

# **Elena Purgatorio; or, A Brief History of the Galleanisti**

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*Keep up with me and let the people talk! Be like a solid tower whose brave height remains unmoved by all the winds that blow; one who lets their thoughts be turned aside by one thing or another will lose sight of their true goal, their mind sapped of all its strength.*

–*Purgatorio* (Canto V, 13-18), Dante Alighieri, 1321

## **I: The Marriage of Elena and Ubaldo**

Like most anarchist women, we know very little about Elena Purgatorio. She was born Elena Alfonsi on August 4, 1891 in the ancient town of Gualdo Tadino, nestled beneath the Perugian mountains in the center of the Italian peninsula. Along with thousands of others, Elena left Italy and immigrated across the Atlantic to the US, registering under her birth name at Ellis Island, New York on August 17, 1907. She was sixteen years old, and seemingly alone. Her father Eugenio had arrived the year before with her brother Carlo, although little is known about them, and it appears the rest of the Alfonsi family emigrated to the US in the years to come.

It's unclear exactly why Elena left Italy, but months before her arrival, history recorded the appearance of a man destined to play a great role in Elena's life, a man named Ubaldo Purgatorio. In the February 9, 1907 issue of *Cronaca Sovversiva*, the Italian insurrectionary anarchist newspaper, we can see that Ubaldo Purgatorio donated 25 cents to the editors, along with nearly two dozen other Italian anarchists who lived in Frontenac, Kansas. Together, these men and women contributed \$6.25 to the most important anarchist paper of its time.

Frontenac, Kansas was a coal mining town back then, the site of a horrific mine explosion in 1888 where 44 mostly Italian miners were killed by ignited coal dust. In the years that followed, Frontenac became an anarchist hotbed, attested to by its mentions in the *Cronaca*, the first of which is from June 24, 1905, when the anarchists L. Cipelli and G. Rosa donated a collective \$2 to the paper. Nearly a year later, the Frontenac anarchist group was at least thirteen members strong, including one G. Bianchi, who will appear again in this narrative.

In the March 10, 1906 issue, we find a brief article written from Frontenac by L. Cipelli, which informed the reader that not only did the anarchists have a Social Studies Club in town, but that this Club was being mercilessly harassed by a self-professed *dangerous anarchist*, a old-time *superman in '64*, and Cipelli claimed that *the love we bring to the truth and the desire we have for the realization of our ideal pushes us to not keep quiet about the wounds that torment us and to invoke the disinfectant that protects us from the rodent virus.*

This same March 10, 1906 issue also featured an anarchist named G. Galeotti donating \$1 from Frontenac, and in the April 21 issue of *Cronaca*, this same G. Galeotti wrote an entry about Frontenac and the recent coal miners' strike, of which his anarchist group took part. This snarky article explained how *Pope Mitchell*, the Anglo leader of the Union, forced the striking miners to obey *the most scrupulous legality* before ordering them back to work.

During the course of the Frontenac strike, the mine-owners suffered nothing, having enough coal stockpiled to remain profitable for months, and before the miners legally won any concessions, the Union had its members sent down into the shafts *to extract new coal from the mines, which in due course can be sent to the market.* This angered the Italian miners, so they held a mass-march to the Gobbo mine where some of their comrades arrived with rifles, given *they were returning from hunting.* This display of weapons made the Union, the bosses, and the press

furious, but the anarchists led the march to the Union hall and denounced the leadership for all to hear.

This episode reveals much about the tactics and ideas of these Italian anarchist coal mine agitators, and sometime between this strike and the February 9, 1907 issue of the *Cronaca*, an anarchist named Ubaldo Purgatorio arrived in Frontenac and joined their group alongside familiar names like G. Bianchi, both of them donating 25 cents. When we see the others who donated to *Cronaca Sovversiva* in 1907, it can be assumed all of the men were coal miners, busy agitating among their coworkers.

Another strike broke out in April 1908, and it was still going by May 23, when the *Cronaca* printed a communication from Frontenac where an anarchist named Q.P. stated, *we have been on strike here since April 1, according to the order issued by the Committee of the Prostitute's Union, to which we are forced to belong.*

The next group initiative in Frontenac can be seen in the September 18, 1909 issue of the *Cronaca*, where the local anarchist group donated \$14.80 towards the *Mexican insurrection*, just as the anarchist group in the coal town of Chicopee, Kansas donated an additional \$6.00. In the days leading up to this fundraising effort, there is no mention of the anarchist G. Bianchi or his comrade Ubaldo Purgatorio.

The next time we find Ubaldo Purgatorio in the pages of *Cronaca Sovversiva*, the year is 1910, only he is now in a coal mining town on the other side of the US, a remote place called Cle Elum, Washington. With him was Elena Alfonsi, who changed her name to Elena Purgatorio, and this newly married couple were now a vital part of an anarchist initiative that fomented conflict in coal towns across the length and breadth of the United States.

It remains unclear how Elena met Ubaldo, given she arrived in New York while he was in Kansas, but meet they did, and by the September 3, 1910 issue of *Cronaca Sovversiva*, Elena was the newspaper's official agent in Cle Elum, gathering \$20.00 in donations and \$23.75 in subscriptions from her comrades in this mining town. Among them was Michele Bombino, an Italian anarchist who donated \$1.00 that week and would later cause much trouble outside of the coal fields.

## II: The Coal Agitators

Before getting to all that, we need to return to Kansas in the year 1900. A two hours walk south of Frontenac was Chicopee, another coal mining town filled with Italians. In the September 8, 1900 issue of *L'Aurora*, an Italian insurrectionary anarchist newspaper, we find one of the listed contacts is the *gruppo L'avenire del Proletario*, located in the town of Chicopee. To make direct contact with this group, the reader need only write Enrico Coletti at PO Box 31.

*L'Aurora* was run by Giuseppe Ciancabilla and his partner Ersilia Cavedagni, and not only did they have a contact in the Kansas coal-mining town of Chicopee, they eventually moved their paper to the coal-mining town of Spring Valley, Illinois. By the December 15, 1900 issue, *L'Aurora* was firmly planted in this coal-town, with the front page entirely devoted to local issues, calling for a meeting of the town's impoverished Italian coal-miners at the Vecchia Opera House.

Beyond the town of Spring Valley, both Giuseppe and Ersilia agitated among the Italian coal-miners of the aptly named Coal City, Illinois. The January 19, 1901 issue of *L'Aurora* features an announcement for an upcoming lecture in Coal City, given by Giuseppe Ciancabilla and an anarchist named Carlo Torigliatti. As a consequence of this well attended lecture, an anarchist

group was formed called *La Massa Lavoratrice*, or *The Working Masses*, which was organized by Torigliatti and would meet every Saturday. These were the kinds of groups the Italian anarchists were creating in these late-Victorian coal-towns, and their efforts seemed to spread like wildfire across the US.

In the February 23, 1901 issue of *L'Aurora*, the editors included a report from the coal-town of Black Diamond, Washington, where a group of comrades held a *party and dance for the benefit of our propaganda*. From the proceeds, the anarchists of Black Diamond gave \$12 to *L'Aurora*, \$6 to *La Questione Sociale* in Paterson, New Jersey, and \$1 to the family of Gaetano Bresci, the anarchist who killed King Umberto I of Italy in June of 1900.

An informal bar took place a bit later which generated an additional few dollars to the same recipients, and in conclusion, the anarchists of Black Diamond *thank all the compagni and compagne who participated in the celebration, making it both happy and profitable, and especially the good Belgian comrades who also happily took part in large numbers with their companions*. This article was signed on behalf of *the Anarchists of Black Diamond* by someone identified as R. Ferrari.

In response to this report, the editors of *L'Aurora* placed this directly below that entry: *well done and thanks to the dear Black Diamond comrades, who expressed their solidarity to us in such an effective way that is worthy of being held up as an example*.

Black Diamond was about thirty miles south-east of Seattle, a coal-town perched at the western edge of the Cascade Mountains, and as of 1901, it had become an anarchist hotbed. After *L'Aurora* ceased publication due to government repression, the printing press made its way to Barre, Vermont where it would print the new *Cronaca Sovversiva*. By the November 18, 1905 issue of the *Cronaca*, we find an anarchist named Trilli Ciro donating an entire \$1 from Black Diamond, and in 1908 they are joined by Ernesto Ainardi, as well as someone named Piccolotto. By 1909, this group also included E. Marano, John Rosa, and Macellino Fernandez, indicating a consistent anarchist presence for over a decade in this Pacific Northwest coal town.

### III: Heart of the Cascades

Just as Black Diamond was becoming a node in this Italian anarchist network, another node appeared in the remote mine town of Cle Elum, located in a narrow valley close to the eastern edge of the Cascade Mountains. As early as 1905, we find C. Filippini, Joe Contratto, and Antonio Serena donating to *Cronaca* from this isolated extraction colony. In the June 30, 1906 issue, the anarchists of Cle Elum donated \$1 towards the national speaking tour of their comrade G. Pimpino, one of the *Cronaca's* most prolific writers.

In the coming years, the anarchists of Cle Elum were joined by C. Cianfichi, F. Cava, G. Combi, L. Crosetti, A.A. Padalini, J. Piro, G. Prato, C. Cianfichi, J. Andrino, and R. Anderlini. By 1908, there were at least a dozen members of this group, and in the May 2, 1908 issue of *Cronaca*, we find the first report-back written by these anarchists of Cle Elum.

In this short text, the authors explain how, in reaction to a political and financial crisis shared by both *Cronaca Sovversiva* and *La Questione Sociale*, the anarchists of Cle Elum organized a dance party on April 18, 1908, and *nearly all of the workers of Cle Elum* attended this boisterous event. As the authors explain, *the festa, a triumph of cordiality, was enlivened by a select concert of talented amateurs, who wanted to generously join our initiative, renouncing any compensation*. In conclusion, the authors told the reader that if every group across the country supported the anarchist

press in this manner, their newspapers would be in a better position to make propaganda and serve the *causa comune*, or the *common cause*, meaning anarchism.

In this same issue of *Cronaca*, we learn that the Cle Elum anarchist group nearly tripled in membership thanks to this widely popular event, with \$24.05 going to *La Questione Sociale* and \$23.05 going to the *Cronaca*. The group was relatively quiet for the next year until the April 24, 1909 issue, where another entry on Cle Elum appeared in the recurring *Per La Vita E Per La Idea* column.

As reported by the authors, the anarchist comrade Paolo Bignami went on a *propaganda tour of these mining fields* and gave three lectures: *Science and Religion*, *Who We Are and What We Want*, and *Revolution in Relation to Progress*. At these lectures, *the miners came in large numbers to hear the warm and convincing words of Bignami, an authentic worker, who left everyone with real enthusiasm, especially for his thorough attacks against all the politicians, devastating them, pointing out the remedies so that they have no chance of infiltrating among the working masses and distracting them from their true path to emancipation, and he was also very convincing later when he demonstrated the deleterious work of parliamentarianism*. In conclusion, Bignami told these miners that revolution was *the only means for proletarian emancipation*.

This entry provides some clear insight onto how these Italian anarchists fomented conflict in the coal mines, and it seems they possessed a lot of sway in Cle Elum, which had a population of around 2,500. However, according to the October 2, 1909 issue of *Cronaca*, certain unnamed labor organizers around Cle Elum, who they labeled *loschi pastori* (*shady shepherds*), had been busy discrediting their anarchist ideals throughout 1909, causing *an unfortunate period of apathy and discouragement*.

To the delight of the anarchists in Cle Elum, the agitator Paolo Bignami returned to their region to give a lecture on *Reformism and Revolution*, and after this he decided to stay in Cle Elum to help with their propaganda. This article was signed by the *July 29 Group*, a newly constituted public formation that would, *with fervor, enthusiasm, and energy* bring some much needed anarchism to the coal fields.

In fact, there were multiple formations of the *July 29 Group*, with one in the aptly named Coalgate, Oklahoma, and inside the October 30, 1909 issue, in a report from another of Paolo Bignami's lectures, the *July 29 Group* referenced the recent mining disaster in Roslyn, just northwest of Cle Elum.

On October 9, 1909, the Northwest Improvement Company mine shaft exploded in Roslyn, killing eleven miners, and as Paolo Bignami told the miners, *you see with your own eyes how many mothers, how many wives, how many children mourn the immature loss of their grandfather, father, husband, son. These workplace deaths are the victims of capital!* This report-back from the lecture is signed on behalf of the *July 29 Group* by one R. Anderlini, who had been in Cle Elum for at least two years.

The group was active throughout the rest of 1909, with more lectures and a commemoration of the Chicago Martyrs. Paolo Bignami continued to be a contributor to *Cronaca*, often donating \$1 by himself, followed by many other anarchists from Cle Elum, who maintained constant contact with the *Cronaca* and several other anarchist papers across the United States. This group was pretty well established in Cle Elum when two anarchists strolled into town during the summer of 1910. Their names were Ubaldo and Elena Purgatorio.

## IV: The Couple Form

After arriving in Cle Elum with her husband, Elena became the main organizer for the *Cronaca* and dealt with raising donations and subscriptions among the miners. She was nineteen years old when she was trusted with this, and within weeks of her appearance, Luigi Galleani arrived in Cle Elum to give a lecture to the Italian miners.

Prior to his arrival, the August 6, 1910 issue of the *Cronaca* ran an item from Frontenac, Kansas, detailing how, *for the second time, we had the pleasure of hosting Luigi Galleani among us, who held a series of conferences here and in neighboring counties without ever repeating anything he'd said in the previous ones.* This item, written by one E. Teodori, also revealed that Galleani had since departed Frontenac for the Western states, and by the time that issue was printed, Galleani was already scheduled to speak in Cle Elum.

In the September 10, 1910 issue of *Cronaca*, we find a report written by Elena herself, detailing the event and revealing that she was highly literate at the age of 19, the main reason she was put in charge of the group in Cle Elum. As she told the reader, a month earlier on August 8, their comrade Luigi Galleani arrived in town, and we were all anxious and impatient to meet him because of what we'd heard about him from our comrades in other localities.

While Galleani gave five lectures during his stay, Elena's report focuses on a single debate with *one scoundrel of a priest, or the pig priest, as she calls him.* To rope him into this humiliating spectacle, Elena and her comrades *resorted to cunning and met with this priest by pretending to be bigots. Naturally we were received with exaggerated affability and courtesy, of which we took advantage for the trap he would fall into.*

After complaining about how ungodly Italians are, Elena and her friends succeeded in getting the priest to have a public debate with a roving anarchist agitator named Luigi Galleani who they claimed to dislike, and when the night arrived, this *pig priest* had his local power and mystique systematically destroyed by this agitator, for the whole community to see, and only *the sole sacristan, an Austrian, comforted the priest in his defeat.* Elena Purgatorio seems to have had a lot of fun during Galleani's visits, and in her conclusion, she informed the reader that Galleani left for Seattle to continue his lecture tour.

The September 17, 1910 issue of *Cronaca* featured lengthier extracts from the debate between Galleani and the priest, and his summer lectures in Cle Elum seem to have been the main event in that coal-town until October 13, when the comrades held a memorial for Francisco Ferrer, the creator of the Modern School who was murdered by the Spanish state in 1909.

At this *July 29 Group* event, according to R. Anderlini, *a fair amount of people appeared, against all our expectations, not to mention the appearance of the female sex, who have begun to attend our meetings.* While the first speaker was Paolo Bignami, who gave a basic overview of Ferrer's life and death, the main speaker was Elena Purgatorio, perhaps accounting for the high turnout of local Italian women.

As recounted by R. Anderlini, Elena *took the floor with youthful and ardent enthusiasm and boldly declared that the powerful on this earth will also certainly remember this date with thoughts different than ours, that is, they will remember it with complacency and fear, for the conscious worker cannot help but tremble with horror and swear revenge.* She ended her speech by *praising the imminent end of the little Spanish Caligula and all his allies.* After that, *the audience finally burst into thunderous applause.*

We find our next mention of Elena Purgatorio during the winter, in the February 25, 1911 issue of *Cronaca*. In the donations column, we see that, by way of Elena Purgatorio, \$8.75 was raised during *a farewell drink in the house of comrade R. Anderlini, who is returning to Italy*. Among the donors was Elena's husband Ubaldo, who gave \$1, and G. Bianchi, the man who secured the meeting hall where Luigi Galleani debated the priest. This G. Bianchi also was a former resident of Frontenac, Kansas and donated 50 cents at the farewell drink.

## V: Back In Kansas

For whatever reason, Elena and Ubaldo appear to have left Cle Elum shortly after, their names vanished from that town's donation lists or group signatures. The next we hear from Elena Purgatorio is in the April 22, 1911 issue, where we learn she moved to Frontenac, Kansas, the coal-town where her husband Ubaldo once lived and worked.

While Ubaldo was gone, before Elena arrived, the anarchist comrades had been very active in Frontenac. The March 25, 1911 issue of *Cronaca*, printed shortly before the Purgatorios appeared, revealed the existence of the anarchist group *Senza Patria*, or *Without Fatherland*, headquartered in Frontenac, and they contributed to a national conversation on where the *Cronaca* should relocate. For their part, the comrades of Frontenac believed it should be Pittsburg, Kansas, about an hour's walk from their city. Two issues later, the *Cronaca* announced that one *E.P.* would soon be writing for the paper again, followed by another announcement a week after that.

This was the context Elena walked into when she wrote an article for the April 22 issue titled *And The Flags?*, part of the paper's *Proletarian Collaboration* column. In that article, Elena shredded apart Italian nationalism, focusing on the recent March 27 celebrations of Italian unification, its fiftieth anniversary in 1911. She explained how *the vampires of primordial Italy scattered throughout the United States, the masters, the owners of the patriotic and popular newspapers*, had been calling for the diaspora to display both an Italian and US flag on March 27. However, most Italian immigrants failed to do this, so Elena sarcastically asked, *why didn't you do it, Italians?*

It's unclear if she was speaking from her own experience or that of others when she described Italy as *the land that saw us born and nurtured by driving us away*, or when she mentioned how many of their comrades *die of hardship and poverty in their homeland*. This hilarious and merciless article ended by declaring that Italian immigrants don't care for this spectacle, and that one day *they will exultantly hoist their flags and dance happily and satisfied in front of the gallows from which they will hang the executioners who today celebrate the glories of their homeland*. At the back of this issue, we find that Ubaldo and Elena both donated 50 cents to the paper.

Elena was back the following week in the April 29, 1911 issue of *Cronaca Sovversiva*, penning an article titled *The Spring* that was part of the recurring *Proletarian Collaboration* column. In this fiery, heartfelt article, Elena began by declaring that *the sweet season, the season of flowers has returned. Everything invites you to love, to enjoy. But how many will remain indifferent before this grandiose spectacle of nature! Those who are hungry, those who suffer have only eyes to see their own miseries. Yet we should hope that in the sweet warmth of spring the ice of our usual sadness and inertia would melt and that our dormant revolutionary activities would awaken*.

At just twenty years of age, Elena believed fervently in the *beautiful idea* of anarchism, and if she had her way, there would be *no more masters, no more priests, no friars, no parasites to support; no more anguished uncertainty about tomorrow, no more mothers suffering from lack of bread, no*



*more young girls forced to bargain for their beauties, no more of all that afflicts humanity today, but well-being for all and a free field to all one's aspirations.*

In this same April 29 issue, we can also find a report from Cle Elum, written by one Antonio Rodia, brother of Sabato Rodia, creator of *Nuestra Pueblo*, or the Watts Towers. Both of the Rodia brothers were in Cle Elum in the spring of 1911, having just returned from the insurrection in Baja California, but Antonio seems to have been the more confident writer, and his article *Conditions of the Miners in Cle Elum, Wash. and Environs* reveals a growing conflict in the coal mines of the Pacific Northwest.

As Antonio explained, *several months ago, in a Black Diamond mine, there was a gas explosion which caused many poor miners to die, and the charitable Union, instead of forcing the mining company to pay a proportionate compensation to the families in the towns, agreed with the brigands of capitalism and decided to tax all the miners of Washington two bucks each. Faced with such a revolting act of injustice, the miners of Cle Elum rose up in protest and sent their complaints to the "North Western Improvement Coal Co." who, without being moved at all, replied that they "received orders from the leaders of the Miners' Union and therefore the miners had to address their protests to the Union." And the Union, consulted in this regard, referred their complaints to the Mining Company.*

After some of the anarchists recommended directly attacking the mining company headquarters, the majority of the miners elected for a legal strategy, but this got whittled down to those brave enough to put their name on a legal complaint, and while they won back the \$2 taken from their wages as a tax for the mine explosion, all of the signatories were fired, and, *consequently, discouragement and mistrust arose in those who, more daring, had insisted on energetic action against the Company.*

Antonio Rodia went on to explain how *the only ones who resisted this vengeful act of the mine owners with dignity were the anarchists*, and that rather than beg for their jobs back, many preferred to abandon Cle Elum and look for work elsewhere. *Some went to Kansas, some to California; among the later, my comrade and friend Bianchi, to whom I send affectionate greetings.*

From this article, we learn why Elena Purgatorio, her husband Ubaldo, and their comrade G. Bianchi moved from Cle Elum all the way back to Kansas. In his conclusion, Antonio hoped that comrades would *reactivate anarchist and revolutionary propaganda among this mass of exploited people* in Cle Elum, and within four months, Ersilia Cavedagni arrived in Cle Elum to briefly take the place of Elena Purgatorio, that remote coal-town's main agitator for *Cronaca Sovversiva*.

## **VI: We're Not In Kansas Anymore**

Things got pretty quiet in Frontenac, Kansas in the months following Elena's article *The Spring*. The next major mention of that coal town's anarchists is in the donation column for the December 9, 1911 issue of *Cronaca Sovversiva*, where the Social Studies Club of Frontenac donated an entire \$10 to the paper, an organ which had *been able to face the wrath of the ferocious anarchist congregations of America*, implying there was much conflict among anarchists in the US.

Before there was another update from Frontenac, we find a communication from Elena Purgatorio in the February 10, 1912 issue of *Cronaca*, only she was now in Haileyville, Oklahoma, right in the heart of Choctaw Nation. After leasing the land from the indigenous, the Oklahoma coal barons became the law unto themselves. Four years before Elena arrived to agitate among its

miners, on August 26, 1908, the Hali-Ola mine shaft in Haileyville exploded, killing 29 workers, most of them Italian.

While living in this coal town with Ubaldo, Elena organized benefits in Haileyville and nearby Alderson, raising \$12.70 for the anarchist Augusto Masetti, the Italian soldier who shot his commanding officer rather than serve in the Kingdom's invasion of Libya. In fact, most of this money was raised at a talk titled *The Italo-Turkish War*, and it was sent via *international money order No. 788* to the radical lawyer Saverio Merlino, who was defending Masetti.

Oddly enough, Saverio Merlino and Luigi Galleani had sparred in years past, writing *The End of Anarchism* and *The End of Anarchism?* in response to each other. Merlino left the anarchist movement, hoping to take others with him, and for this Galleani responded in kind, a conflict people are still reading about over a century later. However, as this item from Elena makes clear, they were all still working together, and Merlino didn't shy away from defending Masetti, who was never executed and lived to be an old man.

Within a month of this benefit for Masetti, we find a brief item in the March 9, 1912 issue of *Cronaca*, stating that *reasons of work have forced [Elena] and her partner to abandon Haileyville*, who now lived in Sellytown, Illinois, a coal-town that no longer exists. There's no word from Elena for a bit, aside from a mention in the June 8, 1912 donation column, where one Luisa Lancellotti saluted Elena Purgatorio with a donation of 25 cents. A few weeks later, one R. Oliva saluted Elena from Beverly, Massachusetts, alongside 55 cents for the *Cronaca*.

The next week, Elena penned her longest, densest article, a text with no title that appeared in the recurring *Per La Vita E Per La Idea* column, written from the *the sad, desolate, and continuous monotony of this insignificant mining camp*. She explained that a socialist agitator had shown up to convince the miners to vote for socialist candidates at the ballot box, and in her humorous, merciless fashion, Elena Purgatorio demolished this acolyte of state power.

As she wrote, *what are the anarchists asking of you? Nothing, they offer you everything, life, thought, and action, what they want from you is solidarity, and instead they receive insults and mockery while they fight for your own interests, for the betterment of everyone, and their disinterested propaganda proves to you that they ask nothing for themselves, but what they want they want for everyone. The same cannot be said for the socialists*. Beyond this, Elena points out how this socialist demagogue tried to exalt anarchists and champion their ideas, all the while calling them deluded, a standard tactic today in 2023, over a hundred years later. This would be her last major article for *Cronaca Sovversiva*.

In the November 16, 1912 issue, we find that Elena Purgatorio donated \$1 from Sellytown, Illinois, indicating that she and Ubaldo were still living there, but after this there's no mention of either of them until the August 2, 1913 issue, where we find Elena donated two dollars from Frontenac. After this, in the October 25, 1913 issue, we find Ubaldo Purgatorio had also moved back to Frontenac where he and Elena donated 25 cents each. By the December 27, 1913 issue, Elena was still there, donating a full dollar, although Ubaldo was nowhere to be found in the columns.

During their absence from Frontenac, the local comrades organized an anarchist convention on May 11, 1913, and in the weeks leading up to this event, one G. Galeotti made a *short propaganda excursion in the surrounding area*. In the call for this event, ten anarchists are listed, possibly constituting the core of the Frontenac group that the Purgatorios returned to. It's unclear if they made it to this convention, but the call for it was published weekly in *Cronaca Sovversiva*.

In the April 26, 1913 issue, alongside this call, was an article titled *The Convention of Arma, Kansas*, written by an anarchist called Atea. After imploring the readers to attend the May 11 conference, Atea took the anarchists to task for not actively attacking the local priests of these coal-towns who *undermine the ground beneath our feet, inch by inch*. In the days leading up to the conference, Atea implored the reader to *show the priests that we set our large, airy, sun-flooded rooms where everyone can bring their modest word against their dark agglomeration among candles and stench; we set our conferences against their sermons, our luminous truths against their lies, their mysteries*.

The day before the conference, in the May 10, 1913 issue of *Cronaca*, over three dozen people were listed in the donation column, collectively giving \$19.25, and this is the largest the Frontenac group ever appeared, on paper. Nearly two weeks after the conference took place, the May 24 issue reveals that \$10.00 was collected among the attendees to support *Cronaca Sovversiva*. There was no further mention of the conference, its proceedings kept secret from the reading public, and the authorities.

## VII: Somewhere Over The Rainbow

As mentioned above, Elena returned to Frontenac three months after the conference in August of 1913, with Ubaldo having returned by October. That same month, the October 25 issue records the Frontenac group donating a collective \$6.75 for Errico Malatesta's lecture tour across Italy. Only months before, Malatesta had snuck out of London and secretly returned to Ancona, Italy, where he had begun to publish *Volontà, an anarchist newspaper, all in the hopes of fomenting an insurrection across the broken and fractured kingdom. To help him, Elena and Ubaldo each contributed 25 cents*.

Everything gets real quiet in Frontenac during 1914, with the only significant mentions taking place in the *Piccola Posta* section of *Cronaca*, a sort of semi-anonymous anarchist classified column. Two of the entries from Frontenac are signed simply by E., possibly Elena Purgatorio, but the contents are all vague and lacking context, as they should be.

Elena and Ubaldo were still in Frontenac by the spring of 1914, donating alongside the local anarchist group, who contributed \$11.25 to the *Cronaca* on June 6, the day before an insurrection broke out across Italy, partly triggered by their comrade Errico Malatesta. The front page of *Cronaca* had no mention of the uprising on June 13, given how slowly information traveled, but by June 20 the uprising was public knowledge, and the *Cronaca* documented it in the weeks to come. In that same June 20 issue, Elena Purgatorio donated 15 cents to the newspaper. There was no mention of Ubaldo.

The Italian uprising was still on the front page on June 27, although there was no donation from Elena, who seems to not have had extra money. Nevertheless, she organized a dramatic stage play in the following weeks, and from the proceeds, she donated \$2.45 to the *Cronaca*. After this, she vanished until the October 3 issue, where she donated \$2.25, and in the January 23, 1915 issue, Ubaldo was listed as donating 25 cents from nearby Arma, Kansas, a two hour walk from Frontenac.

On May 1, 1915, the Frontenac group held a grand anarchist festa, bringing in \$120.55, which was split between various Italian anarchist newspapers: *La Questione Sociale*, *L'Era Nuova*,

*Volontà*, with the biggest share (\$40) going to the *Cronaca*. It appears that Ubaldo Purgatorio sold \$3.15 worth of tickets and sold \$35.90 worth of food at the May Day *fiesta*.

There was no mention of Elena in this item, and the next we hear from her (possibly) is another entry from E. in the July 10, 1915 installment of the *Piccolo Posta*. In its typically vague manner, this entry reads simply: *Vedrem di strigliare. Saluti affettuosi* (We'll see about scolding. Warm regards). Elena later donated \$1 on October 23, but this is all we know of her life in 1915. In fact, she disappeared from the *Cronaca* entirely throughout 1916, but when she returned on January 13, 1917, she not only donated \$1.50, she was still in Frontenac.

There was no mention of Ubaldo in this issue, who was also absent from the paper, but we do learn that anarchists were still active in Spring Valley, Black Diamond, and Cle Elum, among other US coal-towns. 1917 was the year that the *Cronaca* got a new masthead image, this one depicting three women with outstretched hands gazing at the bright light of a rising anarchist sun. This hyper-floral, ultra-modern masthead certainly conveyed the spirit of the times, just before a massive wave of repression against the US anarchist movement changed everything.

Elena and Ubaldo vanished from the *Cronaca* after 1918, although we know they remained in Frontenac. Meanwhile, all hell was breaking loose across the US. Starting with the bombing of a San Francisco WWI Preparedness Day parade on July 22, 1916, the many followers of *Cronaca Sovversiva* began to take definitive action in order to bring about their *primavera*, their spring.

One of those who likely took part in the San Francisco bombing was Michele Bombino, aka *Bambino*, an old comrade of Elena's from Cle Elum and a long-time supporter of the *Cronaca*. Raids immediately followed the bombing, followed several months later by a raid on the *Cronaca* offices and the arrest of Luigi Galleni for his anti-war activities, the goal of which was to deport him back to Italy. While he awaited his deportation trial, events drastically escalated in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

## VIII: The Flying Monkeys

Years before, on December 2, 1911, the first mention of a *Cronaca* group in Milwaukee arrived in the form of three donations to the newspaper. F. Conzoniere, G. Mattano, and P. Leto all gave \$1 to the *Cronaca*, and by April of 1912 there were five new members: P. Cimino, P. Locicero, A. Calderon, R. Garcia, and F. Perrone. On June 21, 1913, an anarchist named E. Nardini donated \$1 from Milwaukee, and in November of 1913, the group had at least fifteen members, nearly all of them Italian, based on their last names. It was only in 1914 that the group started to get really active.

The first major event among the Milwaukee *gruppo* was six of their agitators getting fired from the Colonial Marble Company, although thanks to the relationships they built, many of their fellow workers threw down money to support them, for which they provided thanks in the *Cronaca*. In their brief write up in the January 3, 1914 issue, these Italian stone-masons described Milwaukee as *this Siberia where the snow is five feet high*.

A week later, in the *Piccola Posta* column, we find an entry from Milwaukee written by E., and all it says is: *Be patient until next week. Salutations*. As promised, an article from Milwaukee is printed in the next issue, written by F. Perrone. In it, Perrone attacks the duplicitous syndicalists who always claim to love and respect anarchists but then generally act like *Bill Haywood, who shouts in public rallies that anarchists are the police*.

Another entry from the *Piccola Posta* column on March 14, 1914, reveals that the Milwaukee group was considering submitting an article, if they will be allowed to condense it. However, no article ever followed, and then next we hear from the Milwaukee *gruppo* is on May 15, 1915, when they donated money gathered at a *festa* and dance they held under the auspices of the Social Studies Circle. Months later, on November 6, they donated \$4 from another *festa da ballo*, which seem to have been popular in this freezing city.

In the December 4, 1915 issue, someone named P. Nardini donated \$1 from Milwaukee. This would be the second time the name Nardini appeared in Milwaukee, and it is highly likely this is Pasquale Nardini, who will appear again. For the past year, the previously mentioned E. Nardini had been living among the Chicago *gruppo*, and they also donated \$1 to the *Cronaca* in the same issue as Pasquale.

On the first day of 1916, the *Piccola Posta* column carried another vague item from Milwaukee, written by someone called N. It read: *In those circumstances and with that aim, no comrade who understands reason will ever condemn you.* It's unclear what this means, but in the January 15 issue, we learn that E. Nardini had returned to Milwaukee, joining Pasquale Nardini and all the others. Not only did the Nardinis donate a combined \$3, E. Nardini co-wrote a short entry from Milwaukee with A. Corti.

In this piece, the two announced their arrival in Milwaukee with a combined \$4 donation, as well as calling for other anarchists like them to help clear the *Cronaca's* deficit, asking the reader *to push it towards balance and gird it with better weapons.* However, as of June 24, the mysterious E. Nardini was back in Chicago, for whatever reason.

The comrades in Milwaukee held another *festa* on November 25, 1916, and of the \$38.45 raised from this benefit, \$10 went to those arrested in San Francisco after the Preparedness Day bombing, as well as \$5 for the prisoners from the recent Everett Massacre. At the end of December, in the *Piccola Posta*, we learn from L.C. that someone's lecture tour was canceled until further notice, presumably someone from Milwaukee.

In the January 6, 1917 issue, we learn that the Milwaukee comrades held yet another *festa*, bringing in \$44.07 on behalf of the Social Studies Circle. In the weeks to come, the only mention of any Nardini in the *Cronaca* came from E. Nardini, living in the Kensington neighborhood of Chicago as of February. Back in Milwaukee, a comrade named N. Mezzetti wrote an article in *Cronaca* outing a parasite who was extorting money by passing himself off as fleeing from the police. He encouraged the reader to not *spare him the salutary lesson that such a scoundrel deserves.* Shortly after this, the US entered WWI.

There was more vagueness from Milwaukee in the *Piccola Posta* that spring, but that was normal for all *gruppos*, as you've seen. E. Nardini was still in Chicago as of June 30, and later that summer, on August 25, 1917, the Social Studies Circle of Milwaukee raised \$20 for the *Cronaca* and the increasing number of anarchist prisoners, including Luigi Galleani, arrested earlier that June for writing an anti-war article. Shortly after this *festa*, everything exploded in Milwaukee, bringing the *gruppo* to national attention.

## **IX: The Wicked Witches**

As the anarchist Emma Goldman would later describe, *a group of Italian Anarchists, Socialists, I.W.W.'s and others of general liberal leanings organized a little social club where they gathered for*

*entertainment, amateur theatricals, dances and occasional lectures on social topics. Their activities and success aroused the ire and envy of an unfrocked Catholic priest, who found it more profitable to use the methods of the Evangelic church to save souls. Especially was he enraged over the audacity of the young Italian who would attend the Reverend's soul saving open air meetings and heckle him as to the greater importance of saving the bodies of the people. At any rate, the heckling continued at every meeting until finally the ex-priest went to the police with the story that a dangerous lot of Anarchists, pro-Germans, I.W.W.'s had desecrated the American flag, denounced the President, etc., etc. Of course the reverend gentleman was given "protection."*

On September 9, 1917, this Italian evangelical preacher attempted his third pro-war rally in the Bay View neighborhood of Milwaukee, its population largely Italian. His two prior rallies had been disrupted by the local *gruppo*, and for this third rally he had police protection. Nevertheless, when the preacher finished his speech and roused the crowd into a rendition of America, the local anarchists stormed the stage and tore down his US flag. That's when the police opened fire.

According to the anarchist historian Paul Avrich, this rally took place near the clubhouse of the Francisco Ferrer Circle, another name for the Social Studies Circle, as it was known in the pages of *Cronaca Sovversiva*. After the police opened fire, Antonio Fornasier, director of the Circle's theater group, was shot through the heart and killed instantly. His comrade Augusto Marinelli drew a pistol and fired back but was mortally wounded in the chest; he died in the hospital five days later. A third anarchist, Bartolo Testalin, was shot in the back but survived.

Two cops were lightly injured by gunfire, and in retaliation, the police arrested eleven anarchists, raided the Circle's clubhouse, beat people up, and confiscated their anarchist literature. Those arrested were Peter Bianchi, Vincent Fratesi, Amedeo Lilli, Adolph Fratesi, Louis Serafini, Angelo Pantaleoni, Gavina Denurra, Daniel Belucci, Pasquale Nardini, Mary Nardini, and Bartolo Testolin. Most prominent among these arrested anarchists was Mary Nardini, who the police claimed had instigated the storming of the stage. Just like Elena Purgatorio, little is known about the mysterious Mary Nardini, other than that she was born Elena Fratesi in Pergola, Italy along with her brothers Adolfo, Vincenzo, and Giuseppe Fratesi, who were also anarchists.

There was no mention of these murders in the *Cronaca* until September 22, when it ran a small item explaining that four comrades were charged with murder, two with seditious acts. Their bail amounts were \$4,000 each for the murder charges, \$2,000 for seditious acts. The anarchist who shot at the cops was listed as Marvila, which is a misspelling of Maravilla, the maiden name of Margaret Marinelli, wife of Augusto Marinelli, a man who died in the hospital on September 15, 1917.

In the September 29 issue, a longer item appeared, albeit on the third page, given the front was dedicated to the aftermath of the Preparedness Day bombing in San Francisco. In this article, part of the recurring *Among The Cloth Of The Holy Office* column, an anarchist called M.F. relates more details about what happened in Milwaukee, as well as publicly stating, *our comrades didn't touch the American flag, they didn't say anything about being against the war or against President Wilson*, which is another way of saying that they did. As the author explained, *we are in times of war and they're doing everything they can to hunt down anarchists*.

This article also revealed that *the esteemed radical lawyer Clarence Darrow promised us his selfless cooperation. Money is urgently needed*. Towards the end of the text, M.F. explained that *ten people were arrested, including [Pasquale] Nardini's proud partner*, and this was first time that Mary Nardini appeared in *Cronaca Sovversiva*.

By the October 6 issue, the comrades at the *Cronaca* had raised \$200 for those arrested in Milwaukee, and in the October 20 issue, we find another call for funds written by an anarchist called X., just as we see that the *gruppo* from Panama, Illinois (another coal-town) donated \$5 to the Milwaukee prisoners. The call by X. was run multiple times in the weeks ahead, leading up to an article in the November 24 issue, written by one Quasimodo, the pen name Luigi Galleani adopted while fighting his deportation case.

In this Thanksgiving issue, the front page carried not only a biting article titled *Thanksgiving!*, in English, but also Galleani's article on the situation in Milwaukee. The article slices right into the priest Augusto Giuliani, calling him *a bastard who knows no other god or cult besides his own belly*. He is described as a grifter, moving from the hustle of the Catholic church to the evangelical church and then onto pro-war patriotism. The article then explained what happened on September 9, 1917, showing how the priest Giuliani organized the massacre with the police, and then it dealt with the bomb.

To be more specific, dynamite, something every Italian anarchist coal miner knew how to use and often had easy access to in the mine shafts and warehouses. On the same day this paper ran, November 24, 1917, *around seven in the evening, as she returned to the Italian Evangelical Mission, which is on Van Buren and Michigan Street, one Miss Maude Richter, who plays the organ for the priest Giuliani during the usual functions, found on the threshold a strange item that seemed suspicious: few people care for this priest, he's had a guilty conscience about a double murder for a couple of months; it's not possible that he's received a gift, or homage and blessings.*

As the narrative continued, *Miss Maud telephoned the police, and since experience must have shown her that the police have gout where there's risk and are always late, she immediately minted a hero with her smiles and coaxing, inducing Giuseppe Massuini, musician of the trombone in that grotesque court of miracles, to gather the mysterious package in his arms and take it to the police himself.*

*Halfway there, he met Detective McKinney who, not wanting to show less courage than an exotic trombone player, grinned as if it were a joke and took the package to the police headquarters himself, calling together his cronies to remove the gag for their part of the fun. They were joking and laughing when a formidable detonation shook the building from its foundation, enveloped in an acrid vortex of smoke that swept away the corpses who were, with the exception of one woman who rushed to report who knows what theft, all police: **Among them Tremplin, O'Brien, the dragon-born heroes of September 9.** The reasons, the perpetrators of this attack?*

Galleani went on to explain that anyone *who felt only horror about the massacre of September 9 must have been the perpetrator, and they must be legion.* The article is blatantly unapologetic over the attack, and as Galleani stated in the conclusion, *hang yourself wherever you like! We are happy about it, and very heartily! For the debts that it pays and the credit it grants with generous confidence.*

The November 24, 1917 issue of the *Cronaca* was allegedly printed on the same day as the bomb, meaning this article had to have been written later that evening, and the issue was likely printed the next day before being mailed out. As far as the bombing, it was likely organized by the Italian anarchist Mario Buda, who had recently been in Chicago, the last known whereabouts of the mysterious E. Nardini. After meeting up with his comrade Carlo Valdinoci, the two probably secured and placed the dynamite at the church before it was taken to the police station. No one was ever caught.

The state firmly retaliated the next month when Mary Nardini, Pasquale Nardini, and their nine comrades were sentenced to twenty-five years each for attempted murder, with the state placing the Nardini's son in an orphanage rather than her own community. As Emma Goldman would write, *the Socialist Prosecuting Attorney, W. C. Zabel, delivered himself of a wild patriotic harangue that Milwaukee must be rid of the murderous Anarchists and undesirables, and suggested a vote of thanks to the instigator of the whole terrible business, Rev. Guiliani.*

In the end, the convictions were overturned, but Maria, Pasquale, Adolfo and Vincenzo Fratresi, and the other seven comrades were immediately detained upon release, now scheduled for deportation. Maria beat her deportation case, although Pasquale, Adolfo Vincenzo, and the others were ultimately deported in 1920. Maria and Pasquale reunited in Canada with their son, and after living there a few years, Pasquale illegally crossed back into the US with them, and by the 1940s they were running a grocery store in Harlem.

The initial sentencing of the Milwaukee comrades was an outrage the anarchists couldn't bear, so Mario Buda and his companions planned another bombing, one that would target the Milwaukee prosecutors who did this to their comrades. While trying to collect enough dynamite for this wave of blasts (some of it to be stolen from the Crawford Coal Company), a nineteen year-old anarchist named Ella Antolini was captured by the police in Chicago, having several sticks of dynamite in her bag. This led to several arrests, but only Ella did any prison time for it.

While she was awaiting her sentence, on April 18, 1918, two bombs were placed at the house of the Socialist Prosecuting Attorney of Milwaukee, William C. Zabel, but they failed to detonate. Had all this dynamite gone off, the entire house would have been leveled. Everything was rapidly escalating, the state was gunning for the anarchists, and many in the movement believed it was time to stop waiting, to truly act, to treat this as the war it always was. And it was in this exact moment, in the spring of 1918, that Elena and Ubaldo Purgatorio decided to have a baby.

## **X: There's A Land That I Heard Of**

It seems Elena was happy to be pregnant, and given she and Ubaldo remained childless from 1907 to 1919, it truly seems to have been something they chose. The final mention of Frontenac, Kansas in *Cronaca Sovversiva* is also the final mention of Elena Purgatorio, and in the January 5, 1918 issue, she donated a final \$1, although just like every other donor, she listed herself only by initials in these times of repression. This signature of E.P. is the last we hear from her or the Frontenac *gruppo*, but it can be assumed they carried onward in their efforts.

As Elena advanced in her pregnancy, the bombs just kept coming. On September 4, 1918, someone threw dynamite into the entrance of the Chicago federal building, killing four, although a young postal worker named Walt Disney escaped unharmed. On December 30, 1918, the president of the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce had his house blown apart, although the man survived. In the meantime, Ella Antolini had been sentenced to 18 months and a huge fine for transporting the dynamite that would have avenged Mary Nardini and the others. While she was in prison serving her sentence, Ella became cell-mates with none other than Emma Goldman, who described her as *a beam of sunshine, bringing cheer to her fellow prisoners and great joy to me.*

Ella was 20-years-old when she went into prison, while Elena Purgatorio was 27 when she gave birth to her daughter Pearl on February 11, 1919. Elena and Ubaldo were still living in



Frontenac, Kansas, and their daughter was just two-months-old in late April when some of their comrades mailed bombs to thirty individuals, including J.D. Rockefeller, J.P. Morgan Jr., and various mayors, police chiefs, jurists, and politicians. None of them reached their targets, nor did anyone die, but that May 1, multiple May Day marches were attacked by right wing mobs, often assisted by the police.

Ever since the Seattle General Strike earlier that February, a wave of reaction had spread across the country, fostered by demagogues like Ole Hanson, who was also a target of the mail-bomb campaign. The end of WWI left the US state with more power than it ever had, and it was now reaping the patriotic reaction it had sown in its recruitment drive for the French meat-grinder. However, this committed network of Italian anarchists was committed to their revenge, and they soon struck again, this time more effectively.

On Monday, June 2, 1919, bombs were set off in seven cities, each containing twenty pounds of dynamite. At each location, a leaflet titled *Plain Words* was scattered on the street, signed by *The American Anarchists* and *The Anarchist Fighters*. In its promised plain words, the text directed itself to the authorities by stating, *you have jailed, deported, and murdered us. We accept the challenge. The workers have a right to defend themselves; and since their presses have been silenced and their voices muzzled, we mean to speak for them with dynamite.*

In Boston, a judge and a state representative had their houses blasted apart. In New York City, another judge had his brownstone blasted into pieces, *Plain Words* scattered everywhere. In Paterson, New Jersey, the president of a silk company had his apartment destroyed, while in Philadelphia a church was blown up. A judge and immigration official lost their houses in Pittsburgh, the mayor of Cleveland saw his house turned to splinters, and most famously, the three-story house of Attorney General Palmer in Washington D.C. was blasted. Surprisingly, the only person who died in this bombing campaign was an anarchist involved in the attack on the Attorney General. His name was Carlo Valdinoci, one of the Milwaukee bombers, a man once called *one of the best in the movement.*

Despite the good intentions of the bombers, this campaign triggered the infamous Palmer Raids, which led to the swift deportation of hundreds of anarchists and radicals, among them Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman. It was dark times, and when the United Mine Workers called a strike on November 1, 1919, it caused an instant drop in the national coal reserves amid the coming winter. Despite their leader withdrawing the strike call, thousands of coal miners kept their worksites blockaded for weeks, although they were ultimately betrayed by their leadership, just as *Cronaca Sovversiva* had been warning of for years.

## **XI: The Tin Man**

As 1920 began, every anarchist knew they had a target on their back, at least those who weren't dead or deported, and in the lead up to May Day, multiple cities had armies of police marching through the streets and flouting machine guns, preparing for an epic showdown with *anarchy and bolshevism*. To make matters worse, the New York City police threw the anarchist Andrea Salsedo out a fourteenth-floor window after extracting information from him through torture, just as they arrested Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti for murder. All of this was in the air when some pissed off Black, Anglo, and Italian coal miners decided to gun down some private detectives in a little coal-town called Matewan, West Virginia.

On May 19, 1920, three miners and seven private detectives died in a gun battle, leaving the town of Matewan in the hands of its coal miners. People calmed down, but even the local sheriff was on the miner's side, and later that June the miners rose up again, so fiercely the army was sent to pacify them. When those charged with murdering the private detectives went to trial at the beginning of 1921, all of them were acquitted and walked free. The rebellion was spreading even into the juries, and for a moment a ray of light pierced through the endless darkness of that new decade.

As we've seen, the Italian anarchists were quite active in coal-towns across the US, and West Virginia was a place they also agitated in for many years. As of the March 9, 1918 issue of *Cronaca Sovversiva*, there were still anarchists donating from West Virginia, and by all accounts these comrades were very active. Carlo Valdinoci was in West Virginia right before his attempted bombings in Milwaukee, and it's possible he was gathering dynamite there.

The Italian anarchists had a long history in West Virginia. The first mention in the *Cronaca* was in the June 27, 1903 issue, where the Monaci brothers (Giacomo, Giovanni, and Giuseppe), donated \$2 from Tug River, a region that would one day explode in rebellion. After that, in the December 12, 1903 issue, we find one Jim Monaci was still writing from Tug River, less than sixty miles from Matewan, inquiring how to obtain *La Protesta Umana*, published out of San Francisco by Giuseppe Ciancabilla and Ersilia Cavedgani.

Luigi Galleani spoke in West Virginia during his 1913 lecture tour, and in 1916 the paper bemoaned *the recent West Virginia strikes, which saw the wonders of capitalism's bulls and Winchester on a daily basis for two months, and not a piece of news in the big newspapers*. This was the Paint Creek Strike of 1912–1913, one of the most brutal of the time, with dozens of strikers murdered in Kanawha County. It was in 1916 that a writer in the *Cronaca* determined that, *unlike the coal fields of Illinois, the miners in West Virginia were unorganized, making it the perfect place for anarchist propaganda*.

After the murders of the Paint Creek Strike, the writers of *Cronaca Sovversiva* constantly referenced them as a reason to directly attack the forces of reaction before they could commit such massacres, and it would be safe to say this was a unified message delivered by all the Italian anarchists in all the mining towns across the US, at least the ones who read the *Cronaca*. We know that one Pietro Accarino wrote a series of front page articles in the winter and spring of 1914, all signed from Follansbee, West Virginia, and reporting on a strike against the Pittsburg West Virginia Coal Company.

One of the most comprehensive mentions of West Virginia in the *Cronaca* was in the November 27, 1909 issue, where one S. Coda wrote an entry from Sophia, West Virginia. This S. Coda is most likely Emilio Coda, a close comrade of Mario Buda and Ella Antolini, and he was one of the most fervent of the Italian anarchist coal agitators. Working as a miner for many years, Coda told the reader of what was happening in Sophia, around 80 miles east of Matewan.

He explained, *here too we workers are exploited and trampled upon perhaps more than in Italy. In the short time I've been living in these West Virginia woods, I've seen some real peaches. He went on to describe forty Italian miners getting shafted out of their wages, all who had families, and if a worker leaves his job of his own volition, it's impossible to find work with another contractor or company*. At the end, Coda pleaded to *let the pain and toil, o workers, unite and spur us on to holy battles, for the advent of the free society*.

Emilio Coda was born in the Piedmont region of Italy in 1881, grew up in a peasant family, and by 1904 he was part of the Paterson, New Jersey gruppo, where he often donated between mining

jobs in the countryside. He always changed the first letter of his first name, from E. to G. to S. and back again, at least on paper. Coda was short, strong, and a skilled thief, seemingly the main procurer of the network's dynamite. By 1910, he had moved to Piney Fork, Ohio, another coal-town, and by 1911 he was helping to organize a lecture in Wheeling, West Virginia, gathering \$1 in subscriptions at the event.

Coda remained in Piney Fork through 1911, although an entry in the February 24, 1912 issue listed him as donating \$1.50 from Torino, Italy. After that, a J. Coda appears in San Francisco, and on March 15, 1913, the editors of *Cronaca* ask Emilio Coda to please get in contact with them, even thanking his friends in advance for sending this message. By January of 1914, he was in Dillonvale, Ohio, yet another coal-town, and he worked closely with miners in Wheeling, West Virginia, just on the state border with Ohio.

Over the course of 1914 and into 1915, Emilio Coda agitated across this region until it exploded, earning him arrests in Piney Fork and Dillonvale for starting riots. Coda torched multiple coal company buildings in Dillonvale during a wildcat strike in 1917, and he not only fought the coal barons, he fought the corrupt leaders of the United Mine Workers, who described him as *the most dangerous character in the Ohio coal fields*. Nevertheless, Coda was a member of the UMW, on paper, though he never took orders from the syndicate hierarchy.

Coda went into hiding after the Dillonvale wildcat strike, eventually following his comrades south to Mexico where they could avoid the draft for WWI. After the arrest of Luigi Galleani, this group made plans to retaliate, and among those who crossed back over from Mexico were Emilio Coda, Carlo Valdinoci, Mario Buda, Nicola Sacco, and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. As mentioned above, Coda, Valdinoci, and Buda were the main architects of the bombing wave that followed the massacre in Milwaukee, and by 1919, poor Carlo was dead, blown into a thousand fragments.

As mentioned above, the state militarized every major city on May 1, 1920, enacted anti-radical pogroms, suicided Andrea Salsedo, and arrested Sacco and Vanzetti. When a bunch of coal-miners opened fire on the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency in Matewan on May 19, it felt like just desserts. It's hard to say how much the Italian anarchists influenced the situation in West Virginia, but as they were being picked off one by one, their long-sought coal uprising began in Appalachia.

While things calmed down in Matewan, gun battles popped off up and down the Tug River, a region where the Italian anarchists had been organizing since at least 1903. Just as these coal miners were arming themselves for the next big battle, Mario Buda was still consumed with a desire for revenge, and on September 16, 1920, he placed 100 pounds of dynamite (along with 500 iron shards) in a wagon, parked it in front the J.P. Morgan & Co. headquarters at 23 Wall Street in NYC, lit the fuse, and ran. Forty people died, over a hundred were wounded, and by far, this was the most direct attack against US capital anyone had ever seen.

Meanwhile, back in Frontenac, Kansas, the anarchists Elena and Ubaldo Purgatorio, along with their one year-old daughter Pearl, were simply staying alive, out of the lime-light. Even the brave Emilio Coda was laying low, devoting all his energy to the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee. Despite the darkness of this moment, an entire mining region had essentially seceded from West Virginia, just as someone had finally struck J.P. Morgan & Co. in the heart. The repression couldn't get any worse, so some people leaned into that reality and truly went for it.

## XII: The Coal War

We know next to nothing about what Elena, Ubaldo, and Pearl were doing in Frontenac, Kansas besides living and working there. According to a census document from 1920, Elena stayed home with Pearl while Ubaldo worked in the mines. As they lived there on the Kansas prairie, it's also possible they learned of the Battle of the Tug in West Virginia, a three day uprising along the Tug River from May 12–14, 1921. A few months later, on August 1, the friendly sheriff of Matewan was assassinated by Baldwin-Felts detectives on the way to the courthouse, where he faced a dynamiting charge, and the murder of this sheriff quickly ignited a general insurrection across the region.

What followed was truly unprecedented, with the government mobilizing soldiers, airplanes, and gas from WWI to fight a giant army of hill-dwelling miners, over 10,000 of them, and day after day, the miners pushed closer to victory, but the Army also brought in more soldiers, and when faced with an opposing army of 30,000, the miners hid their weapons and returned home, and what became known as the Battle of Blair Mountain was over by September 2, 1921. There was no clear victory, no major casualties on the striker's side, very few landed in jail, and their struggle soon emboldened the coal miners of Kansas, who went on strike later that month.

It's unclear how Elena or Ubaldo participated in Frontenac, but what is known is that the Kansas locals of the UMW rebelled against the national leadership and went on strike across the state, shutting down the third largest coal producing region in the US. When strike funds dried up and cold weather took over, the miners' wives of the region met in Franklin, Kansas (a two hour walk from Frontenac) on December 11, 1921, and by the end they resolved to shut down any operating coal mines themselves, with or without help. According to Elena Purgatorio's granddaughter, *for the entirety of her life, my great grandmother Elena Purgatorio did not talk about this "Mother's March," which New York Times named the "Amazon Army." She was one of just 30 women out of 3,000 that were arrested and jailed overnight.*

Raids and arrests soon followed, but most of these were minor, and the troops began leaving on January 4, 1922. Nevertheless, the women didn't stop their activities and continued to assault and harass scabs, just as they began swarming local politicians who didn't support the miners. It's hard to imagine that Elena Purgatorio wasn't involved in all of this, and from the available information, it appears that Ubaldo was unable to find work after the strike.

Ubaldo, who went by Ben at that point, had been part of the wildcat Kansas faction of the UMW who disregarded the orders of the national leadership. Like many unemployed anarchists, Ubaldo took Elena and Pearl out to enjoy life without having to pay money, and Ubaldo was playing a game of *bocci* with his comrades when he was accosted by one Pellegrino Mendichi, a conservative UMW member. As Elena would later recount, her husband told Mendichi *to go away and let him alone. After saying this he turned around and began to play his game with his friends again. After my husband started to play, Pellegrino Mendichi's brother, Charles Mendichi, was standing nearby and insulted my husband in all ways.*

When Ubaldo told the man to shut up or get ready to fight, Charles shot him with a pistol, although Ubaldo was so angry he didn't feel the wound. Instead, he threw a wooden *bocci* ball, hit Charles square in the forehead and then *walked over and beat him until he got too weak to whip him anymore.* With his remaining strength, Ubaldo ran into a comrade's house, being shot at continuously by two other Mendichi cousins. When one of the cousins came to finish Ubaldo

off, Elena broke a bottle and went for him with its jagged edges. And then, magically, the cops arrived.

According to Elena, *one of the cops took the bottle away from me. Then he cursed me and said that he would arrest me and take me to jail. To this man who had shot at my husband, he shook hands and said he was his friend.* In this horribly sad narrative, Elena explained, *all I want is the people to know the true facts of the case and to keep my husband's memory clean, for he was clean, straight, and noble.* To compound the tragedy, she makes clear that her husband's killers were *his best friends up to last September when at the time the strike started, my husband was for [pro-wildcat strike] Howat, thinking Howat was putting a right fight up, while the others seemed to be for the other side.*

Given the sudden appearance and open complicity of the police, it would seem that Ubaldo was openly assassinated in the middle of a *bocci* game, and this was likely organized by elements within the conservative UMW. Ubaldo was buried in Frontenac, his date of death marked July 25, 1922. Below this is the inscription, *to our beloved husband and father cowardly murdered during the miners strike of 1921–1922 for having loyally upheld the cause of justice.* Ubaldo was 35-years-old when he died. His daughter Pearl was only three.

### **XIII: The Coal Miner's Wife**

This story has focused on Elena Purgatorio and her husband, but it's also the story of a forgotten network of Italian coal-miners which stretched from the hills of Ohio all the way to Vancouver Island. Elena lost her husband and partner at the apex of their agitation, when the ideas of the crazy Italian *minatori* finally made sense, although it was far too late. As mentioned above, WWI had made the US state insanely powerful, and anarchism barely survived through 1920s, one of the darkest periods of counter-revolution the world has ever seen.

Little is known about Elena Purgatorio's life after this moment, or her daughter Pearl, but we know they moved to Chicago by 1930, and there is a picture of them both taken sometime in the 1920s. As fate would have it, both of them are faintly smiling in their modern dresses and fancy hair cuts. Despite the sadness in their eyes, both of them seem determined to live.

Elena lived a long life, passing away in 1981 at the age of 90, still living in Chicago. Her daughter Pearl died in 2001, age 82, also in Chicago, and their descendants are still very much alive. We hope this text can help them understand what was happening in those years when Elena Purgatorio first arrived in the US, and with any luck, her story will grow even richer.

Elena was one of millions in those years who were determined to change the world, to bring about the fabled *primavera*, the anarchist spring where the old ruins of capital would be swept away, by force if needed, and she was carried away by this beautiful idea, enraptured by her network of comrades in every city, every coal-town, every mine shaft. They all came very close to actualizing their spring, and if more of the workers had listened to them earlier, before WWI, when it mattered, we might not live in such a horrible reality right now, where capital is desperately trying to maintain its hollow supremacy.

While many elements of this narrative are heartbreaking and sad, while the network was ultimately crushed *gruppo by gruppo*, it wasn't entirely crushed, and what they built from the 1890s to the 1920s is still a wonder to behold, just as it can be an inspiration now, when this digital surveillance world has made utilizing the internet for propagandist purposes a largely pointless,

self-defeating endeavor. With only paper and ink, these Italian anarchists created an entire rebel culture. They moved invisibly when they needed to, and while their influence wasn't definitive, they helped prime one of the definitive labor battles in the US, one which should have kept spreading until the entire system was destroyed.

But here we are, stuck in this reality, and part of why we're here is the erasure of our memories. Anarchists have a long history in the US, and much of it has been hidden up until recently. Just like Elena Purgatorio, many of those deeply involved in this network never talked about it for fear of reprisal, and because of this, much history was lost. Let this text aid in recovering that memory, and let it be a reminder that, while there's no need to reinvent the wheel, it's fine to use an older one.

**Long Live Ubaldo!**

**Long Live Elena Purgatorio!**

**Long Live Anarchy!**

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