

## [The Tool Grinder]

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John [?]. Lynch

[Research assistant?], Jr.

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### THE TOOL GRINDER

It was a dingy, bleak, disordered room, sparsely furnished, uninviting save for the rich sunlight which filtered through the unwashed windows. Here [Garmi?] unfolded his story between heavy potions of grappa. "Sure, I know you're all right or I wouldn't tell you a thing. But if you ever try to double-cross me on this, well, you know what's coming to you, eh?" With assurances that I knew what would be coming to me and that no double-cross was possible, he began: "Me, I'm a citizen anyway, so it don't make no difference. — Yes, I've seen a lot of this granite business. In the sheds, mostly. Where it comes direct from the quarry. No, I don't go near the quarries never have. I get enough of it, right here, in the sheds. I've worked in lots of 'em. They mark them and set them in the sheds. A man lines the stone up for the surface cutting machine, either for the polisher or the hammerer, they make a joint on it, and it's most all rock face stuff. Me? I was born in Italy. Sure thing. Came here with my parents when I was young. Yes, yes, they were much better off in Italy but they had children over here who wanted them to come over here and live. My brothers they were and they worked here. [There?] was lots of talk over in Italy about all the money they made over in America. And all they talked about was the money here and the great things connected with this country. [Gold?] they mentioned a lot. [???] 2 That was attractive. That made them come too. But they lived in a beautiful country. Mountains and lakes and flowers and all that surrounding. The lakes were pretty. Deep blue waters and hills everywhere near them. Bambinos in the fields and all our gardens.

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I'm going back for sure. In 1942. No, no. Not to stay. Just a visit. And see my old home and the kids I used to play with and all the people of the town I knew. A big celebration in Rome, you know, like the World's Fair in New York. Maybe it's a world's fair there. But everybody's going. My friends from here. All of them. You can come with us and I'll introduce you to Italy. Go to Rome. You should see Rome. You'd like it very much. The old buildings, the streets, the customs of the people and the dress and gaiety. Come with me and stay in Florence. That's where you'll learn Italian. The northern part is what I like. The southern part it is not so good as the north. The north is the best. I come from the north. [Pisuschio?], the province of Como. That's the place the royalty of Europe went for honeymoons and vacations. Ah, yes. It is beautiful indeed. You've heard of Lake Como. Of course. So's everybody else. It is all color and much beauty. It is lasting up here (indicating the head) and so we want to go back for a little while and see it. Everybody like to see hometown once maybe in life, after he leave. Where you grow up, where associations are made, you understand. [?] We like to see these old people. My wife she's a go with me too. I have great respect for women. My mother too and all the rest. They're damn fine, women. I respect them very much. So I take my wife. Not the bambino. He is six. Time enough for him when he grow up. He has never miss the old country. My wife is born here in this country. She is citizen like me. They can't deport me now. Not on your life, not me. I am citizen. This will be my last trip over there. Soon I am old and no money. Then, no more trips. No, I have never been over since I came on the big boat. You bet I like it here. It has sure it has treated me fair. Why wouldn't I like it very much. Maybe more than Italy? Yes, yes. I have spent my life here and married here and this is my country. Didn't the Italian peoples fight for America in the last war? You bet. We are all Americans in my family. The Italians in the country here are Americans and they all like it here, I think so, too. Maybe they want to go back and see something like Como some day but they won't stay. America is swell, great, yes, it is fine and I love it. [Mussolini?] has made great improvements but he has lots of things he could better. America has live up to what [cha?] call that, spectations? Sure, it has, plenty. I know more people here now. We landed in New York in 1912. She was a big boat and very fine. Sped right across, in four days they

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do it now. Four days. The Conte di Savoia. When we took longer of course. Fourteen days it took me. Like Columbus, eh? I enjoy the trip much but not my padre. He was sick, no, no, not from the trip, from the vaccination. Work used to be steady over there but it was hard to get 4 along there too. So we landed in New York, see? Fourteen days. Long trip, eh? Well, things have changed a lot since 1912. Ships and machinery and people too. Everything seems to have changed since then. Mostly people. Even granite has changed. Machinery has changed granite. Men out of work, lots of them. All the time. And better working conditions too. Of course. Modern machinery has done lots for granite, lots of good. But it has thrown many out of work. It has changed granite, I tella you. I was much, very much lonesome when we landed but soon I get over it. I am young, then. I got over it quick. I knew lots of people here in short time. After while, we know everybody. We mix, see. Not like some people, some race, they don't mix but we mix and soon know everybody in town. Then we spend money. When you know lots of people you spend much money, eh? I went to public school. It's good, the public school. Good. But I don't like school, me. I like work and I left school. I was thirteen when I left school. To go to work. Work, I've had plenty of it since. I got what I wanted, work. You bet. Only when the strikes come, then I gotta no work. But before I left school I work in granite. Sure. I start with young granite. Before I was thirteen I work from six in the morning till eight, then I go school. I work from four to five or six at night, every night after school. I start with granite when I am little and I grow up with granite. I know granite. I have never made much money in the business, I have no trade that pays a lot, like cutter, or sculptor. But I work all the 5 time at something. When the strike first came I went to Newark to find work. I worked in store there. Thirteen is young to start work with granite, eh? Now the young people go to school long after that, they do. They want college too. All my people are in granite so I have to start in Granite. I grind tools. Yes. Grind. You think people work hard today, well, we work hard then also. Early and late we work. All in the sheds. All the hours I could I worked. During the big war, when Americans enter, I work in ship yards. Busy time then. I had hard job there. Build ships. That's hard job, but must be done to win war. I rivet. I rivet in the ship yards. Not riveter, no. Just heating rivets, that's a my job. [For?] the riveters

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I heat them. I work better with granite. Now it takes three days to turn out a stone but in my early days it took about a week. Fast work they turn out today. Machinery has done that. Even in the quarry they have better machinery. It was tough for everybody in the early days. Lots of granite men die from the tools, that's bad, no equipment to save life. Now they got lots of equipment. It helps but there's lots to improve, I know. You betcha my kid, he won't never go to work in no damn granite. It'll take long time before it's safe to work with it. Silica. That the thing that kills everybody. Everybody who touch granite. Sooner or late, it kills everybody. I don't get so much. Maybe I'm smart I don't make so much money but I don't get so much silica. In my end of the shed there's not so much dust. I can laugh at the damn granite 6 because it can't touch me the way it wants to. Ha, ha, ha. That's a me. I ain't got no money but I ain't got much silica, no? My end of the shed is not so dusty. It's like a knife, you know, silica.

“My name? I told you. Yes, I know some Italians' names are hard to spell. Some American names too, they are not so easy. [Kaschi?]. That's my name. I never brought home no steady work but we got along just same. When the big strike came in `22, I was learning the blacksmith trade. Had to move to get a job. No jobs here. Everybody out of work. When granite men out of work, everybody affected 'round here. Hard to get groceries. So I move to Newark. I finally went into the hotel business and married an Italian girl. She and I we were both single, neither had been married before. She came from Montpelier, her parents lived here. They came from Italy. My wife, she came near being born on the boat but no, she was born in America. That was good luck. The parents are all dead now. Hers and mine. By 1933 they are all dead. I am cattolica and my wife too, she is cattolica. [We?] have one child. After we return from Newark. But we were married eleven years before we have bambino. Long time to go without a child. I am proud because the child is boy. He has been very sick but now he is big. He is strong and healthy. That is way I want it, strong, and a boy, that makes me proud. I have good time of course. I play butch, that's Italian game we all play 'round here. 'Butch,' yes, it's funny name. Like bowling, but not same. They played it in the old country 7 and it is one of the old Italian customs they bring

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over here with them. Every race brings some good things with them and maybe some bad. Butch is good thing they bring. Makes Italian people happy when they play butch. They remember old country and pleasant times they had in Italia. We play cards, sure. Cards recreation for many. Nice game we play. Called 'scoppa.' It is real Italian game. We play it lots. Very much. We drink, you bet we drink. You make me laugh. Do I drink? Beer for one thing. But beer is not my drink. I drink more 'vino.' Mostly vino, that's a my drink, and I like it. You have to drink if you work with granite. The goddam silica kills you anyway. You are no good to live if you live a little while with granite. Only a little while Italians live. They all die young. I am in my forties. But I have no dust in my end of the shed, very little, not so much silica and I am happy. No money but little silica. If you want to make money in granite you have to get silica and that means you die. Me? No, no, not me. I no die yet. I have no money."