 She was very pale and was sicker than any of us thought.
 Maria was 24, pretty and healthy, but she talked only of being a nun.
 She knew she couldn't leave now because she saw how ill her mother and sister were.

She and I began doing more of the house work, and I think her mother was relieved.

Toward the end of 1829
 Vincenza got very sick,
 and in December she died.
 Mother Ottavia was terribly sad.
 She herself was very sick.
 Just seven months after Vincenza's
 funeral
 Mother De Mattias died.
 I felt so sorry for Maria and her dad
 and for the boys too.

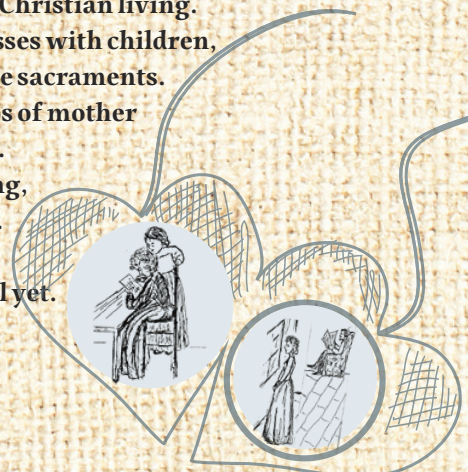




The next two years,
Maria showed a side of her personality
that hadn't been revealed before.
She took charge
and how she managed!
Her mother had so dominated
the household that Maria
just kind of lived quietly,
trying not to cause too many upheavals.
Now she and her dad organized everything.
They let me take care of the house
and the kitchen.

Michael was a young man,
23 years old now.
He had finished his studies
in law school in Rome
and had returned to Vallecorsa
as a successful lawyer.
He married Carolina Scachette
and they lived in the home place too.
That was nice.
Carolina was a good companion for Maria.
Antonio was 20,
studying medicine in Rome,
but not too seriously.
His dad had wanted him
to enter a seminary,
but that didn't work.
Maria was aching to get on
with her missionary work.
She felt she couldn't leave her dad,
at least not just yet...
But she felt she was getting old,
waiting...

(that's what she told me,
but I didn't think she looked old at all!)
Her dad let her carry on as much apostolic
work in the house as she cared to.
She had meetings with young girls,
and taught them catechism,
and much about good Christian living.
She continued her classes with children,
preparing them for the sacraments.
And sometimes groups of mother
came to pray with her.
While she was working,
she seemed so happy...
BUT
It wasn't giving her all yet.



Do you remember my mentioning Don Gaspar who gave a mission here back in 1822?

He was really impressed with Maria, though he only saw her once after that. He corresponded with her dad some, I don't know how much.

Well, wouldn't you know, early in 1831, Dad got a letter from Gaspar, asking him to let Maria go to Norcia to teach in a school there. Dad came to the kitchen looking for Maria, with the letter in his hand... and that's how I knew something was going on.

Later Maria told me all about the Norcia offer and her desire to go. She was so excited. I had mixed emotions, because I liked it in the De Mattias home, so I hated to think of leaving. Her enthusiasm was contagious... and as we made plans, I got excited myself.

We started getting ready: Sewing more clothes... knitted stockings... not just for ourselves but for Dad and the boys too. We also canned tomato sauce with Caroline, helped smoke sausages and ham. Then wouldn't you know it, another letter came, this time from Merlini... telling Maria to wait a while.

"Norcia wasn't God's will for Maria", he wrote.

Now how did he know that? Maria was so sad.

I did my best to console her.





We picked up our life
where we had left off.
Maria increased her classes.
And I went back to cooking
and house cleaning.
Dad was very happy.
His only sorrow was seeing Maria
so disappointed.



He knew she wanted to give herself totally to God, and to service of others.
He knew that sooner or later he would have to let her go.
So, when another letter came, this time from Bishop Lais, asking Maria to
teach in Acuto or in San Stefano, Dad even encouraged her,
as did Michael also. I'm glad we had prepared all those clothes two years
ago. We had less to do now-- and less time to do it.
Maria was a bundle of joy. She and dad had long talks.
I felt so sorry for him, he looked so old and lonely.
Michael promise to take care of him and dad was grateful.

However he did insist that Michael
accompany his sister to Acuto.
Their good-byes almost tore me apart.
Dad blessed both of us.
I sure was glad the two little grandchildren
were hanging onto Dad's pant legs.
They would help to distract him,
and ease his loss.
Frankly, I'm glad Michael came with us.
I wasn't used to riding a donkey and
Michael had to help me up and down
at every stop.
He helped us carry our things
into the house and
get settled.





We didn't get to stay in the Frasca house very long.

There were three rooms on the ground floor,

which could be used as classrooms.

(The family used the two upper floors.)

There wasn't room for the 100 girls who came to be instructed by Maria.

That house was dark, and damp, and cold--

I think every single one of us got sick. I cried my eyes out to see how Maria's health was weakened.

The happy girls that came to us cheered us, and helped us remember it was all worthwhile. Some wanted to stay with us all the time. They helped me in the kitchen too, rolling out the pasta, and preparing the vegetables.

They called me Aunty, and I liked that. Maria was going to get a teacher to help her. That was good...and that was bad.

Anna Farrotti needed a place to sleep, and it almost cost me everything.

One afternoon Maria sat down beside me and talked to me about returning to Vallecorsa. I couldn't believe it!

Surely she didn't mean that she didn't want me with her any more.

I cried. I begged to stay. No, it's true I can't teach,

but she and the others needed someone to cook, to clean, to pray.

I promised to stop "being her maid". I begged to become a member of her Congregation:

A working sister--

a praying sister.

I didn't convince her the first time,

but I asked Jesus to help me...

and finally, she understood

that He could call members

who have different gifts

besides teaching and giving retreats.

So, she let me

STAY.





One day Maria came to tell us
we were going to move again.
I didn't even moan,
because I wanted to get out
of this house.
Then when she told us we had
permission
to use the Bishop's seminary--
THE BIGGEST HOUSE IN TOWN--
with lots of good air,
and space for all of Maria's,
I mean God's work...
room for our growing family....
You should have seen us dance and
sing.
We kept on singing as we grabbed
our things

and started to run up the many steps
TO OUR NEW HOME!

Having told you how happy we were to move up to the seminary...

I must tell you we were even sadder to have to leave.

We had had two wonderful years in that big house and now
the bishop wanted us to leave.

I couldn't believe it.

He had to be joking....

but that wouldn't have even
been a good joke.

We didn't run this time.

We drug our feet down to the
Stefani house.

Maria promised us it wouldn't be for long
and somehow we believed her.

It gave us courage to squeeze
together again.

Our group had grown to nine sisters
plus boarders.





I have a confession to make and I hope Maria isn't listening.

While she and the others were busy with the girls, and I had finished the dinner dishes, and had a breathing spell,

I used to slip down to the old hospital which Maria was transforming into our future MOTHER HOUSE.

I loved to watch the workmen, and dreamed about having a home of our own.

It was there that I saw what a difference it made when Maria came on the scene.

Hammers flew faster saws zipped with renewed speed.

There were smiles, greetings, and joy.

She often brought them lunch and a little wine.

Then I knew why I sometimes couldn't find dinner-left-overs that I planned to serve for supper.

But I didn't mind, I was glad it wasn't a mouse that was in my pantry.

With all the excitement of the building, and all the work with the people in Acuto,

We were all quite jolted when news came, on September 17, 1839, that Dad De Mattias had died.

Maria and I hadn't seen him since we rode away, five and a half years ago.

In his letter, Michael wasn't very clear

about the cause of the death. I cried enough tears for Maria and myself together. She hid her sorrow

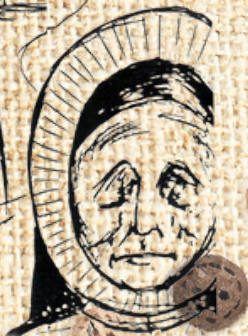
and I knew she was trying to be unselfish rejoicing in her father's

entry into heaven, when, united with his wife and his seven children he could sing God's praises in unending joy and glory.

Maria consoled her brothers and encouraged them.

Michael and Nina already had three children.

Antonio was about to marry, and move into the home place too.



This is 1855,
and today is a great day in my life.
I received the habit
and am truly a member
of this wonderful
congregation.

The sisters all made the
Eucharist celebration very
joyful.

I was amazed to see
how many of the Acutans
came to rejoice with me...
with us. You know, I am the first lay sister
to receive the habit.

There are several other ladies who have been cooking for the sisters
for many years; and I know they want to become members too.

NOW they have hope. you'd be surprised what good
community-builders we can be: cheering the sisters with good food,
clean clothes, and little surprises.

We have time to pray extra too, both while we work and
in the presence of our Eucharistic Lord.

It was unbelievable how our congregation grew in members... and in the number of towns
where our sisters served.

Over 200 sisters joined Maria through the years.

I was proud and happy when in August,
Michael's second girl, Albina, entered.

His youngest girl, Maria, later entered. He had a son,
Pio, who became a lawyer,
married and had two children.

His other son, Francis Xavier,
became a priest and theologian in Rome.

Antonio had eight children.

His oldest daughter,
Rose, also joined her aunt.
You could tell these girls
belonged
to the De Mattias family.

They loved their aunt,
and treated me as
aunt also.

They were fine sisters!





I was so proud of Maria. She was a great saint and most people recognized it.
 But it hurt me terribly when some of the sisters were disloyal to Maria and made her suffer.
 Most of these eventually left, and I sang for joy (out in the garden where no one could see me.)
 Some priests and bishops were hard on Maria for a while too.
 You can imagine how I prayed, for their conversion, if it isn't disrespectful to say it.
 But I'm sure every single one finally realized her holiness...
 and appreciated her. Another thing that caused me suffering was to see how Maria's health
 had been undermined...
 by bad living conditions...
 by overwork...
 by that tumor on her arm...
 by contact with so many sick sisters.
 Her first bad spell was in 1835 while we were still living in the Frasca house.
 Then through the years, her health weakened.
 When she reluctantly stayed in bed in Acuto,
 I sometimes prepared
 special things for her tray like:
 An egg, fruit, milk.
 But then I heard that she gave away
 the "extras" and ate only the common food.
 Naturally, I was disappointed,
 but I understood.
 I kept trying to accept her heroic virtue:
 But sometimes my love for her
 forced my hand
 when preparing her tray.





You may think I spent all my Religious life in Acuto...but no, I also served in Rome: at San Luigi and San Giovanni.... and then my last years were in Civitavecchia.

I loved my work, wherever, as long as we sisters were united in love.

It was good to see how the sisters imitated Maria, in their loving service.

I felt so much pride in watching them teach, conduct retreats, lead singing in church, and so many other things.

I especially liked to see them prepare children, especially the poor little shepherds, for the sacraments.

It reminded me of my own sacramental preparation, so many years ago, by Maria herself.

In recreation, the sisters used to ask me to tell them stories of the De Mattias household.

I LOVED IT!

And at night I dreamed dreams of our beautiful years in Vallecorsa.

When I was in Civiavecchia, I was very happy when the little Maria was assigned to our community.



She was such a good girl, everyone loved her. Michael and Nina came frequently to see her...me...us. They were concerned, for they saw she was not well. They were concerned, for they saw she was not well.



At the same time I heard how sick
our Mother Foundress was in Rome.
You can imagine how hard it was for me
to be so far away.
It was no surprise to me,
when news came that she had gone
peacefully to God.
We all cried a lot,
but somehow we felt her
continued presence among us.
Then four months later,
our little Maria
went to join her Aunt in Heaven.
She was still so young,
so full of life
and had only been in the congregation six
years, but then, Heaven is something we
all look forward to, so I couldn't wish her
back.



For fourteen more years I
continued my service
to the sisters,
to the Congregation
and to the Church.
I did my best...
but I wasn't so young
anymore.. edging close to 60
and then easing over.

Others helped me with my work
in the kitchen, laundry and garden. Now there are quite a few
lay sisters
professed in our Congregation.

They Jokingly call me their PIONEER. in 1879, word came that
Antonio De Mattias
passed away at the age of 68.

His hadn't been an easy life, but I'm sure his sister prayed him into Heaven.
Michael was not too well now. In 1880, he and I both were to enter Eternity...
I in March and he in September. It was just like a grand homecoming. All of us De Mattias together again
with God....Forever!



My message to you sisters is:

**LOVE GOD AND LOVE
ALL PEOPLE.**

I can't do better than that:
since it was Jesus' command.

Love your foundress and learn all you can
about her.

She is a great saint,
and is just as eager today
to help you as she was back in 1834.

Believe in her conviction that:
THE INSTITUE IS GOD'S WORK....

HAVE NO FEAR....

BE CHEERFUL.

And thank you, for letting me
talk to you today.

It was quite a privilege.

When you are ready,
We'll welcome you into Heaven
and you'll see how wonderful it is.