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GREEN HORSE PUBLISHING COMPANY

ÅSA, SWEDEN





Caelum, non ánimum, mutant qui trans mare currunt.

*Those who cross the sea change the place where they live, but not the
place where their soul lives.*



Dedication

This book is dedicated to the memory of my maternal grandparents, Nonno Checco (Francesco Rosati) and Nonna Rosa (Rosa Notari Rosati); to their four children: my Mother Mary (Maria Rosati Sena), my Aunt Yolanda (Jolanda Rosati Alloy), my Aunt Helen (Elena Rosati Baldrice), and my Uncle Charles (Celeste Rosati); to their spouses: my Father Lawrence (Lorenzo Sena), my Uncle Pat (Pasquale Alloy), my Uncle Ernest (Ernesto Baldrice), and my Aunt Fannie (Filomena Sena Rosati); and to their children's children: my sister Joann Sena Wolski, and my cousins Anthony Baldrice, Francis Baldrice, James Alloy, Ann Marie Alloy Martarano, Carol Ann Rosati Nageli, Rosemary Alloy Early and Thomas Alloy.

This book is also dedicated to the past generations of Rosatis and Notaris, and to the current and future members of both of these families who trace their roots back to the village of Sigillo, in the Province of Perugia and the Region of Umbria in the Republic of Italia.

Preface

Francesco Vincenzo Arcangelo Rosati was a simple man who had a complex life, like most of us. When he was a young boy growing up on a farm in the hills of central Italia, he had no idea that he would be taken on a journey from his pastoral home to the coalfields of the eastern United States. He emigrated to America, but unlike many of his countrymen and fellow Europeans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, he did not leave home to seek riches and a new life. He had a comfortable life in a city in southwest Luxembourg where he and his wife, Rosa, lived with their two children, Celeste and Elena. Circumstances, not dreams, pushed him farther away from his ancestral home and his and Rosa's families. Once in America, however, he seized the opportunity to build something better than he had in pre-war Europe. He found the means to feed his family, a family that grew when Maria and Jolanda arrived, to build a new homestead, to see his children happily marry and prosper, and to become a grandfather, whom we called Nonno Checco (pronounced cake-oh).

What was it that caused him to take those long, dangerous steps, to place himself, as well as his young bride and infant children, at the mercy of so many uncontrollable forces and travel at the beginning of the First World War to a foreign country and a completely unknown future? What could compel him to risk everything, even death, to meet an uncertain fate? The answers to these questions from an inquisitive young boy to his Mother and her brother and sisters were never completely satisfying. I could not believe, as they suggested, that wanderlust caused him to move away from a secure home at the age of fourteen. I had difficulty with the explanation that fear of dying in battle, either in a German or Italian uniform, was the sole reason he fled from an established and prosperous life in Europe. There had to be a deeper, more troubling event, an inciting incident in his life and that of his family that made him begin and continue his journey.

Why didn't I just ask our grandfather what the reasons were for his leaving, first his home in Italia, and then his home in Luxembourg? One reason was that I never learned to speak Italian, and he never gave any indication that he could speak English. He did speak English, of course, just like he spoke French, German and Luxembourgeois, as well as his

native Italian. Thinking back, it was probably our grandmother who made the special rule that no English would be spoken in her house, and our grandfather, who was used to following his own rules, was only too happy to grant her this small favor. This leads to the second reason why I did not ask our grandfather my questions. Nonno Checco was a man of few words; very, very few words. Even when the men in the neighborhood gathered on his porch—which, because of its spaciousness, was the assembly point for The Orchard, as the neighborhood was called—even then, he was mostly silent. While the other men argued and carried on in loud voices, our grandfather sat in his rocking chair, with his brown, broad-brimmed hat covering his bald head down to the fringe of reddish grey hair just above his neck and around his ears, smoking his Parodi and listening.

There must have been times in his life when he had to speak long sentences, and maybe even string several sentences together in order to deliver an important message. But we never heard the sentences or the short passages. He spoke volumes with his eyes, however. You knew there was a great deal going on behind those sparkling blue eyes and underneath the broad brim of his ever-present brown hat, and the few words he did speak to us, even though they were in a language we could not understand, conveyed their meaning. But they did not reveal his life's story. I am certain that he, like most of us, had a secret that affected the course of his entire life, a secret that he never shared with anyone and only rarely acknowledged to himself.

I set out to uncover his secret and piece together his story from the fragments of facts that we know about Francesco Rosati, about his wife Rosa Notari and her family—since these two families are so tightly intertwined—and from some probable occurrences based on the places and times in which he and Rosa and our ancestors lived. Then, to fill in the holes—and there are many of them—I have had to imagine how some events could have occurred. This book is therefore a work of fact and fiction. I do not pretend that it is anything else. However, the imagination has not run wild. Our ancestors have not been transformed into dukes and duchesses, saints or martyrs. As I said, our grandfather was a simple person; it was his life that was interesting. This is his story as I imagine he would have told it.

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Walls of stone, ovens of brick

WHEN THE GREAT SICKNESS came to the village of Sigillo for the second time, Umberto Rosati knew what would happen. He had heard the story from his grandfather, Pietro, who had lived through the first plague. Many people would die; young, old, women, men, rich, poor, holy, sinners. God would take them all. It struck at random, and once it did, there was no escape from death. Pietro was the only Rosati who survived when the sickness passed through Sigillo, seventy years before. He was an infant at the time. He and six other babies, the youngest sons and daughters of Pietro's father and his brothers, were taken by the young village priest to a hermitage in the mountains, north of the village, on the other side of Monte Cucco. They were put in a stable with the other babies from the village that had also been taken there by the same priest. Before he died from the sickness, the caring young priest had placed forty infants in the hands of the monks.

One monk cared for the infants, feeding and changing them as best he could. One child after the other died. When the caretaker monk died, he was replaced by another. The dead were carried out of the stable and placed in a large grave, the monks' robes and the babies' wrappings burned, the ashes placed in the grave and covered with a layer of earth. When a month had passed and the monks and babies stopped dying, the grave was filled and crosses were placed over it, six large ones for the monks who had offered their lives for the children, and twenty-nine small ones for the infants who carried the disease with them to the hermitage.

Pietro was one of the eleven infants who did not need a cross. When Pietro was old enough to understand, he was told by the monks what had happened after he arrived at the stable. Neither his sister nor his cousins who had been with him in the stable survived. His parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts, and the other children in his extended family who stayed in the village had all perished. The ten other infants who had

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survived were eventually sent back to the village with a relative or friend who came for them. No one came for Pietro. He was alone, and he would be raised by the monks, staying inside the hermitage's walls long after the sickness vanished from the village.

Pietro and the other infants had been brought to the Hermitage of Monte Cucco. It sits on the northern slope of the mountain in a limestone amphitheater in the valley of the Rio Freddo. The buildings of the hermitage are made up of cells that are literally carved into the rock and encased on the outside with limestone blocks, so that the walls seem to grow naturally from the cliffs. Roof beams, floor boards, door and window frames, and the sparse furniture in the hermitage are all constructed from beech and chestnut that grew on the mountain when it was built in the early 16th century, some thirty years before the outbreak of the episode of the plague that brought Pietro to it. The style of the buildings is Romanesque, which was the prevailing architectural style for ecclesiastical structures that served as homes for their religious inhabitants.

The founder of the Hermitage of Monte Cucco was Beato Paolo Giustiniani. He established it in 1521 as the first hermitage of the Camaldolese order. The monks lived in seclusion, and did not accept outsiders, except those in need. Beato Giustiniani was not alone in seeking the solitary life offered by the Apennine Mountains of northern Umbria. Others were San Romualdo, San Pier Damiani and Beato Tommaso di Costacciaro. It was the combination of the difficult terrain that discouraged passers-by, and the ample presence of water that attracted these men and their followers to the area. What was perhaps remarkable was that the monks in those days were not from the peasant families, but sons and daughters of the rich and aristocrats who wished to devote their lives to quiet contemplation of God and service to the Holy Church. Becoming a monk was one of the religious choices for the privileged males. Many of those who chose an ecclesiastical life were less noble in their devotion to God. They were given a *beneficium*, or an income, usually in the form of a land holding. Some were given a *commendam*, which was the position of Abbot for a monastery or abbey. Such was the case at the time for the Hermitage of Monte Cucco. The Abbot did not live among the monks, but had his quarters in Perugia close to the Bishop.

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One of the principal ways these communities served the Church was through the sale of their production of fruits, vegetables and other products. The monks developed and perfected new methods of growing and producing, and they closely guarded their secrets. Inside the hermitage's walls, Pietro learned these secrets of growing fruits and vegetables in abundance, in the harshest soil and weather conditions. He learned to butcher livestock, make sausages and cure meats. He learned to make cheeses from the milk of goats and cows. He learned how to make wine and grappa and the clear spirits that could be flavored with different spices. One special craft that Pietro learned was the grafting of fruit trees. There was an abundance of apple and pear trees in this region of the country, and the monks had perfected techniques for spreading those varieties that were the hardiest, tastiest and best for different purposes. Compared to trying to grow a tree from seed or a cutting, grafting was much quicker. The host tree was already adapted to the soil and climate, and a grafted branch would bear fruit from the first season.

Most of all, Pietro learned to be thankful for each day of his life and to be generous with his help to those who cared for him.



When Pietro was twelve years old, he was given the choice of remaining in the hermitage and becoming a monk, or going back to Sigillo or one of the other local villages and working in the fields or in the stables. Like the other inhabitants of the hermitage, he had never been outside its walls once he arrived. Unlike most of the other inhabitants, the only life experience he had was from inside the walls. He had never seen or been with other children. His only sight of a woman was from the pages of the manuscripts that the monks read. He could not yet read himself. This would be the first step in his education as a monk, if he decided to stay.

He decided to leave the hermitage, even though it meant he would never see his benefactors again. Pietro had been an obedient child, and he was well-loved by the good monks. But even at the young age of twelve, he understood his duty to carry on the name of his family as its only survivor. The monks prepared him for his journey and gave him a map they had drawn to show him the way to the foot of the mountain and his village. He was also given a few small coins and some food and a letter from the eldest monk stating who he was and how he had come to

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the hermitage. The monks were not sure that there was anyone at the foot of the mountain who could read the letter, but they told Pietro to keep the letter always in a safe place in case one day he would need it. They instructed him to walk straight to the church of Sant'Andrea, which was marked with a cross on the map, and speak to the priest.

Pietro was led to the large, main entrance door by the eldest monk. He had been Pietro's spiritual leader. The monk opened the door, the young boy passed over the threshold and entered the tree-lined valley that spread below the only place he knew as home. The door was closed quietly behind him. He was alone for the very first time in his still short life. He walked in a southerly direction, leading his shadow that was behind him in the noon sun. He followed the course of the riverbed, beneath the steep limestone cliffs. His path took him to the east of Monte Cucco. He passed over the Pian di Monte and then followed the Rio Fonturce down to the via Flaminia. From here he walked south along the road to the center of Sigillo.

Sigillo had fewer than one hundred peasants tilling the fields and tending small flocks of sheep and goats when Pietro wandered into the center of the village on a warm summer day, and found the church, Sant'Andrea, that had been marked on the map by the monks. He found the priest, showed him his letter, told him his story, and asked him where he could find work, just as he had been instructed to do by the monks. The priest took him to Enrico Tedesco, who lived in the village near the church. Enrico Tedesco was *colono*, or foreman, for a farm at the northern edge of the village. The farm, and all of the land in the entire region of Umbria where Sigillo was located, was part of the Papal States. The Church, with the Pope as its worldly leader, owned the lands. The Pope placed their administration in the hands of an ecclesiastical administrator, and in the case of Sigillo, it was part of the Bishop of Perugia's domain.

Enrico's wife, Anna Maria, met them and invited the priest and the young boy into the house where the priest told her Pietro's story while they ate bread and soup that Anna Maria had put before them. She was very moved by what she heard. She was fifteen when the plague came to the village, she said. Her parents and many of her relatives also had died. She thanked God for sparing her life and the lives of her mother's parents, who took care of her until she married Enrico.

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When they were finished eating, she asked Pietro and the priest to follow her daughter, Angelina, to where Enrico was working. Angelina was seven. She was tall for her age, almost as tall as Pietro, and, like her father, had terra cotta red hair, bright blue eyes and fair skin. Pietro had never heard another child's voice, only his own. He thought, how soft and light are the tones coming from her mouth. It sounds like she is singing. Did he sound like that when he was her age, or is this something particular to girls, he wondered?

Enrico heard the story, delivered again by the priest. Enrico remembered the Rosati family. They were hard-working people, he said, and generous. They had often helped him take in the crops. Pietro was welcome to work and live on the farm. He was given a few sheep to tend. Enrico, with Angelina following closely behind, showed Pietro to his place in the stable where he would sleep among the animals. The priest bid farewell to Enrico, Angelina and Pietro, and said that he would look forward to seeing all of them at mass on Sunday.

Pietro had been told by the monks that God had shown great mercy in sparing his life, and that he should repay His mercy through hard work and devotion to His teachings. Pietro was truly thankful, but could never understand why God, who was infinitely merciful, had taken his entire family and left him alone to learn life's wonders and mysteries from a band of secluded monks, and then inspire him to leave the safety and security of the hermitage for the harsh life that existed outside its walls. He lay down to sleep that first night in the stable, thought of his warm bed in the hermitage, and wondered if he had chosen correctly.



Pietro worked hard. His flock grew under his care. When he was sixteen, the flock was divided between the youngest sons of Enrico's two brothers who worked the farm with him. Their families lived in the loft above the stable where Pietro slept. Pietro began to work in the fields and was given a small plot of land where he could grow vegetables for the table at which he ate his meals. When he was twenty-two, he and Angelina Tedesco married. It seems that Angelina had decided that it would be so the first day she met Pietro, and she had told her father this fact that night as he put her to bed. Pietro and Angelina had twelve children, among them Umberto's father, Tommaso.

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Pietro was given permission by his father-in-law to extend the stable and to enclose the loft above into a living space. The walls were formed from stones that grew in the fields each winter, and were harvested with the ploughs each spring. The wooden beams were hewn from the beeches that grew on the side of Monte Cucco, the same beeches that had been used inside of the hermitage where he grew up. He copied the details of the wood finishing that he had seen and touched as a child. He built a large fireplace, in brick, at one end of the room. This would be used for cooking and for warming the house. He had learned from the monks how to make the bricks, build the flue of a fireplace to retain as much of the warmth as possible in the winter months, but to release it during the heat of summer. The room would serve as the family's living quarters, with each married couple and their children having their own space separated from the others by linen curtains woven from the flax that grew in the fields. It was a fine house when it was finished, a house that was built to last for many generations to come. Walls of stone, a fireplace of brick.



The hearth in Masseggio

The Pietro Rosati family prospered, although they were still peasants, *contadini*. They owned nothing, subsisted on what they could grow in their tiny garden, and owed their continued existence to the whims of the weather that could deliver a harvest sufficient for them to pay the rent to their ecclesiastical landlords, or destroy the crop by withholding the rains and scorching the earth, killing the seedlings or withering them before

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they achieved full growth. Since Pietro returned to Sigillo, the rains mostly came when they should and the sun shone at mostly the right times and at the correct level of intensity. It seemed that God was offering a balance to the misery caused by the plague.

Pietro's and Angelina's sons married, and they each had large families. Even the sisters brought their husbands to the farm that proved to be more fertile than any other in the valley. Two new structures were built to house the animals and provide shelter for the families. Pietro was strong, as was his wife Angelina; he was the foreman of the men and she was in charge of the women. When they became too old for these duties, Tommaso and his wife, Beatrice, took them over. When they aged, Umberto and his wife, Lucia, took over. Umberto and Lucia had two sons, Francesco, who was two, and Tommaso who was four, and a daughter, Maria, who was eight, when the Great Sickness arrived in Sigillo for the second, but not the last, time.

Umberto knew what would happen, and what he had to do. It had been decided by the family. One of them had to survive. They were chosen. They were not running away or abandoning the others. They were doing what was expected of them.

He hitched a cart to the family's mule, tied four goats to the back of the cart, placed a cock and a hen in a wooden cage and hung the cage over the side of the cart, then wrapped his three children in all of their clothes, carefully covering their faces and hands, and sitting them each in their own corner of the cart. He instructed Lucia to wrap herself in the same way as he had wrapped the children. They walked on either side of the mule as the cart followed the ruts in the road up the back side of Monte Cucco to the shepherd's hut, the *pagliaio*, that he had helped his father and grandfather build when it was his time in life to tend the sheep and goats. There was a thin cover of snow on the ground that cracked under the wooden wheels as they slowly wound their way up the trail. An almost full moon reflected off the white sheet of snow. The air was still. It was peaceful. The same moon shown on the same snow at the bottom of the mountain, in the village, where fear, sickness and death would rage for the coming months.

The family reached the *pagliaio* in the middle of the night. Umberto made a fire from the wood he had brought with him in the cart. Centuries of grazing sheep and goats had shaved the mountainside of

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striplings, and the villagers had long ago cut the last of the timber for their roofs and floors and fences and tools. He brought as much wood as he could carry, but it would not last more than thirty nights. The children were kept separated, hands and faces covered. Where had he learned that God brought the plague to remind humankind of its frailty and its dependence on His good will, but that humans spread the fatal disease from one to the other with no need for God's assistance. There was also talk that the sickness was carried by infected rats that passed it to humans through the bites of fleas that had sucked the blood of the plague-filled rats and injected it into the veins of their human hosts.

After a few days, Maria developed a fever. Lucia fed her with strong, hot broth, and made her tea from herbs she had brought with her from the farm. Maria shivered and slept fitfully. After the passing of two nights, the fever broke. It was not the plague. She was back to full health by the end of a week. None of the family had contracted the disease before they left the village. They stayed in the pagliaio on the mountain throughout the winter, five months after they had arrived. Umberto went out each day to hunt game, and Lucia and the children gathered grasses and roots to eat and make fires for cooking and for warmth. No one else had ventured up to the pagliaio, and the family saw no others during their daily excursions.

After the fifth month, Umberto decided to return to the village to see whether anyone had survived and what had become of the rest of his and Lucia's family. He left them with provisions for three days, and promised to return before they were finished. Lucia had great faith in her husband, but she vowed silently to make the provisions last for at least a week. Umberto left at dawn. The sky was heavy and promised rain. Before Umberto reached the eastern edge of the village, farthest up the side of the mountain, the heavens opened, soaking him with its cleansing waters.

He saw smoke rising from many of the chimneys. Some had survived, he thought. He looked across the valley to his family's farm. There were signs of life there as well. His steps were water-logged and heavy, but his heart was light and filled with hope. His youngest brother, Giovanni, met him as he walked up the road to the house on the hill. They stopped a few yards from each other, wanting to embrace, but still fearful of the infectious might of the plague. Umberto said that Lucia and the children

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were all safe and healthy. Giovanni named the dead as if he were slowly tolling a bell. Nine out of the thirty-four had died. It was considered a minor miracle that so many in the family had not gotten the disease. More than one-half of the villagers were now in new graves in the cemetery between their farm and the market square. Their grandparents had survived again, probably because their bodies had resisted the sickness the first time it struck. Their parents had survived also. Two brothers-in-law and two sisters-in-law, including Giovanni's wife, were in the graves. The five youngest children in the family were beside them.

The last death had occurred over two months ago, so it was wise of Umberto to stay away as long as he did. The plague had passed now, and life was returning to normal in Sigillo. Umberto's family were convinced that he, Lucia and the children were still alive, said Giovanni, and they prayed each night at benediction for their safe return. God had now granted their wish. Umberto stayed long enough to dry his clothes and feel the warmth of his family rejuvenate his spirit before he walked back up the mountain. They spent one last night in the pagliaio. The next day they walked alongside their mule, which was weakened, but still alive. Keeping the mule alive had been a task that Lucia had set to her children. Tommaso, Francesco and Maria were proud of their success; Lucia and Umberto were proud of theirs.

During the first weeks of the families' reunification, much time was spent in telling and re-telling the stories of what happened, both in the village and up on the mountain. Most of the villagers who died went in the first few weeks after Umberto had left. It took almost a month before the disease reached the household. First, Giuseppe, their brother-in-law, fell down in the stable, struck with the fever. They had tried to follow Pietro's advice, to avoid all physical contact, but somehow it found its way into the compound and spread to the most vulnerable. Giovanni's wife, Teresa, was a frail woman. The birth of each of their four children had been difficult, and two of their children were among those who did not survive this episode of the plague. Gradually, the village returned to normal, the survivors now trying to do the work of their departed friends and family, as well as their own.

One day, after Umberto and his family had been back in Sigillo for a few months, the farm received a visit from Don Augusto, the new beneficiary of the region. He was a nephew to the Bishop, and he

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inherited the benefit of the lands from his father, the Bishop's brother, who had recently died. His father was a good and just man who gave all the excess he was due, over the amount that was the Bishop's, to the religious men and women in the hermitages, abbeys, convents and monasteries in the mountains. Many of these *caenobia* suffered after the Church instituted the *commendam* in the 15th century, the practice of replacing the Abbots who were themselves monks who lived in the abbey or hermitage, with lay people or prelates who were not at all associated with the order, and never shared in the life and work of these communities. These absentee Abbots usually took more and more of the religious community's production until many could no longer sustain themselves and closed.

Don Augusto was a priest in the later stages of middle age. He was rather tall, and very round. The roundness came from eating his fill from the labors of the tenant farmers, while doing no physical work himself save the lifting of the chalice at his compulsory daily masses. His hair had receded to a thin line above his ears which could be seen even though he kept his hat in place when he greeted the men and women of the family. The purpose of his visit was to set the terms for future payments to him for farming the land that was his to control. The plague had severely reduced both the number of faithful who could be tithed, and the number of hands that could be employed to generate income for the Church through the sale of grain, produce, dairy and meat products. The Church was, therefore, extremely weakened by the plague. The peasants who had survived and who continued to benefit from the good graces of the Church, who allowed them to live on Her land, would be expected to work harder to make up for the shortfall. The good works of the Church could not be compromised by worldly events, even though these events may have been caused by God.

Here were the his new terms: He would now take seven of every ten bushels of grain from the harvest, increased from the four his father received previously. Two of the remaining three would be given to the village church. The tenants would now be able to keep only one out of ten bushels, rather than the four they kept previously. The tenants could continue to keep the vegetables from their gardens, and house their livestock and poultry on the land, but these gardens could not cover an area larger than one square yard for every household member over the age of six.

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Umberto had learned from his grandfather to respect the clergy; he owed his life to their good graces. But this glutton who stood before them, requiring respect, but showing none in return, would not increase his family's servility without giving something back as well. Don Augusto had two negotiating points: he represented the landowner who could, at will, cast out the tenants; and, he represented the absolute authority of the Church, which commanded obedience in both secular and spiritual matters at the time. Umberto had only one argument in his favor: if his family was forced off the land, there were few who could take their place. The plague had seen to that.

Here is what Umberto offered Don Augusto: They would keep three bushels out of every ten. The Rosati family would have the right to live on the property called Maseggio, a frazione in Sigillo, marked with its present boundaries, as long as a Rosati worked the land. They could not be thrown off the land or out of the house by the Bishop or the Bishop's beneficiary, nor by any succeeding owner. Umberto would have this in writing as a legal and binding document. If the Don Augusto and Bishop could not agree to this, his family was prepared to leave Sigillo and the Papal States and migrate to Toscana, where there was a strong demand for farm laborers.

Don Augusto knew that Umberto was prepared to carry out his threat. He was not about to test his will. He was also weary from his travels through the half-deserted villages. Many of the farms he had visited were untended, the fields growing weeds where wheat and barley and oats had grown in abundance just a few years before. The yield from the farms was now less than one-half of what it was before the plague had visited the valley, and this was the second time it had struck in less than a century. It mattered not to him who lived and worked on these farms, just that they were productive. The local church would have to be satisfied with only one bushel out of ten from this farm, and he was still getting two more than his father had managed. What was it to him that someone cared to bind his heirs and the heirs of his heirs for eternity to a one plot of ground. He would accept the offer, with one caveat, that the Rosati must be male, and he must himself work the farm. Umberto accepted. Don Augusto wrote a contract on parchment and placed the Bishop's seal on it. Don Augusto signed it with his name. Umberto placed the *segno di croce*, the Latin cross used in place of a signature by

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those who did not know how to write. The contract would be taken to the office of the Bishop for safe keeping. The year was 1622.



Masseggio and Monte Cucco

Ten generations of Rosatis had lived at Predio Masseggio before Francesco arrived. He was the first member of the eleventh generation, born on the 8th of June 1886, the oldest child of Tommaso Rosati and Anna Maria Sabatini. As was the custom, he was named after his paternal grandfather. His grandfather was Ciccio, and the new Francesco would be called Checco. He was followed by four brothers: Luigi; Umberto; Enrico, who was called Righetto; and Giuseppe, who was called Peppe; and three sisters: Consiglia; Filomena; and Rosa. Very little had changed in Sigillo and at Masseggio during the two hundred and sixty-four years since the contract was made with the Bishop of Perugia. There were, however, a few noticeable differences. The village had grown from a few hundred to over one thousand. All the land was farmed. Three new churches had been built. The village had a governing council, and a special building had been erected for the government

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workers. This town hall was at one end of the central square, the Piazza Martiri.

Great change had come to Italia. It had become a mostly united country in 1861. However, The Church, with the assistance of the French armies of Napoleon III, still controlled the Papal States, dividing the united Italia into two unconnected sections. It took another ten years for the Italians to bring the Papal States and Roma into the unified country, with Roma as the capital. They did it without the assistance of their leader, Garibaldi, who had failed in several earlier attempts, had been captured and jailed. Regione di Umbria, Provincia di Perugia, Commune di Sigillo, was now officially part of Italia, although ownership of the lands was still mostly in the hands of the Church, the old nobles, or a few wealthy families.

Francesco did what the earlier generations of Rosati boys had done. He was allowed to play until the age of six. Then, he was given a goat to tend. In the summer, he also helped to plant the vegetable garden, watered the plants when there was no rainfall, and picked the weeds. In the winter, he went out each day to gather branches along the brook that flowed at the southern edge of Masseggio's boundary. He bound the branches in tight bundles that the men hung to dry in the ceiling of the ground floor where the animals were kept. At the age of eight he was given the task of tending the sheep on the mountain. He would help the older boys with this chore and some of the heavier chores around the house. At the age of ten he would be in charge of the flock and the younger shepherds. He would do this until he was twelve, when he would start to work with the men in the fields.

It was during his time as an apprentice shepherd that he learned the secret of Monte Cucco, just like all of the other boys in the village. Cucco means, literally, something empty. When he would ask as a young child why the mountain had that name, he would always be told that one day he would find out. He had to wait for that day and be patient. One summer night his wait was over. His older cousins, the two sons of his mother's sister, who were in charge of the flock, came to him in the night as he lay asleep in the shepherd's pagliaio on the mountain, blindfolded him, and led him up to the top of the mountain. They told him not to be afraid, that he was going to learn the secret of Monte Cucco. He was afraid, but he was also excited.

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When they reached a point near the top, the younger cousin disappeared. Then the older boy tied a rope under his arms and began lowering him into what Francesco thought was a well. The younger cousin was at the bottom calling up, and guiding the rope, so Francesco knew that it was safe below. It seemed to take forever for the bottom to be reached. When he was once again on firm ground, his cousin removed the blindfold. The light from a large lantern made it difficult to see at first. When he was finally able to focus his eyes, what he saw was the most spectacular sight he had ever experienced. He was in a very large hall, many meters high and wide. There was an emerald green pond in the middle, and the walls were a glistening white. He walked with his cousin for a long distance, through a series of caves, each with its own distinct design formed by the force of water many, many centuries before. This underground world was truly beautiful. He was not afraid, as some of the other boys had been when they were taken on their initiation tour. He did not want to leave when his cousin told him it was time to get back to their sheep. From then on, he always wanted to be the first down the well when it was his turn initiate the younger boys.

At twenty-one he would be expected to marry, to have a family, and contribute to providing new generations of Rosatis to Masseggio. In a small village like Sigillo, it was important to marry as far from your own family as possible, to avoid the sicknesses that came with in-breeding. This was easier said than done. It was understood from experience that marrying a second cousin, when your grandfather or grandmother was the brother or sister of your prospective spouse's grandmother or grandfather, was too close. It should be at least a third cousin, and preferably farther removed. With a village of around one thousand inhabitants, and with the average size of each family being around eight, everyone is at least a third cousin. So, you tried to marry someone who looked different.

The quiet, uncomplicated life of Masseggio appealed to Francesco. As the eldest son, he would have inherited the position of foreman. But he did not need this position in order to stay at the farm. The days were a gift, beginning with the rooster waking the family before dawn, the bells in the twelfth century *Chiesa Sant'Andrea* Church chiming the hours during the day, and the crackle of the fire in the large fireplace lulling all the family members to sleep each evening.

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Francesco was proud of his name. His grandfather had told him that the name came from the Latin Franciscus, which meant “Frenchman”. Are we French, asked the younger Francesco? No, said his grandfather, we are Italians and Romans and, before that, Umbrians. Maybe a German or Frenchman joined the family at some point, said the elder Francesco, but our given name was a common one after San Francesco del’Assisi. We always celebrate his feast day on October 4th, Francesco’s grandfather instructed him.

“If we have the same name, why are you called Ciccio and I am called Checco?” asked the grandson when he was old enough to be so inquisitive.

“There are so many people who want to have our name,” explained his grandfather, “we need a way to keep everyone from getting confused and thinking he is someone else.”

Everyone toiled very hard during the six work days. It was backbreaking labor to plow the fields, remove the stones each spring and harvest the crops of wheat, barley, rye and maize each autumn. Maize was the most important food crop for the family because with it they made the staple of their daily diet, *polenta*. If plowing was hard work, making polenta was even harder, especially because there were so many to feed. It started with removing the kernels from the cob following the harvest. The kernels were dried in a special oven that had been built by Tommaso’s grandfather in one of the barns. The drying was the most important part of the process, because if the kernels were not dried properly, they would rot and the resulting meal would be dangerous to eat. The family had purchased a special metal grinder for turning the dried kernels into meal. Tommaso said that the corn meal produced with the metal grinder was more healthy than the meal that had been produced by cracking the corn in the stone grinder that had been used for a century. The meal was finer and more digestible.

The women took their turns making it each day. The largest copper pot, the *paiolo*, was used. It was hung from the swinging brace in the fireplace with an extra long hook in order to get it close to the hot embers. An iron stand was placed under the *paiolo* for added support because there would be constant heavy stirring of the mixture. Water was poured into the *paiolo*, up to a quarter of the volume. A small handful of salt was thrown in and the water brought to a boil. The corn

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meal was then added in a very slow stream and the stirring began. A long, heavy wooden paddle was used for the stirring. Two hands were needed. More water was added if the mixture thickened too quickly. Corn meal, stirring, corn meal, stirring, some water, stirring, stirring, stirring. This combination was repeated until the polenta peeled easily off the sides of the *paiolo*.

At least two women were needed to make the polenta, one stirring and one pouring. When the polenta was done, one or two more sets of hands were needed to lift the *paiolo* from the fire and perform the all-important next step. The *paiolo* was lifted and the polenta thrown out quickly onto a flat, round board that had the diameter of a long arm, and two handles protruding from opposite sides. When the molten polenta was poured out in one throw on the board, it spread to the edges forming an even layer as thick as a hand resting on a table. As it cooled, a light crust formed on the exposed edges, giving it a certain firmness.

On one of the handles was wrapped a sturdy, waxed string. When the polenta had sat for several minutes, one of the women unwrapped the string and stretched it out between her two hands. She gingerly slid the string between the polenta and the board, four fingers from the edge. She raised the taut string to slice through the polenta. She repeated this, using the last slice as the start of the next four finger distance until the polenta was sliced into rows in one direction. She made a ninety-degree turn and sliced at right angles to the first rows, forming neat squares, forty-nine of them. The rounded edges on the circle were perfect for the smallest children.

Each square was placed in a bowl. It was the additions to the basic polenta that made the meal. A piece of stewed rabbit, cabbage and beans, tomato and cheese, a few slices of sausage that had been grilled over the fire. Of course it was the success of the harvest the year before that determined whether there was anything to add to the polenta, or if it was four fingers, or three, or two, or none. It was a rare year at Masseggio that the squares were less than four fingers.

The family looked forward to Saturday evening, when the men would leave the fields, and the boys would come down from the mountain with the sheep, to wash for church the next day. At the age of eight, the boys began to wash with the men of the family, instead of being scrubbed by their mothers. It was at this time that the men developed their

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relationship with water and soap. Some men took seriously their job of washing, while others behaved like water and soap were a deadly combination when brought into contact with one's skin. Anna Maria had been careful with her son's fair skin, although she often mistook his freckles for spots of dirt.

After the baths, the family ate their usual *minestra*, a soup made with chicken stock, egg, breadcrumbs and nutmeg, with the bread the women had baked that morning. The bread was roasted on a grate over the coals in the cooking fireplace. When the harvest had been good, and there were enough olives over the quota that was owed to the Bishop, the family would make olive oil for their own use. They would then sprinkle a few drops of the liquid gold over the roasted bread. This was heaven. In the lean years, there might be drippings of fat, or nothing at all but the plain bread. Even that was sufficient.

When the bowls were cleared, everyone sat together in the common room. There were close to fifty men, women and children living on the farm during the last decade of the nineteenth century. The women sang. Anna Maria had a beautiful voice. Tommaso played the mandolin, and his father, Francesco, after whom, according to tradition, the first-born boy was named, played the accordion. The songs were mostly from the Church. Tommaso, along with his brothers and brothers-in-law, wanted to play the new songs they had learned during the *passeggiata* on Sundays, songs of the *Riorgimento*, but this was not so popular amongst the women. Italia was now ruled by the Savoia family, formerly kings of Sardegna, Piemonte, Liguria and part of Lombardia. They had replaced the Pope as the head of state, and while the women understood that there was little to be done about that unhappy incident, they would neither acknowledge or support it. The women liked the traditional music, and it was they who decided what happened inside the house. They also decided when it was time to sing the last song and when everyone went off to bed.

Sunday was the best day of the week, at least for the men. God, it was understood, had decided that no one should work on the seventh day. It was God's Day, *Domenica*. In the Holy Bible, it was written that God rested on this day after creating the earth and everything else in it. If resting on Sunday was good enough for God, it was good enough for the Rosati family and every other family in Sigillo. Most of the family got to

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sleep a little longer, after the rooster stopped crowing. The oldest women woke to start the fire for cooking Sunday's supper that they would eat when they returned from church. There would be no breakfast because everyone fasted before attending mass. The children who had not yet received First Holy Communion would be given a piece of bread and milk. Tommaso once had commented that he did not understand how God, after working hard for six days to create the world, would have waited for half the day before eating on His one day off. Anna Maria was rarely cross with her husband, but this reflection bordered on blasphemy. He never mentioned it again.



Tommaso Rosati and Anna Maria Sabatini Rosati

The family—except for the children under four who were tended by one of the younger, unmarried girls—walked to church, the elder Rosati couple, Nonna and Nonno, holding on to each other and to young Francesco's hand, setting the pace for the others. The children might run ahead, but when they entered Sant'Andrea, Nonna and Nonno led the way. Tommaso and Anna Maria walked on either side, with the rest of

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the family following behind. The priest usually delivered a variation of the same message each Sunday, that God was forgiving, as long as we were humble. Our lives on earth were short compared to the eternity after we died. Living a good life while on earth and following God's laws as given to man by the Holy Church would mean an eternity of happiness in heaven. Not following these laws would mean an eternity of misery in hell. God gave everyone a choice to choose between the two. The choice seemed an easy one to make for the members of the Rosati family.

When the final blessing was given, the men and women filed out of the church and went separate ways. This is when Sunday for the men and Sunday for the women became different. The women, along with the children, returned to their homes. The men walked to the town square, the piazza, where they talked about important things, like the price of grain and the news from Roma. They smoked their cigars, drank strong coffee with anisette, and promenaded around the square, the *passaggiata*—in this case, before, not after, the meal. After an hour or so, the Rosati men would find their way back to their homes, stopping at the cemetery along the way to pay their respects to their dead ancestors. The women had been there earlier and had laid fresh flowers on the graves.

When the men entered the large room in the living quarters, the table was set and it was time to enjoy the *fettuccine* or *cappelletti* that had been made the day before with the thick, tomato sauce flavored with sausage and other meats. There was often a pork roast, *porchetta*, and roasted potatoes with apple sauce made from the apples grown in Masseggio's own orchard, where apples grew alongside pears, peaches, plums and cherries. All of this was accompanied by the farm's own wine that was made each autumn and kept in large barrels in the cold room below the side of the house farthest from the fireplace. Here were also kept the dried meats and sausages that the men made just before winter each year. After the main courses, there would be a *dolce*, some form of sweet or fruit or cake with coffee.

This is how it had been for over two-and-a-half centuries at Masseggio, and at the other farms in and around Sigillo. Many wars had been fought during the centuries before Masseggio was leased to the Rosatis in perpetuity, and dominion changed hands often. Sigillo's

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strategic location on the *via Consolare Flaminia* road was the reason Sigillo, called Suillum in Roman times, was fought over and often plundered by the so-called *invasioni barbariche* from the north, the *Goti*, *Visigoti*, *Ostrogoti*, *Eruli*, *Longobardi* and others, on their way to Roma, or by warring local factions. In 220 B.C. the consul Flaminio ordered the building of the road that took his name. It started in Roma and it ended in Rimini, where it met the *via Emilia* and it continued with other roads towards the North and towards the continental Europe. Sigillo became part of the Papal States in 1397, and in the next century obtained its own statutes which were amplified and confirmed in 1616, just before the Rosatis signed their agreement with the Bishop.



During the last days of the nineteenth century, the course of Francesco's life, and the lives of all the Rosatis, would change forever. For the third year in a row, the harvest had been a disappointment. The spring rains had been heavy and lasted into May. When the rains stopped, the heat of the sun would not subside. The earth baked and dried and cracked. No matter how fertile it was, conditions would not allow it to nurture and bring forth a healthy crop. The family slaughtered its few cows and most of their sheep in order to have something to eat. The youngest children cried often from hunger. On Christmas Day, 1899, it snowed. The family walked to church in silence. Nonno and Nonna had grown too old and feeble to make the journey on foot, so they rode in the cart pulled by the family's only remaining livestock, a donkey.

The priest read the same Christmas gospel that everyone had heard since they were old enough to understand the words. An angel had appeared to shepherds in the night to tell them that God had sent his Son to free the world from sin. The Messiah had been born to common people, and was lying in a stable because his family had no place to stay for the night. They had traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem—a distance of over 100 kilometers, the priest had once explained—by order of the Roman Caesar Augustus to be counted and then taxed. Maria, the Mother of the baby in the stable, had given birth along the way. The infant would grow to be come our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. The priest in his sermon acknowledged that life in the village had been very difficult for the past few years. But the angel of mercy was not far away.

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He could appear to any of us at any time. We just needed to keep our faith.

No one in the village had seen an angel in a very long time. Was this a sign that they were doing God's good work and did not need reminding that He was watching them? Or was it rather a sign that God had given up on them? Everyone in Sigillo and the other villages surrounding Monte Cucco were suffering from poor harvests, the lack of food and harsh weather. They prayed hard, in their churches on Sundays and holy days, like this Christmas, and daily in their homes, in the fields and up on the mountain pastures. It seemed that God was testing their will to survive and to continue to serve Him.

They left the church, and all returned directly home, stopping, as was the custom after church, at the cemetery where now the Church of Sant'Anna had been built. There would be no Christmas feast, just a simple meal of polenta. They shared small pieces of the dried sausage that had been made from the last remaining pig. The forty or so family members sitting at the table tried to think of happier Christmases, but the memories were fading. The plentiful times seemed so very long ago. When they finished with their meager meal, the dishes were cleared, the tables and chairs moved, and the musical instruments were brought out. No matter how desperate they were for food and money, they could still sing and dance. This pleasure did not cost a thing.

The next day, as usual, the family rose before dawn. With only a few animals left, there was little to do. Tommaso and his brothers huddled with their father, the elder Francesco. There was much sighing and nodding of heads and little talk. Everyone in the household understood that the situation was serious and there was a mood of despair that hung in the air. It was thick and had a special aroma that mingled with the damp, cold and smoky air inside the large dwelling.

There was a knock on the door. Who could be visiting at noon on this day? Had an angel been sent by God to rescue the family? Anna Maria went slowly to the door and opened it. A short, very thin man who looked to be in his early thirties stood in the doorway, heavily wrapped in a long black coat and shoulder cape against the still cold air. He wore a broad-brimmed black hat with a black band. He was not an angel, but the representative of the new owner of the lands of which Masseggio was a part. He walked into the room, where he must have felt immediately

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that the air was as cold inside as out. He removed his hat, but not his coat. Tommaso approached him, bowed, and offered him a seat at the small fire. The last few pieces of wood were placed on the smoldering embers in the huge gaping fireplace that had once filled the house with warmth.

He waved aside a cup of mulled wine that had been set before him, and thankfully refused food. He was quick to come to the point. His name was Mauro Lucca. He lived in Gubbio, but he would soon be moving to Sigillo. His employer had recently acquired all the lands in Sigillo from the Bishop of Perugia, and he was determined to run the farms in a more profitable fashion than had the Church. The crops had failed again for the third year running. The Rosati family had not met its sworn duty to the Bishop. The Bishop had shown God's mercy during the last two years and took no more than was his due. He asked for only six sheep as just compensation for the failed crops. This year there were no more sheep to offer the new owner because the family had eaten them, as with the cow. Since the family had nothing to offer, they would have to offer themselves. He said they would have to leave Masseggio in the Spring, before the next planting. There was a new family coming to live at the farm. They would take over the house and farm the land when the family was gone. Over the years, most of the farms changed occupants whenever a new Bishop was appointed, or whenever the family fell out of favor with the overseer or the local church. There were no formal agreements like the one between the Bishop and the Rosati family.

The elder Francesco protested that the Rosati family could not be evicted from Masseggio, that there was a document signed by the Bishop's emissary two-hundred sixty-four years earlier stating that they had the right to live on the land as long as it was occupied and farmed by a male Rosati. Lucca laughed. That document, if it ever existed, he said, disappeared in the last century when the Bishop's offices and all of its records burned to the ground. He went on about how the Bishop had told his employer that this family might give him trouble and refer to some agreement that they thought they had with the him and the Church, but that he should simply ignore it. He owned the land and it was his to do with as he wished.

This message was delivered with no visible emotion, no show of sadness for the forty souls who represented what would become the last

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of the Rosatis at Masseggio if they were indeed forced to leave. Where they would go, and how they would survive, were not his concern. God had watched over the family through the generosity of the Holy Church for almost three hundred years. The family had been blessed. Now they must pray for God's forgiveness for not holding to their agreement. God rewards the good, he said. Place yourselves at His mercy. He started to raise himself slowly from the chair. Tommaso, who had stood and listened in silence to this man pronounce a death sentence on his family, stepped forward, toward Lucca. Lucca appeared startled, and returned quickly to the chair. Tommaso raised his hand as a sign that he meant no harm or disrespect, but wished only to respond to what Lucca had said.

"God has watched over our family since we came to Masseggio. We have tried to please Him. We know we have failed Him during these last years. There are no crops to offer as just payment for His Grace allowing us to live on his land and take shelter in his house. We have eaten the animals that could have served as compensation. Now, the new owner has found more worthy people to take our place, and we hope that they will bring honor to God through their work, as the Rosatis did until now. Surely we have sinned and deserve this fate which His Grace has decreed."

The family listened to their leader in amazed disbelief. He continued.

"Signor Lucca, we would not compound our sins by attempting to bargain for an extension of God's mercy and appealing to your employer's good will. We understand that his decision is final. But we must repay our debt. We are humble people, but we are honorable. We have decided to send our eldest son, Francesco, to Sardegna to work in the mines with his cousin. His wages will go directly to you until the debt is repaid."

The silence in the room was complete, and lasted for many seconds that seemed like hours. Francesco tried to understand what his father had just done. Was he really being sacrificed to save the family? Why him? No one had talked to him about this plan. When was it decided? Had his father thought it up during the moments that Lucca was delivering his decision, or was it an idea that the men had been discussing before the emissary had arrived?

Lucca suddenly changed his tone. When he replied to Tommaso, he was consoling. Perhaps he could prevail upon his employer to delay

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their eviction for another year. Maybe the harvest would be much better during the coming season. If the boy's wages were sufficient, and the harvest plentiful, it might be possible to repay the debt of the past year by the time the boy was ready to marry. Then they would not have to leave Masseggio at all. This was agreed without a single word being spoken to Francesco. Lucca would return in nine months to see the crops and to receive assurances that the boy had gone to Sardegna as promised. He would return again one year from this day to receive the first payment. No papers were signed and no hands were shaken. Lucca turned back as he was departing and said in a warning tone that not a word of what was said today and agreed to should be repeated to anyone. With that said, he left.

Francesco did not know which emotion to express at that moment. He was angry, frightened about his future, and sad because he was being forced to leave his family and Masseggio. A tear edged out from the corner of one eye. His father came to him, stood squarely before him, put his hands on both of his son's shoulders, and told him how proud he was of him, that he had said nothing when he was talking to Lucca of his plan. His uncles and grandfather clapped their hands and told him he had done very well. Francesco looked over to his mother. She was holding her youngest baby, Filomena, in her arms, and the other children were sitting on the floor at her feet. She was gently crying, but her look was one of both desperation and resignation. She could offer no consolation to him. He would have to accept his fate.

The logic of the decision could not be disputed. None of the men could go because that would mean one less seasoned hand to work the farm and ensure a good crop. He would also have to bring his family with him, which would be costly. There would be little left over to pay the new landowner. If the departing man's family stayed at Masseggio, they would be extra mouths to feed. Francesco was the oldest and he was a strong and capable worker. In six or seven years he would come back to the farm, take his position next to his father, and, in time, become the foreman. Working in Sardegna would be a sacrifice for him, but also for the family, who would miss his presence and his able hands, and worry about his health and well-being. God would make the years pass quickly, and He would bless him for saving the family from ruin and disgrace.

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Francesco understood that he was now a hero. He was important to the family. He would not disappoint them. It was six months until his birthday, and then he could begin his adventure. He would work hard and send home all of his earnings. He was determined to return to Masseggio sooner than anyone could think possible.



Chapter Two

Away from Home

Gloves of Wool

WITH TOMMASO DRIVING THE WAGON, Francesco sitting beside him, and Peppe, the youngest son, standing in the back behind the two of them, they left the road leading to Masseggio and turned onto via Flaminia heading south. The sun was just rising over Monte Testagrossa, the 'large head', lying to the south of Monte Cucco and east of Sigillo. As the early morning sun touched the stones of Masseggio and the tiles on its roof, the entire structure seemed to be a giant glowing ember. Spring rains had been heavy, but the fields were seeded and the plants had sprouted, and they were now moving from the lime green of early season to the deep green of late June. Francesco had turned fourteen earlier that month, and it was time for him to leave. He looked back at Masseggio until it disappeared, knowing it would be a long while before he saw it again.

Francesco had made the journey to Fossato di Vico a few times before this day. Once, when he was nine, his grandfather, the elder Francesco, had succeeded in harvesting the first tomatoes in the valley. He gently packed four bushels with his scarlet treasures, placed them and the younger Francesco in the back of the wagon, and coaxed the donkey to take them as quickly as possible the five kilometers to Fossato di Vico's central market. They left Masseggio on that day before dawn so they would arrive at the market when it opened at daybreak. Early produce fetched the best prices, and prices were always higher in the Fossato di Vico market than in Sigillo. It was because of the railroad, people said.

All four bushels of tomatoes were sold within minutes after they arrived at the market. The elder Francesco received as much for them as he would have for an entire wagon-full later in the season. Before they returned home, they stopped in the café near the train station. The elder Francesco liked to see the great steel monsters billowing smoke as they chugged in and out of the station, steam whistles screaming at a high

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pitch. Trains had come to Italia during his lifetime, around the time his son Tommaso had been born. Tommaso, explained the grandfather to his grandson, dreamt about getting on one of those trains one day with his entire family and riding all the way to Roma. The grandfather was content just to watch them; he did not feel that he had to ride them. Tommaso's family had never made that journey together, but the fourteen-year-old son was about to do it alone today.

When they arrived at the train station in Fossato di Vico on this day, father and son stood at the side of the wagon not knowing what to say. Francesco had said his good-byes that morning to the entire family, and there did not seem to be anything more to say. He had no experience to guide his actions, and neither did Tommaso. He was leaving his family for an unknown destination. Would he come back? Would his family be there when he did. Could he really do what was being asked of him? He was, after all, only fourteen. His feet were fixed to the ground on which he was standing; his head was moving on the train that would carry him eventually to a boat to Sardegna; his heart was getting back on the wagon, riding back to Masseggio, as he had done before with his grandfather, and thinking that this had just been a dream.

Peppe came down and gave him a brotherly hug, and Francesco hugged him back as hard as he could until Peppe said he would be able to hug as hard when Francesco returned. Tommaso had tears in his eyes. It was his idea to send his son away. He still felt it was the right decision, but it did not hurt him any less because it was so. He embraced Francesco, kissed him as a father kisses his grown son. Then he kissed him on his forehead, as he had done each night when Francesco, as a young child, was put to bed.

“Don't do anything foolish,” he said to Francesco. “Your mother would never forgive me if anything happened to you. Come home when you can. God be with you.”

This blessing released the hold the ground had on Francesco's feet, and reunited his head with his heart. He turned and walked to the train. He stood by the window and waved to his father and brother. Soon they disappeared behind the great cloud of smoke and steam, and Francesco was alone. His cousin, Orlando—or Lando as he was called—would be waiting for him in Roma. They would take the train together to Civitavecchia where they would board the ferry to Sardegna. Francesco,

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with Don Antonio, the very young parish priest who had come to Sigillo less than a year ago from Perugia, had looked at a map of Italia that was hanging on a wall in the Sant'Andrea rectory. The priest had shown Francesco where Sardegna was located, where Cagliari was situated on the southern coast, the city that would be Francesco's final port after taking the ferry from Civitavecchia, and where Malacalza was, the town where he would live and work. Don Antonio took out a large book, and read from it. He called the book an atlas, and said that it was about the world, the countries and their people. He said that Sardegna was an island in the Mediterranean Sea that it now belonged to the Kingdom of Italia. Before Italia was one country, Sardegna was part of the Kingdom of Piemonte and the House of Savoy, from where the Italian royal family comes from, and before that it was ruled from Naples by the southern Kingdom. Before that, it was ruled by Spain. It is very mountainous with few people. In the south there are mines. That was where Francesco was going, to the south, to work in the mines.

Francesco thanked Don Antonio for telling him about Sardegna. He said that he liked looking at the book about the world. He asked Don Antonio if it was difficult to learn to read, and how old he was when he was first able to read by himself. Don Antonio was a very young priest, not more than ten years older than Francesco. He had only recently come to Sigillo and to the parish after being ordained in Perugia. He told Francesco that he could not remember when he was not able to read. His father had arranged for him to have a teacher at a very early age. His father had wanted him to become a lawyer. But he always knew that he would one day become a priest, like his uncle.

Lando was waiting on the platform when the train pulled into the Central Station in Roma. He stood there, searching through the windows of each wagon as it passed. Francesco waved his arms out of an open window, calling his cousin's name. The last bursts of steam from the engine drowned his shouts and built a temporary fog bank between the slowing train and the platform into which both Francesco and Lando disappeared. When the noise stopped, the train stood still and the veil of smoke lifted. Lando was still standing at his post, and he could now see his cousin.

Orlando Sabatini was three years older than Francesco, the oldest son of Francesco's mother's brother, Giovanni. He had been working in

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Sardegna, in the mines, since he was fifteen. He had gone there with his own mother's brother who had tired of the low wages and difficult life of a day laborer in Sigillo. His uncle had decided that it was better to stay closer to home, rather than doing what many others had started doing, leaving for America. One of his father's brothers, who was also named Francesco, was planning to leave for America shortly. His idea was to open a bakery where he would bake bread in the Italian way for the growing number of Italian immigrants who came to work in the mines, on the railroads and in the fields. He had already decided that his bakery would be called *Frank Sabatini & Sons Bakery*. He would change his name to 'Frank', he had said, when he arrived in America. Lando's father did not think much of his brother's idea, and he tried to convince him to stay in Sigillo, but 'Frank' Sabatini had decided that his future was in America, and he would leave as soon as he had saved enough money for the journey.

Francesco and his older cousin had a few hours before their train left for Civitavecchia. They walked out of the station and into the streets of their still young country's capital city. Everything was much larger than in their village. Everything moved much faster. They walked among the crowds of people and wagons and horses until they began to feel tired. It was very warm in the early summer mid-day sun. They found a shady corner on the steps of a church where they sat down to rest and watch. In front of them were the ruins of ancient Roma. This is where the main road of their village, via Flaminia, led. Francesco took out the bread and mortadella his mother had packed for him. The bread's aroma took him back to Masseggio. What would happen when the bread was finished, he thought. Would the memory of his home disappear? Would the images of his family be erased from his mind's eye? Why is it that aromas kindle the fires in the mind?

Lando could see that his young cousin was full of wonder, and he understood that the boy had no idea what questions he should ask his more experienced relative. As they sat and ate, Lando described the journey that lay ahead. It would be a short train ride to Civitavecchia. The ferry terminal would be directly across from the train station. They would board the ferry and sail for twelve hours to Olbia. After making a brief stay, the ferry would continue first to Árbatax and then to Cágliare. There, they would board a train to Iglesias. At Iglesias they would take a coal train to Malacalzetta.

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The ferry to Sardegna was always exciting. If the sea was calm, the trip would be shorter because the ship would not have to change course to avoid the waves hitting directly from the side. If it was stormy, as it often is in the autumn and winter, but not in spring and summer, there was a chance of becoming sea sick.

Francesco had never in his life been in a boat, not even on a small pond. He had great difficulty imagining the sensation of moving in a vessel on the surface of the water. He was not a swimmer, either. There were ponds in the mountains overlooking Sigillo, but swimming was not practiced. Water was something to drink and to cook with, and sometimes to bade with. It was something that was necessary for the survival of plants and animals. Fish lived in it. It was not something to play with or in. What would happen if the ferry began to sink, he asked? Lando convinced him that such things did not happen. He had made the trip across and back many times, and there was never any danger. Besides, there were small emergency boats that could be used if there was a problem. Why were there emergency boats if there was no danger, asked Francesco. Lando did not know the answer to that riddle. He suggested that Francesco ask the captain of the ferry when they got on board.

They walked back to the station and boarded the train to Civitavecchia. When they arrived and Francesco saw Mar Tirreno, the section of the Mediterranean bordered by the Italian mainland, Sicily, Sardegna and Corsica, he was struck by fear. All he could see was water clear to the horizon. He would walk back to Sigillo, if he had to. Nothing would force him to change his mind. He was not boarding the boat.

“When I took this ferry for the first time,” said Lando, quietly, “I was deathly afraid. I would not get on board. The ferry left without me. I sat on the pier and would not move. A day passed. The next ferry came and went. Another day passed. I would not board the ferry, but I could not imagine returning home. I was frozen to the pier. On the third day a young boy came down to the pier with his mother. They lived on the island, and had been on the mainland for a visit with his mother’s family. He asked me where I was going. When I told him that I was traveling to Malacalzetta, to work in the coal mines, he said that that was close to where he lived, in Iglesias. His father worked in the mines in Acquaresi,

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he said. I could travel with him and his mother, and he would tell me all about the city and the mines. He took my hand and led me on board the ferry. By then I was tired and hungry. We went into the cabin and before the ferry left the pier, I fell asleep. I slept during the entire voyage, and awoke only when the ferry came to the final port, in Cágliare. I was never afraid of taking the ferry again.”

Francesco thought his cousin might have made up this story to encourage him to conquer his fear. It worked. He got on board the ferry, but he did not sleep, not for a minute. He watched the sun set ahead of them, and the mainland disappear behind them. He experienced every rise and fall of the boat on the waves. He looked at every passenger for a sign of danger, thinking that they knew more than he whether the vessel would sink below the surface. He searched the passengers' faces and imagined why they were on the ferry with him. Were they going home, or were they going away from home? How long had they been gone; how long would they stay?

The sail across Mar Tirreno was smooth, and they put into port in the early morning. They were not yet in Cágliare, but in Olbia. Some of the passengers left the boat, while others came onboard. In Árbatax, those who came onboard were all men, no women or children. Most of them carried a pick or a shovel, shining new. Lando seemed to know most of them, and they him. None lingered after a quick hello and a wave of the hand. Everyone found a place and settled in for the trip. They were asleep before the boat left the pier. As they sailed out, Lando explained what to expect at the boarding home where they would stay, and what the first day of work in the mines would be like. Just before he was getting to the part where he would describe how all first day miners had to crawl through a passage just large enough for a body not much bigger than his own, that the passage was a dead-end, and he would have to back out the entire distance, which was at least as long as the piazza in Sigillo, Lando noticed that Francesco had finally fallen asleep.

Francesco awoke as the ferry made contact with the pier in Cágliare. The men moved together like a long caterpillar through the open end of the boat onto the pier and up the hill to the train station. They bought their tickets to Iglesias and boarded the third class cabins for the two hour train ride. In Iglesias, the caterpillar re-formed on the platform and wound its way to a another train waiting at a siding a few hundred meters

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from the station. The train line had been built by the mining company to bring their coal down to the main train line for transport to Cagliari and shipping across to mainland Italia and to other markets around the Mediterranean. A few simple passenger cars were added to carry the miners and the few women and children who lived in what was then little more than a camp. Lando and Francesco squeezed themselves onto a bench in the makeshift coach between two brothers from the province of Potenza in the southern Region of Basilicata.

The train moved slowly through rolling hills. It was less mountainous than what he was used to. What was most noticeable was that the hills were mostly white. He had never seen so many sheep before in his life. He mentioned this to Lando, who laughed. There are five times as many sheep as there are people on the island, Lando told him. “You will learn to like all forms of cooked lamb, or you will go hungry,” joked his cousin.

After a one-hour, bone breaking journey on a train made for hauling hard coal, not living creatures, they all arrived in Malacalzetta. The boarding house was a short walk from the train stop. The long human caterpillar was now many small ones, scattering the men, women and children to boarding houses or small huts that some of the men had made to shelter their families. What struck Francesco immediately was that everything was covered with a layer of fine, black soot, everything including the buildings, the vegetation, the animals, and the people. The town looked like a photograph in real life. Then there was the smell. It reminded him of the time he found a box along the side of the road on his way to the market with Nonno Francesco.

His grandfather had told him not to open it. The box had been left for a reason, and had not been hauled back up and onto the wagon from where it had obviously and unfortunately fallen off. He had not listened to his grandfather, but pried open the lid. The stench of rotten eggs was unbearable. He ran up the slope and down the road ahead of the wagon until he was out of breath. Every day, until he left Malacalzetta, he would be reminded of his disobedience. Was this his penance, he thought?

Antonio Vecchiè owned the boarding house where Lando led his cousin. Before the mines opened twenty-five years before, Antonio had been a farmer. His land was now covered with slag from the mines,

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leftover rocks and dirt after the large blocks had been crushed in the coal breaker that dominated the landscape at the eastern edge of the town. Antonio had watched the slag pile grow higher and spread out over earth that had once sustained his family and his family's ancestors for centuries.

Antonio's wife, Silvia, showed Francesco to the cot where he would sleep when he wasn't working in the mines, eating at the table in the large kitchen, or taking care of his bodily needs in the latrine in the back of the house. The number of hours he would spend in this simple bed would be few. Silvia had rearranged the sleeping quarters while Lando was away meeting his cousin, and she had put Lando's things on the cot next to Francesco's. She was a kind woman, and Lando thanked her for her caring by bringing her small gifts whenever he went to Cágiliare. This time he brought back a head scarf that she could wear to church on Sundays. Antonio and Silvia appreciated these small gestures, and treated Lando like a member of the family.

When the men returned that evening from the mines, and after they had washed for dinner, Lando took Francesco to meet Silvio Amaducci, who was the foreman of the shift that all of the men living at the boarding house worked. Silvio was one of the few miners who was a native of Sardegna. His family lived in Iglesias, and once a month he rode home on his horse that grazed in a small field in front of the house with several other horses and Antonio's cow and sheep. Silvio told Francesco what Lando had already related, that he would pay for his tools and clothes with his first two month's wages, that three month's pay would cover his food and lodging for the next twelve months, and one hour each day for the first two years he was working for him. He would not see a paycheck before he had finished his sixth month.

The twenty or so men who shared the boarding house sat down at the long table, and before Silvia and her daughter Chiara served the meal, which was lamb stew, Lando presented his cousin to the men. Francesco would learn their names in time. Silvio spoke.

"Francesco, there are two things I will tell you about working in the coal mines. The first is that when you go into the mine, keep your mouth shut, breathe through your nose and talk with your hands. The coal dust will kill you if you let it get into your lungs. The second is you never bow down to pick up anything. Your back is not made for lifting, and

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once you have made it sore, it will never heal. You will be finished as a miner. Use your legs,” and he squatted down to show the young Francesco what he meant. “Remember those two things and you will have a long and happy life as a miner.”

The next day, Francesco and Lando and all the men in the boarding house woke before dawn, put on their work clothes, ate the bread, boiled eggs and dried sausages that Silvia had placed on the table, picked up their tools and walked to the mine. Several of the men broke off from the rest and went to the pen holding the donkeys. They placed harnesses on the donkeys and led them into the mine. They passed from one darkness in the still early morning into another, lit only by the few lanterns Silvio and his lead miners carried. They walked in silence in the shaft that led down to the face of the seam of anthracite. Every day a portion of that seam, created millions of years before anything that was on the surface today, was extracted with pick and shovel and hauled to above ground in carts pulled by the sturdy donkeys.

Mining had been done in the southwestern part of Sardegna, where Malacalzetta was located, for many centuries. The Carthaginians were there before the Romans. Artifacts had been found bearing their signatures. The Romans built a temple in the region of Fluminimaggiore dedicated to the Emperor Commodus, and lead coins found in the area testified to their mining activity. A long period followed the collapse of the Roman Empire during which no mining was done in the region. It wasn't until 1840 when the freedom of mining was introduced by the rulers of Sardegna, when the island was part of the Kingdom of Piemonte and the House of Savoy, that the wealth of minerals began to be exploited.

Anthracite coal was one of the lesser minerals extracted from the region's mines. Lead and zinc were the most important minerals, obtained in lodes in the forms of galena and calamine respectively. Silver was also found, along with manganese, antimony, lignite and copper. Anthracite was mined in small quantities, but it was no less valuable for its scarcity. It brought good prices in a market that was growing more and more dependent on coal for feeding the ships' engines that were crossing the seas, and for fueling the furnaces that were making the steel for these ships.

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Francesco entered a coal mine and not a silver or manganese or lignite mine because that was where his cousin, Lando, worked. And why Lando landed in Malacalzetta rather than in Gonnese, no one knew. Francesco had no fear as he entered the mine. He remembered his journeys into the grotta of Monte Cucco, exploring the caverns, crouching through the dark, narrow passages to reach a previously undiscovered room. Compared to those experiences, this was like walking across the piazza in broad daylight. Lando had told him it would be so, and it was. Even the first day miner's initiation ritual, crawling through the narrow tunnel to a dead end was child's play for an experienced cave explorer like Francesco.

Each day, six days a week, the men walked into the mine before daylight and emerged after sundown. On the seventh day, Sunday, those who could manage to wake before noon and who were convinced that there was another hell than the one in which they spent the rest of their days, attended mass. Francesco had promised his mother and both of his grandmothers that he would not miss mass, and he kept his word. Every Sunday he rode to church in the back of the Vecchiè's wagon with five of their six children. The sixth was an infant and rode on her mother's lap. The oldest of the six was Chiara. She was one year older than Francesco. She had pitch black hair, dark brown eyes and dark olive skin, like all the children and like her parents. She liked Francesco, perhaps because he looked so different from everyone else who lived in their village and from most of the men who came to work in the mines. His red hair, bright blue eyes and ever-present smile were all unique features of color in a grey landscape. Francesco admitted to himself that one of the reasons that he did not miss the chance to attend mass on Sunday with the family was that he could spend time in the company of Chiara.

The Vecchiè family ate well, and so did their boarders. The food was different from what Francesco was used to eating at Masseggio. As Lando had said on their train journey from Iglesias, there was plenty of lamb. There were other meats as well, including goat, pork, beef, hare and wild boar. The boar was blacker, smaller and more ferocious than those back on Monte Cucco. Everything was cooked *a fùrria fùrria*, meaning to turn and turn again. The animals were skinned, cleaned and placed lengthwise on a spit. No herbs were used. The spit was set beside a fire made of juniper, olive and mastic wood. The spit was turned and the animal roasted. No flames should touch the roast. It was

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the woods used for the fire that gave the animal its distinctive flavor and aroma.

Another method of cooking was *a carragiu*, which means “in a hole”. A hole was dug that was as long as the animal being cooked. A fire was made in the hole to dry the surrounding earth. When the fire had burned down, the ashes were removed and the hole was lined with myrtle branches. The animal was laid on the myrtle branches and then covered with more myrtle. A layer of earth was placed on top of the branches, then stones and a fire laid. When the fire had burned down to ash, the animal was done. It was said that this method of cooking was first practiced by the peasants who stole and killed their masters’ sheep, and hid their prize beneath a harmless looking fire, and masked the smell of the roasting lamb with the myrtle.

Francesco had never seen anything like the breads they call *carta di musica*, or “music paper”. It is made from unleavened dough in large, round, thin sheets. He could never understand why it was called carta di musica. He did understand that if kept dry, it would not turn moldy and could be eaten by the herdsmen tending their flocks away from home during the summer.

Silvia Vecchiè had a specialty that was everyone’s favorite. It was called *culingiones*. This was a ravioli stuffed with ricotta cheese, spinach, eggs and saffron, and served with a meat or a tomato sauce. Instead of romano, peccorino or parmigiano cheese grated on top, she used a cheese called fiore sardo, or “flower of Sardinia”. Except for the saffron and cheese, Francesco had tasted all of the other ingredients. They ate ravioli at Masseggio, usually filled with leftover meats and spinach. But Silvia’s *culingiones* were something very, very special.



The first sum of money arrived from Francesco at Masseggio in a small envelope, postmarked Iglesias, Provincia de Cágiliare, Sardegna. It was the total amount of his first salary. Francesco kept nothing for himself. It was such a small sum, he thought that Lucca would be angry and not accept it. There was a short letter with the money, only the second Tommaso and Anna Maria had received in the seven months since their son had left home. His first letter arrived in August. It was in

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a carefully crafted hand style, written for Francesco by one of the nuns who taught the children in the small village school in Malacalzetta. She wrote these letters as a favor for most of the youngsters who came to work in the mines. None of them could read or write.

She had told Francesco's family that their son was well situated with a family that made sure he attended mass every Sunday. He was eating well and working hard for the glory of God, and that he prayed for them each night and every morning before starting his work. Don Antonio read this letter as he did many of the other letters received from his parishioners who had left Sigillo to seek their fortunes elsewhere.

The letter they had just received arrived shortly after the Feast of the Epiphany. It was written in a much coarser hand than the first, and it said only that he wished everyone Buon Natale e Felice Anno Nuovo. He said also that he hoped his letter arrived before La Befana so that it could be placed among the presents. He said that he wished he could be home with them and all the family. Anna Maria wept at the thought of her young son having to endure this trial, and took small comfort when Tommaso pointed out that he was with his cousin Lando. Francesco apologized for the small amount of money. It was because he had to pay for all of his costs before he received anything for himself. The next payment would be more, he promised. He closed by thanking his friend Chiara, daughter to Antonio and Silvia Vecchiè, for writing his letter.

Tommaso and Anna Maria had written several letters to their son. They told him about the weather, about his cousin's marriage, about a visit from one of their neighbors who had been to America. They did not tell him that the summer had turned cold and that it had rained constantly since he left. They did not tell him that the crop was mostly spoilt and lay rotting in the fields. They did not tell him that Lucca had made many visits to the farm and each time he threatened them with eviction if they did not do something to rescue the crop, and if their payments were not made in full and in time.

Tommaso had talked with Don Antonio, and he had asked him for guidance. The young priest had no experience with the affairs of business, he had said, but he would seek the council of the Bishop's secretary. All of his parishioners were in the same difficulty, Don Antonio had explained to the secretary. The sun did not shine on one-half of Sigillo and not on the other. The secretary said that he would try

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to ease the burden on the *contadini*, but that the Church needed to make sure that they could continue their good works. Gifts from the land holders and income from the land holdings was their principal source of revenue. Still, he promised to try to do something.

When Tommaso brought the proceeds of the harvest's results to Lucca, he feared that this would be his family's last day at Masseggio. But he found a man whom he did not recognize. It was Lucca, but it was another person inside his body. Lucca smiled when he greeted Tommaso.

"Considering the very poor conditions, you have done well Signor Rosati," said Lucca. "As always, Masseggio delivers the best results. Next year will be better."

"We are ashamed for how poorly we have done. We did everything we could to salvage as much as we could," lamented Tommaso.

"Don't worry. The owner knows of all our troubles. Everyone has suffered. There is nothing to do except pray for better times and, particularly, better weather. Of course, he knows that you will be making a payment in a few months."

"Thank you, Signor Lucca," said Tommaso as he left. What had happened, wondered Tommaso?

What had happened was that the Abbot's secretary, Lucca's supervisor, had been contacted by the Bishop's secretary. The Bishop was concerned that the landowners were pushing the *contadini* too hard. There was nothing that could be done about the weather. People were desperate, some were starving. The Church needed to help its people, not press them further. Many were already leaving and going to America. He knew that the Abbot was close to the landowner of the former Papal estates in Sigillo and surrounding regions. Would he convey the message that it is the Bishop's desire to forgive debts of the *contadini*.

Lucca listened to the Abbot's secretary as he repeated these words. He had sent word to him to come to Gubbio. It was urgent. This is what he wanted to tell him, to forgive the peasants their debts. Of course he would do as he was told, but this would make his own relationships with the *contadini* more difficult. He would have to think about how he could

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continue to keep the *contadini* under his control while the landowners lessened theirs.

Tommaso was thinking as well. How would he deliver his first payment to Lucca, a payment that Lucca had reminded him many times during the past seven months was due in full? The money he held in his hand was a fraction of what Lucca expected. Tommaso was sure of that. The family had no other money that they could add to increase the sum. Even if they had valuables left that they could sell, there was no one who, in these times, could afford to buy them. Tommaso decided that the only thing he could do was to make the offering of his son's money to God, and tell Lucca that there was no payment. And that is what he did.

At first, Lucca did not understand. Why was there no money from his son? Had he spent his entire salary from the first six months? Yes, explained Tommaso, but not on himself. He paid for all his costs for the first two years of his employment. There were others in the world who took advantage of the poor, of those who were forced to earn their daily bread by their own toil, instead of the toil of others. The first six months of his labors would pay for his son's tools, clothes, shelter and food, and the rest would go to the crew boss. Only now would he be able to keep most of his wages, and those he would send in full to Tommaso for payment to Lucca. All this Tommaso explained in a calm, but firm, voice.

Lucca wasn't certain whether Tommaso was lying, but he was certain that he would not receive any money on this day. Maybe his accepting and understanding attitude at the poor harvest results had emboldened this man, he thought. It did not matter. That would be the last smile to cross his face in his presence.

"Your family has used its last chance, Rosati," said Lucca emphatically, purposely leaving off the polite address. "If I do not have a payment that I can give to the landowner without embarrassment when the next payment is due, you will have to leave Sigillo. That is all I have to say to you today."

Six weeks later, Tommaso found Lucca at his usual cold or wet weather location, inside the café in the piazza. They did not exchange greetings. Tommaso handed Lucca an envelope, which he opened. Without taking out the bills, Lucca counted them. He nodded to Tommaso.

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“No more missed payments, *capito*.”

“*Capisco*.”

Tommaso turned and left. For the next year-and-a-half, letters arrived on schedule from Francesco, and Tommaso passed on the payments to Lucca. Tommaso always took a few small bills out and placed them in a corner of his small chest that he kept under their bed. The chest contained few other items. Tommaso had decided to save some of the money he received from his son to give to him when he returned. He was sure that Francesco could not possibly be saving more than would be needed for the bare essentials, and for an eventual journey home. Tommaso had underestimated his son.



Francesco understood that he would never get home if he sent all of his money to his father. He also knew that if he took out more than a few lira from his salary, the total would not be sufficient to satisfy Lucca. He had only one choice, and that was to find a way of earning money on his only free day, Sunday, while still attending mass to keep his promise to his mother and grandmothers. He knew this was not going to be easy.

The first job he found was in San Benedetto, at a blacksmith shop. He cleaned the stalls where the horses and mules stood before and after shodding. Then he cleaned out the furnace of the ash, cinders and iron drippings that had accumulated during the week. He earned a few lira for a Sunday afternoon of work. It was a start, but it would take more time than he cared to spend before he had enough money to leave Malacalzetta. The Church had given special dispensation to certain professions to work on Sundays, otherwise, it was forbidden. Blacksmiths cleaning out their furnaces were among the exceptions, and of course, farmers feeding and milking their animals were another.

After a few months of Sundays at the blacksmith shop, Antonio told Francesco that he had heard about Sunday work in Iglesias, at the town's largest iron smeltery. It was the same kind of job that he was doing at the blacksmith shop, maybe heavier work, but it was better pay. Antonio knew the owner, and had already told him that Francesco would be there next Sunday. He arranged for one of the other boys to take Francesco's

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place at the blacksmith's shop. On the next Sunday, Francesco attended mass with the family, returned to the house where he ate dinner with the other boarders, and then Antonio walked with Francesco one hour down the road to the smeltery, to show him where it was and introduce him to the owner.

He was not alone as he had been at the blacksmith shop. He worked alongside an unusually large man named Guillermo. This seemed to be the only name he had. He was nearly twice Francesco's size, yet he was a quiet and gentle man. His arms seemed to be disproportionately long and his legs shorter than they should be for his long torso. His head was devoid of the tiniest strand of hair. He had a short, stubby nose and a wide mouth that seemed to extend from ear to ear. His ears, flat and almost imperceptible, looked like they had been pressed into his skull by a vice.

Guillermo had toured Europe with the circus. He had been the strong man, lifting horses off the ground on his back, and balancing a half-dozen acrobats on the top of his head. He had been in all the continent's capitals, from Roma to London, Paris to Moscow. For nearly ten years he had toured with the circus before its owner died, tragically. His wagon, with him and a female companion inside, burned one night in the middle of Bucharest. The circus owner had many enemies, mostly jealous boyfriends and husbands in every city where they had performed.

There were very few moments when Francesco could talk with his giant co-worker. When they did take a brief pause in their work to drink some water and have a few bites of bread, Guillermo told tales of the places where he had been, and Francesco listened, spellbound. Then one afternoon, when they had completed their work and they sat in the heat of an early summer evening before returning to their respective dwelling places, Guillermo asked Francesco where he was from. Francesco told him about Sigillo and Masseggio, about his family, and about needing to earn money to help the family and eventually buy the farm. He did not tell him about Lucca, since he was sworn to secrecy on this subject.

"Why have you come to Sardegna if you want to earn enough money to buy your family's farm?" asked Guillermo.

Francesco did not know how to answer this question. He had never thought about any other option, except America, and that was not presented to him.

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“This is where my family thought I should go,” responded Francesco. “My cousin was already working here. Are there better places, other than America.”

“I do not know anything about America. But there are indeed better places on our continent. I would be in one of them myself, but I must take care of my mother. My father died while I was working with the circus, and I am their only child. If I wanted to earn money with my hands, there are opportunities everywhere. There are even more possibilities for someone who can read and write and speak the different languages. You cannot do any of those things, Francesco. You can manage with not writing and reading if you only work with your hands, but you must learn to speak French and German, and perhaps even English, if you are going to make you own way.”

Guillermo led Francesco on a trip across and up and down the continent. There were railroads being built in every country, but this was backbreaking and dangerous work that required constant moving from one camp to another. There were factories opening in the industrial heartlands of all countries, and there were well-paying jobs to be had. There were brickyards in the midlands of England that were supplying bricks for houses, bridges, walls and roads all over the world. And there were mines, where a good worker could earn more money than in all other types of manual jobs.

The best mines were in the Duchy of Luxembourg, a small country nestled in between France, Belgium and Germany. The mines were in the southwest, near a town called Esch-sur-Alzette. This is where he would go, if he could. He knew the foreman of a crew of Italian workers. They all lived with a family that ran a boarding house. The house was perfectly situated, explained Guillermo. He had been to visit his friend when the Circus was playing in the City of Luxembourg, a brief train ride from Esch-sur-Alzette. The entrance to the mine was only a short walk from the house. Yes, said Guillermo, this is where he would go if he could.

Francesco decided that this is where he would go when his contract in Malacalzetta was finished in one more year.



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Francesco continued to work seven days a week through the summer of his sixteenth birthday. He sent his mining job pay home to his father each month, and saved the earnings from his Sunday employment. At the end of August he sent a short letter with his paycheck. Chiara wrote the letter for him, as had been usual for the two years he had been in Malacalzetta. She did so tearfully this time because in the letter Francesco told his family that he would be returning to Masseggio in a few weeks for a brief stay before he went on to a new job in Luxembourg.

When the day came for Francesco to leave, he bid farewell to all his work companions with whom he had shared so many days of hard labor. He thanked Silvio Amaducci for giving him the job. He said good-bye to Antonio Vecchiè, his wife Silvia and Chiara. He was sad to leave his friend. Did he understand that her feelings for him went beyond friendship? She gave him a small package just before he left for Iglesias. She said he would need it where he was going to live, and not to open the package until he had arrived in his new home.

Lando decided to travel home to Sigillo with Francesco, but he would be coming back for at least one more year. He liked the work, the pay was sufficient and he enjoyed the natural beauty of the southwestern part of the island. He did not have the same desire of his cousin to earn money, nor did he know the reason behind this drive. He sent money home to his family as well, although he kept a much larger share for himself and spent it when he could.

With Lando, Francesco paid a last visit to his friend, Guillermo. Guillermo had sent a letter to the foreman of the mining crew in Esch-sur-Alzette telling him that a very good, strong worker would be arriving before the end of the year. He asked him as a favor to give him a job and help him to get settled. He closed his letter by telling his friend that he hoped to see him and Francesco one day in Luxembourg.

Francesco and Lando repeated the journey they had taken a little more than two years before. When they arrived in Fossato di Vico they walked to the town square to see if they could find anyone from Sigillo who had been to the market and who was driving his wagon back home. By then it was early evening and everyone had already left for home. They found an open stable at the edge of the town where they slept for the night. The next morning, starting at dawn, they walked to Sigillo. Francesco left

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Lando in the town and continued to Masseggio. His mother was the first person to see him as he climbed the path to the house. She could see that it was her son—he was smiling, as always—but it was not the boy who had left two years before. It was a young man, with a sturdy body nearly twice the size of the one he had left with, and with a steady gait. He wore a man's hat.

It was a happy reunion with tears and laughter. Francesco answered hundreds of questions: What is it like to sail on the sea? What is it like in the bottom of a mine? What is it like to ride on a train? Is Roma as large a city as everyone says it is? When the questions and laughter and tears finally stopped late in the evening, Tommaso talked with his son, alone. They walked out into the cool night. Most of the village that they could see in the distance was asleep. A few candles twinkled behind curtained windows, but their light was nothing compared to the clear, bright stars that blazed in the moonless night.

“What is this about Luxembourg, Francesco?” asked Tommaso. “You are home now, and you will stay home.”

“Has Signor Lucca freed us from our debts, Babbo?” countered Francesco.

Tommaso sighed. If anything, Lucca had become more demanding. *No more missed payments.*

“I have gotten a taste of hard work, and even more of a taste for earning money with my labors. I didn't leave Sardegnna because the work was hard, but because it did not pay a fare wage. If I stayed there, I would never be able to come home. I am going to where a decent day's work pays a decent wage. I will pay our debts and I will save for a time when our family can be free of people like Signor Lucca and the owners of our land. I don't want to be chained to someone else's land for the rest of my life.”

Tommaso listened to his son. These were the words he should have spoken when he was Francesco's age. Many of his friends and cousins had left the village because they shared the thoughts that his son had just voiced. He stayed in Sigillo and at Masseggio because he would become the family's leader. He felt the responsibility to those who could not leave, to those who always would want to stay. Had he thought about this possibility when he sent his son away, that he would find a better life

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beyond the hills surrounding Sigillo? Perhaps he did. Maybe not at the moment he proposed that his son would be chosen for making the sacrifice, but at the moment he boarded the train that he had always wanted to take to the country's capital, but never did.

As if Francesco was listening to his father's thoughts, he continued, "I will come home to Sigillo, and when I do, it will be to a home that is ours."

Tommaso wished he had the means to make his son's dream come true without him having to leave again. He did not. When they walked up the stairs and into the house, Anna Maria was pushing the fire's embers into a neat pile, bedding them down for the night. She handed her son and her husband each a cup of hot wine spiced with sugar and cinnamon. She kissed them both and retired to bed. The two men drank their cups, watching the embers fade.



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Families Apart

FRANCESCO ARRIVED IN LUXEMBOURG at the central station early on a Sunday morning in late October. He had stayed in Sigillo long enough to help with the last harvest for the season, and now it was time to get back to work where he could earn the money needed by his family. The train to his final destination, Esch-sur-Alzette, left in two hours, so he decided to walk outside and have a look at the city. His cousin Lando wasn't with him this time for company. He knew only a few words of French that he had learned from his co-workers in Sardegna.

In 1902, Luxembourg was the capital of a country that was trying to find its place in the world. It was tiny compared to its neighbors, Belgium, France and Germany, both in size and in population. During Roman times, the area was part of Belgica Prima. It later became part of the Frankish kingdom of Austrasia, then part of Charlemagne's empire. Count Conrad, founder of the House of Luxembourg, took control of the country in 1060 and his heirs ruled over it until the middle of the 15th century. Spain and Austria dominated it until the close of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, when the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg was established by the Congress of Vienna and placed under the rule of William I, King of The Netherlands. In 1842 it came under Prussian domination as part of the Prussian-led customs union called Zollverien. France tried to negotiate its purchase from The Netherlands, almost unleashing a war. In May, 1867, an international conference adopted a treaty guaranteeing the independence of the Grand Duchy and providing for its perpetual neutrality. The Dutch king, William III, ruled Luxembourg until he died in 1890. In 1890, the grand ducal crown passed to Adolf of the German House of Nassau since William had no male heir, and the Luxembourg constitution did not allow for female succession.

Francesco knew nothing of politics, history or geography. He was a shepherd, a farmer and now a miner, a coal miner. He could neither read nor write. These skills were not needed in his fields of work, nor in his

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normal course of life. But as he walked through the streets of the City of Luxembourg on this Sunday morning, he thought it would be useful to be able to understand what was written on signs in the shops and carved in the stones above the entrances to the buildings. The carvers of the letters, did they understand the words they were spelling, or were they simply copying the designs for the letters that had been drawn by learned men? Why was one child born into a family where he would learn to read, and another child born into a family where he would learn how to tend sheep, grow wheat or mine coal, he wondered.

This was Francesco's first experience in a truly foreign country, where he could neither see, nor hear, nor speak the language, and he was overwhelmed by it. He walked quickly back to the train station, asked for and found the platform where the train would leave for Esch-sur-Alzette in one hour, and he sat down at the end of a bench on the platform and thought about what his family was doing at that moment back in Masseggio.

The journey from Luxembourg to Esch-sur-Alzette took less than one hour. It was just after mid-day when Francesco stepped off the train, walked down the platform and out of the station. The streets were empty, except for his fellow passengers and the few people who came to greet them. Within minutes, they too were gone, and he was alone. He needed to ask someone how to reach Rue des Martyrs. That was where the boarding house was located where he would live, and that is where he would find the foreman of the Italian crew in the coal mine where he would work.

Francesco understood that everyone was sitting at their Sunday supper table, having just returned from church and visits to the cemeteries. Like Italia, Luxembourg was a Catholic country, and its people followed many of the same traditions as those in Italia. The foods would be different, Francesco had been warned. There would be more potatoes and cabbage and unfamiliar vegetables. There would be no tomatoes unless he grew them himself. Was that possible, he had thought when he heard this. Was there land to grow vegetables? Could a city have soil that gave a good taste to what grew in it, like it did at Masseggio. He was determined to find the answers to these questions.

Don Antonio, the parish priest in Sigillo, had written the name of his landlord and his address on a piece of paper. Francesco had memorized

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both, but he was prepared to show the paper in case he could not pronounce them properly. Pierre and Charlotte Lecroix owned and ran the boarding house. Pierre had a grocery shop on the ground floor of the three-storey stone structure. Charlotte took care of preparing the meals, washing the miners' clothes and keeping the rooms as neat and clean as possible with twenty men tramping in each day covered from head to toe with soot from the coal and iron ore mines or from the smelteries where they worked. Charlotte was helped by her widowed sister, Annette, and her two daughters, Estelle and Christine. Estelle was nearly twenty, Christine the same age as Francesco. Neither girl was married, but Estelle was engaged to the shoemaker's son, and it was understood that Christine would marry Pierre's best friend's son, who was now twenty. He was an apprentice in a bank. In a few more years, he was told, he would have a permanent position, and he and Christine could be married.

By the time Francesco found someone to ask where the Lecroix family lived, and then walk the three kilometers to the house, people began appearing again in the streets. It was a warm and sunny autumn day, and he was sweating when he reached the house. He twisted the door bell to ring it. A few minutes passed without a sound from within. Francesco waited patiently, confident that someone was home. The door opened, and it was the youngest daughter who greeted the stranger. Francesco quickly removed his cap, revealing his carrot-colored hair. Together with his blue eyes, ever sparkling, and his cheeks, rose pink from the walk, he created a peculiar impression on the girl. He could not possibly be here to find lodgings and work, she thought. He must be lost.

When Francesco, using the few words of French he had learned, asked if this was the house of Monsieur Lecroix, and explained that he was there to find work and become a boarder, Christine responded in Italian and pulled him into the vestibule of the house and ran upstairs to announce him to her father and mother. Both Pierre and Charlotte returned to greet him. They also spoke Italian, to Francesco's relief. Although he wore the weary and bedraggled look of someone who had been traveling non-stop for a few days—which is exactly what he had been doing—he had a friendly and calm appearance about him. People liked him immediately. Pierre and Charlotte, and especially Christine, were no exceptions. Even Estelle, who was normally quite shy, even standoffish with the boarders, smiled when she met him and thought she would like this young boy.

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He was taken upstairs and introduced to the men. There were a few men in their early twenties, but most were older, up to forty. Most of them had come from Italia, the rest from Corsica and southern France. Some had been there for almost ten years, trying to earn enough money to feed their families back home or to pay off debts, like Francesco would be doing. He shook hands with them all, and in spite of his young years—he had turned sixteen—his hard callused hands and his firm grip left them with the impression that beneath his fair appearance was a hard-working, determined soul.

One of the men who had felt his grip was Giancarlo Cardoni. He was the foreman of the Italian crew, Guillermo's friend. Yes, he had received his friend's letter, and, yes, there was work for Francesco. There was always work for a miner who was willing to risk his life each day underground. Francesco had two years of mining behind him. He knew how to dig. He was strong and he worked hard. Cardoni would give him a week to prove himself, at no pay. There could be no favoritism, even if he came with good recommendations. He must agree to work on his crew for at least two years. He would take one day's pay for every ten he worked for the first year, and one for twenty in the second year. After that, he was free of commissions. He would pay for his tools out of his first month's pay.

Francesco felt like he was adding more burdens, rather than reducing those he already had. But he had no choice. He had no money to return home, since he had given his father everything he earned in Sardegna, keeping only enough to pay his way to Esch-sur-Alzette. Even with the two days pay taken away, he would still be making more than double what he earned in Malacalzetta.

That night, before he slept, he took out the package that his friend, Chiara, had given to him just before he left Malacalzetta. He unwrapped it carefully. Inside was a dark grey wool scarf and matching pair of gloves. Chiara had knitted them from the wool that she had spun from her own small flock of sheep. He put on the gloves and wrapped the scarf around his neck. The gloves fit perfectly, and the gloves and scarf would indeed keep him warm when the chill and damp of winter covered his new home.



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Over three years had passed since Francesco arrived in Esch-sur-Alzette, and nearly five since he left Masseggio. He was earning good wages in the coal mines—especially during the past year when he was free of his commission to Cardoni—and he was sending almost all of his earning home to his father. When he was last home for a visit, his father had told him that Lucca was raising the rate of interest he charged on the debt. Costs were rising quickly, Lucca had told his father, and money was not worth as much as it had been. It seemed the harder he worked, and the more money he sent home, the more was needed.

Estelle married shortly after he arrived. She and her husband Christophe, who was a clerk in one of the trading firms, and their two children lived on the same street, above the shoemaker shop. Estelle still helped her mother with the boarders, as did Charlotte's sister. Christine had married the previous year. She and her husband, Stephane, a bank manager, lived on the other side of the city in a large apartment. They were expecting their first child. Pierre and Charlotte, along with Estelle and her family, visited Christine every Sunday after their mid-day meal, now that it was difficult for Christine to make the journey to her parents.

Francesco was treated like one of the family. He had been invited to both of the daughters' weddings, and their husbands made him feel like a younger brother. Just after he arrived, he had asked if he could try to grow vegetables in the plot behind their home. It was unused, except by the neighborhood cats, including Charlotte's, for their midnight wrestling matches and courting adventures. It was overgrown with weeds. But both its southern and eastern sides had unobstructed access to the sky, allowing the early morning and mid-day sun to warm the earth. The area was bordered on two sides, south and east, by a two meter high stone wall, on the west by the side wall of the neighboring house, and on the north by Pierre and Charlotte's dwelling, boarding house and grocery store.

During the first season he planted nothing, but devoted considerable time to preparing the soil and building the planting beds. He bargained with the dairy for horse manure, with the poultry shop owner for chicken droppings, and he borrowed Pierre's wagon to drive out to the countryside to collect cow dung from the farms. Each had its purpose. Their secrets had been taught to him by his father and grandfather. They

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were the legacy of Pietro Rosati, who had learned them from the good monks in the Hermitage of Monte Cucco.

By the third season, Francesco's garden was producing more than Charlotte's, Estelle's, and Christine's kitchens could use, and more than the boarders could consume. He grew tomatoes, zucchini, cucumber, spinach, radishes, red beets, onions, garlic, chard, lettuces, potatoes, many different spices. Pierre began to sell the vegetables in his store, and it wasn't long before his grocery store became known in all of Esch-sur-Alzette as the one with the best produce.

Francesco converted a space in the basement below Pierre's store to a cold storage room. He told Pierre that he knew how to make sausages, *prosciutto*, *capocollo* and *mortadella*. These were products that were highly sought after by not only the many Italian families that lived in the city, but by the Luxembourgers who had acquired a taste for them. Francesco spent his evenings and free weekend day in the late autumn preparing these meats from a pig that Pierre had bought already butchered. These, too, Pierre sold in his store. Francesco offered to save Pierre money by butchering the pig himself, but they decided that there was no good place to do the work in the middle of the city. Francesco took no money for his labors, but by the third year he was paying nothing for his lodging and his food. He was able to send all of his wages home except for a few florins that he kept to buy an occasional cigar and small gifts for his family when he returned for his visits.

When Francesco had been in Esch-sur-Alzette for five years, he celebrated his twenty-first birthday. According to his father's original plan, he should have returned to Sigillo and married. When he was last at Masseggio in September the previous year to help, as usual, with the harvest, there was no talk of him returning. His younger brothers were taking on their duties; his next oldest brother, Luigi, was already working in the fields beside his father. The harvests had been mostly good during the seven years since Francesco left home. Lucca was still demanding his regular payments in addition to a share of the harvest, so there was no point in discussing his return to the farm. Francesco had also gotten used to his life away from Masseggio.

The day before Francesco would leave to return to Esch-sur-Alzette, he walked to church with the family. He regularly attended mass with Pierre and Charlotte in St. Joseph's church. It was an important part of

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his life when he was growing up, and it pleased him as well as both of his families, to accompany them to Sunday mass. Sant'Andrea in Sigillo was an important part of the Rosati family history, and, although they were still poor *contadini* like all the members of the parish, the family was welcomed and respected by the priests and parishioners alike.

Francesco sat next to his mother in their normal place, on the left side, three quarters of the distance from the front of the church. Before mass began, he did what he had always done: watched his friends and cousins filing into their pews. He noted how they had grown since he last saw them. For the first time he noticed a young girl he had not remembered having seen before. Her long hair was as black as the coal he mined in Sardegna and Luxembourg, her eyes the dark brown color of chestnuts, and her skin, still tanned from the summer sun, a light olive hue. She sat with Domenico and Angela Notari and two of their four sons. Could this be their little daughter, Rosa, he thought. Of course she had always been there, in the pew with her brothers, who were all his friends. He had just never noticed her. Not before this day.

As Francesco and his father walked to the piazza, they caught up with the Notari family. Rosa blushed when Francesco was introduced to her by Domenico. This small detail did not escape Rosa's mother. Angela and Tommaso were third cousins. Angela's father and Tommaso's mother were second cousins. Tommaso's grandmother and Angela's grandmother were first cousins. This made Francesco and Rosa fourth cousins. Francesco saw that Rosa carried a church missile. She could read.

Francesco thought about Rosa on the long train ride back to Esch-sur-Alzette, and for the first time he thought about his own future. How could he marry as long as he was a simple laborer and all his wages were being sent home to his family? He had been an obedient son, and he had done what was asked of him, but surely it was time for someone else to share the burden. His brothers were now old enough to leave and find work, just as he did. Why hadn't any of them offered to do so? Why hadn't his father demanded it of them? On his next visit he would tell his father that it was time for him to return to Masseggio and take his rightful place on the farm.

When Francesco arrived to the house on Wednesday at noon, the store was closed. There was a sign saying that it was due to the proprietor's

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sickness. Pierre had been in perfectly good health when he left three weeks before, thought Francesco. What kind of illness could he have contracted? He ran quickly up the stairs to find Charlotte and Christine in the kitchen, sitting at the table. Charlotte burst into tears when she saw him, and came to him, hugging him closely. Christine explained that there had been an accident when Pierre was loading flour at the mill onto his wagon. He fell off the loading dock and two large bags of flour fell on top of him. His head had hit the pavement. He was still unconscious five days after this happened. The doctors were not sure they could do any more. Estelle was with him now. Charlotte had not left his side until a few hours earlier when she came home with Christine to wash and change. Francesco returned with Charlotte to the hospital. Together, they kept a vigil for the next two days. Pierre never awoke.

After the burial, while family and friends gathered at Charlotte's house, Estelle's and Christine's husbands asked Francesco to follow them down to the store. They had talked with their wives and with Charlotte about what they would discuss with Francesco. Their mother-in-law could not continue to live in the house and run both the boarding house and the grocery store unless she had help. They each had their own work, they explained, and they would not leave it to become a grocery shop keeper or a boarding house proprietor. Their wives could not do the work of their father. Would Francesco be interested in running the grocery store? He had helped Pierre build up a good business, and many of their customers now came from all over the city for his vegetables and cured meats. They would help him with keeping the finances and other administrative matters. Francesco could keep the profits from the store's operation, and he would share the costs of maintaining the premises with Charlotte, who would live on the profits from the boarders.

Francesco had come to this city in a foreign country as a stranger who could speak only a few words of French and even fewer of the local language. He was now being given the opportunity of becoming the proprietor of one of the most prosperous grocery stores in the city. Of course he wanted to accept this generous offer, but how would his acceptance affect his other primary obligations to his family? Would he have enough money to successfully run the business and to send home money to his father? No one knew about Francesco's obligation, and he was not prepared to share this secret with the two men. Still, he had to

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know what the economic consequences would be before he agreed to accept their offer. He asked if they knew whether the result would be more than what he was earning in the coal mines where he now worked. They smiled at each other and then at Francesco. Yes, they said, much more.

It took Francesco a few months to understand just how much more. He could put aside a sum equal to his wages at the mine, and then an amount twice as much again—and this was after he paid his share of the house expenses and covered all of the store's costs. Now he had a true dilemma. Should he tell his father of his good fortune and risk the chance that Lucca would treble his demands, or should he continue to send home the same amount as he had for the past two years and keep his new situation from his family? It would only be a matter of time before a fellow villager would come to Esch-sur-Alzette and eventually find his way to his grocery store. Somehow, someone in Sigillo would learn about his good fortune, and eventually the news would reach Lucca.

He thought about Rosa. This was his chance to marry her if she would have him, and if the Church would give them dispensation because they were fourth cousins. He decided to guard his secret for as long as he could, and to save as much money as possible in the meantime. They were so different, he fair skinned and red haired, and she olive skinned and black hair. Surely, the Church would see that there was no danger of them producing ill-formed offspring.

He could not travel back to Sigillo. This was one of the busiest time of the year for him with preparations for Christmas, making of the hams and sausages, and seeing to it that the store was fully stocked for the holiday shopping. He did not want to wait until the spring to know whether Rosa would marry him. Maybe he could write a letter, he thought. Christine would help him. He would tell Rosa in the letter the reason he left Sigillo, and how he became a prosperous shop keeper in Luxembourg. He would tell her that in the spring he would come back to Sigillo and ask her father for her hand in marriage. He would ask Rosa to keep their secret until he returned.

Francesco's problem with this plan was that he did not know for certain that Rosa wanted to marry him. He would be placing his full trust in a young girl with whom he had never exchanged a single word. For all he knew, she was already promised to someone else. There was another

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problem. How would Rosa receive a letter without her family knowing about it. There was no one he knew who could secret a letter to her. And if they knew she had received a letter, they would force her to reveal its contents and its sender. He decided to wait with his proposal of marriage until when he returned to Sigillo. First he would tell his family about his good fortune, and then he would visit Domenico Notari to ask for Rosa's hand.



It wasn't until the following year, again at harvest time, that Francesco was able to make the journey. He thought about leaving at Easter, but that was even busier than Christmas. He began to sell *ciambaloni*, the Easter sweet breads that are made in Umbria, and *pasta dolce*, a cold fettuccini made with honey and walnuts. Each town in the region had its own variation of these delicacies, and the town's citizens guarded the recipes as if they were state secrets. The breads and sweets that filled Francesco's shelves at Easter were made by Italian women who lived in the neighborhood. They were pleased to be able to add a few florins to their households by baking a little extra for the store. Like the hams and sausages that Francesco began making for Pierre, the *ciambaloni* and *pasta dolce* were instant successes among the Luxembourgers.

From Easter until the autumn he devoted all of his spare time to his vegetable garden. He had added several fig trees which he carried back from Sigillo two years before. The colder climate of Esch-sur-Alzette was not ideal for fig trees, but Francesco made sure they were in the warmest spot in the garden, covered them in the early and late seasons if there was any threat of frost, and kept them wrapped in burlap through the winter months.

Traveling back to Sigillo was becoming more difficult with all of his responsibilities, but Francesco never thought of it as an obligation. He loved his family. He was devoted to his mother, admired and respected his father, cared deeply for his brothers and sisters, and worshipped his grandparents. Although his new life was more enjoyable than he ever could have expected or hoped for, he never gave up the thought that it

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was in Sigillo where he would eventually settle, and that it was as the foreman of Masseggio he was destined to spend most of his life. Sigillo and Masseggio were home and every other place was away from home. On this visit, his suitcase was filled with gifts for everyone. What better way to announce his good fortune than by sharing it with his family.

After dinner on his first evening at home, he raised himself up from his chair and asked his family to allow him to say something to all of them. Francesco was not accustomed to being the center of attention, of telling a story to a large group. His grandfather was the expert storyteller. It was he who related the history of the Rosati family every Christmas Eve, who told about Pietro and Angelina, Umberto and Lucia and all the first members of the family. It did not matter how many times he heard the story, it always filled Francesco with wonder and pride. He did not himself have the gift to deliver a story, to hold the attention of his listeners like his grandfather. This was, in fact, the first time he was talking to more than a few people at one time. His family was as surprised as he at what he was doing. They listened.

He told them what had been his secret for almost one year, that he had been offered the chance to manage a business and properties by the family with whom he lived since he arrived in Esch-sur-Alzette. The businesses were prospering, and he had now established himself in his new home. He explained everything, how he came to be trusted by the family, how he grew vegetables, made the special meats and organized the Italian women in the neighborhood to make their specialties. There was silence when he finished his tale and sat down. He said nothing about his plan to marry; he would discuss that first in private with his father, as was the custom. His eyes were down, staring at the empty plate in front of him, waiting for some form of response. His youngest brother, Peppe, broke the silence with his clapping hands.

“Well done, Francesco!” he said. “Bravo. Bravo!”

His other brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts and cousins joined in the chorus of cheers. He looked up at his mother sitting at the end of the table. She was smiling and crying at the same time. He looked at his father. He was not smiling. His expression was of a man who was worried. He asked his son if this meant that he had decided not to return home. Francesco, who was never disrespectful to anyone, especially not to his father, could not hide his hurt and frustration at his exile. He

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answered that he dreamt only of returning one day to Masseggio. It was his obligation to his family that forced him to leave. It was his desire to quicken his return that drove him to work as hard as he had, and it was his hard work that resulted in his being given the store. It was not his ambition to become a wealthy or important shopkeeper. He simply wanted to come home. He did not ask the questions that haunted him: Why couldn't someone else take their turn? Why was he alone responsible for the fate of the family?

Tommaso promised that he would talk to Lucca and obtain from him an accounting of the status of their debt. The family would finish paying this debt, he would tell Lucca, and his son would come home. He would find Lucca tomorrow, he said, and tell him this.

Tommaso did find Lucca the next day, sitting as usual in the café at the edge of the central piazza. This was Lucca's 'office', where he met to settle accounts and take the payments owed to his employer. Tommaso had never said anything to anyone about his arrangement with Lucca, but there were rumors in the village that suggested he was not alone with being in debt to the mystery person for whom Lucca worked. All of this person's dealings with those who farmed his land—it was assumed that it was a 'he', although no one had ever met 'him'—was through Lucca.

Don Antonio looked over the fields from a vantage point above the village where he would walk after saying mass each morning. It would be a good harvest, he thought. There had been five plentiful years after five disappointing ones. Lucca was managing the affairs with the farmers for the land owner, whoever it was, and he was doing it well. Perhaps too well. He had heard rumors about Lucca having special arrangements with some of the farmers. He often saw him sitting in the piazza with one of them. If he wasn't mistaken, it was Tommaso Rosati who was there with Lucca the day before when he walked into the piazza. Tommaso always looked very sad and serious when he met him these days. Why would that be? The Rosati family's farm, Masseggio, delivered the best return, year after year, even in the worst of times? What was troubling Tommaso? His son, Francesco, had left home some years before. That was not uncommon in these times. Many of the villagers were leaving for America. They left their families, both married and unmarried, to make money. They sent most of their pay

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back to their mothers or wives, the “White Widows” people were calling them. Lucca kept reporting that it was becoming more and more difficult to find enough experienced hands to make the fields productive. Too many of the laborers were leaving. Perhaps if they could keep more of the results of their labors, or if they owned the lands on which they toiled, they would stay. But the landowner did not seem to understand this, or he had too many obligations of his own.

Lucca’s greeting was cordial, even friendly. Tommaso had always been prompt with his payments, and Masseggio remained the most productive farm in the village. Lucca always commented that it was his best decision to convince his employer to keep the Rosati’s at Masseggio, and today was no exception. What could he do for Tommaso, he asked.

Tommaso sat down, removed his hat, and slowly explained why he had come to meet Lucca. His son, Francesco, wished to return home and re-join his family. He wanted to know how much more he had to pay to clear his debt. Surely, the harvests at Masseggio during the past five years were bountiful enough to ensure the landowner a good profit. What more could he want from his family, begged Tommaso.

“My employer is not a greedy man, Tommaso. He is fair and patient. Didn’t he show his goodness when the crops failed for two more years after our agreement? Paying him with your son’s wages kept you from being removed from the land. Masseggio is not the only farm that he owns, and five years of losses on all the farms has meant that his own debts are large. It will take many more good years before he is free of his debts, and you are free of yours. I am sorry, Tommaso, but I cannot tell you when you will be able to stop making your cash payments. If you want to continue to farm the land at Masseggio and live in the house, you will need to continue paying. As another gesture of good will, I will not ask you to increase your payments for the next year, but the year after that they must be higher.”

Tommaso was heartsick. He placed his hat back on his head, thanked Lucca for his time, and walked slowly back home. Along the way he entered the cemetery to visit the graves of his departed relatives. It was his responsibility to see to it that future generations would visit their graves and lay fresh flowers on Sundays and holidays. He felt like Masseggio was slipping away from him and the family.

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After Tommaso told his son what Lucca had said, Francesco told him that he wanted to marry Rosa Notari. If he could not return to Sigillo, he would take a part of Sigillo with him to his new home, he said. Tommaso was bewildered. Had his son declared himself to Domenico Notari? Did his daughter know of this plan and did she agree to marry him? Surely Lucca would consider Francesco marrying as a sign that he was earning more money than he was paying, and he would ask for a larger increase. Couldn't he wait for a few more years, asked Tommaso. He would try to find other means to convince Lucca to conclude their arrangement.

Francesco had made up his mind. He did not want to wait. Besides, he explained to his father, with a wife by his side, he would be able to expand the business, take in more boarders, maybe even buy the store and the building. If Lucca asked for more money, he would pay it, but his father should do everything to keep any more increases as low as possible. Would he speak to Domenico, asked Francesco? Tommaso had asked so much from his son, he could not deny him this wish. He would talk to Domenico the next day.

Domenico was very pleased with the proposal. He liked the family and had always been on good terms with Tommaso. He and his sons often helped at Masseggio with the plowing and the harvest. Francesco was like a cousin to the Notari boys. Domenico was also very pleased that Francesco had been fortunate enough to be able to leave the fields and prosper as a shopkeeper in Luxembourg. It meant that his daughter would also not have to work in the fields. He had only one question, a question that many in Sigillo asked in private: Why did Francesco leave Masseggio? If his daughter was going to follow Tommaso's son away from home, he would have to know the reason.

Tommaso would not lie to his friend, but he could not tell him the whole truth. Francesco left to work in order to help support the family during the time when the crops were failing. He has continued to supplement the family's income so that the farm can be prosperous. One day he will return to take over as foreman. That is his strongest wish, and that is the entire family's wish as well. The explanation was sufficient for Domenico. He would talk to his wife, Angela, and then to Rosa.

Angela was not very happy with the thought of her daughter leaving Sigillo, even if Tommaso had said it would only be for a short while.

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Two of her sons were already far away, in America, although the younger of the two, Tommaso, returned regularly to visit his wife. Rosa could marry Francesco, but only after he returned to Sigillo. She was only just sixteen; there was plenty of time for her to wait. That was her final word. Not a word would be mentioned to Rosa.

Domenico knew it would be no use arguing with his wife at this point. He passed on Angela's decision to Tommaso, and Tommaso broke the news to his son. That should have been the end of it. Children did not make these kinds of decisions, their parents did, explained Tommaso to his son, even if he was now twenty-one. Rosa and he could only meet if both families gave their blessings, and it was absolutely necessary that the prospective bride's mother agreed to the union. Angela Notari was not against her daughter marrying him, said Tommaso, but she had set her terms, and they must be respected.

Francesco was determined to marry Rosa, and he was also determined to do it with her mother's full support. He decided that his only chance for success lay in first winning Rosa's heart, and then leaving it up to her to convince her mother. This was not going to be easy because he had only a very short time left in Sigillo and most of that time he would be helping with the harvest. He would never be able to get close to Rosa after mass on Sundays because her mother would smother any attempts at contact—especially now that she knew Francesco's intentions. His only chance, he thought, would be at the upcoming Festa della Sant'Anna, the patron saint of Sigillo. He needed an ally, he decided. It would be his sister Filomena.

The Rosati family arrived at *la festa* as they arrived at church every Sunday. Tommaso and Anna Maria flanked Tommaso's mother and father, and the rest of the family followed behind in order of age. Francesco walked with his sister, whispering instructions on how she was to help him talk to Rosa Notari. It would be simple, he explained, for what seemed to Filomena the one hundredth time.

"When the music starts and the dancing begins," explained Francesco, "run over to Rosa, grab her hand and lead her out to the middle of the dance floor. Tell her that you and she will start a *saltarello*. When you get to the middle of the floor, I will come in and ask Rosa to dance. She can't refuse."

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Filomena was not sure she could be convincing enough to get Rosa to follow her, being so much younger, but she promised to try. As they entered the piazza, she could see that most of the villagers were there. Having four churches in the village meant that it was only on very rare occasions that families from each of the churches met. It was not so much a rivalry among the church parishioners as it was a traditional division of the town's inhabitants along family lines. Everyone in each of the churches was somehow related. She could not remember anyone ever moving to Sigillo, other than as a new wife or husband of a villager. Rosa's great great grandmother and Filomena's great great grandfather were brother and sister.

This event was the one time that all the churches cooperated. A small group of women from each church met each week during the three months prior to *la festa*. Zia Maria, Tommaso's youngest brother's wife, was the representative from Sant'Andrea. She was the leader of the committee. People listened when Maria Rosati spoke. Sant'Agostino, Santa Maria Assunta and Sant'Anna each had their committee members. The priests from each church were also present in the meetings, but it was the women who decided how things would be done.

When Filomena grabbed Rosa's hand, Rosa laughed and ran quickly after the young girl, who was seven years her junior. In the middle of the piazza Francesco was waiting. Rosa seemed to know this would happen. She smiled shyly. They danced to the music of the *saltarello*. The music did not stop. On and on they danced until their feet grew weary and their throats dry from talking and singing. Francesco walked Rosa back to her family. Domenico and his three sons were smiling. One of his sons, Celestino, said to Francesco that he didn't know he could dance, and that he must have learned those special steps from the Luxembourgers. Celestino's two younger brothers, Antonio and Umberto, joined in the laughter. Angela told her sons to stop teasing Francesco, but he didn't seem to mind. He was smiling as he said good night to the Notari family. The look on Rosa's face told Francesco what he wanted to know.

On an evening a week following *la festa*, Domenico paid a visit to Masoggio. He and Tommaso sat in the garden, beneath the grapevines that had only recently been picked bare. Tommaso told Domenico that he understood Angela's concerns. Their only daughter would be moving far away. But it would only be for a short while, he assured Domenico.

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Francesco wanted to return home and take his place as *massaio* and have his wife become *la donna di casa*. Soon he would have achieved his goal and earned enough money to purchase a property in the village. Why did he need to do this when the Rosati family had the rights to Masseggio, asked Domenico. Masseggio is not growing any larger and the family is not getting any smaller, answered Tommaso. “And the times we live in are so uncertain. The boy feels a duty to have some protection for the future,” added Tommaso.

Tommaso managed to get through this meeting without having to lie to his good friend and future in-law. They agreed that Francesco and Rosa would be married in the spring. Domenico returned to his home to tell his wife what he and Tommaso had decided, and then they both talked to Rosa. Francesco, who was still out in the fields when the meeting took place, received the good news when he returned after dark. Both he and Rosa had difficult times sleeping that night, and every night until after their wedding.



Lucca knew he was playing a dangerous game. His employer had given him free rein to manage his estates with only a few conditions. He was to treat the *contadini* with respect, make sure that the farms were productive, and keep his employer’s identity a complete secret. Surely he was holding to these conditions, he thought. He had found a brilliant way to ensure that the farms were productive by binding the workers’ continued ability to live on and work the farms with financial payments. The payments were more symbolic than real, he argued to himself. It was not that much money he asked from each of his tenants, not more than they could find the means to pay. Proof of this was that they all did pay. His own salary was reasonable, but he deserved more for what he was doing. His responsibilities were many. He did not live beyond his means. The small amounts he received for his hard labors were saved in a safe place to secure his future retirement.

Masseggio and the Rosati family was his most successful venture. The farm produced like no other, and the son, Francesco, had turned the coal that he mined into gold in Lucca’s pockets. Whenever Lucca raised the payments, the Rosati boy found a way to pay. This was good, thought Lucca, but it was also troubling. What was he doing up there in Luxembourg? Did they pay so well in the mines in that small town

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where he lived? He could not possibly have two jobs, not with the back-breaking work he would have to do at least ten hours a day digging and hauling coal.

Lucca's answer to his question about Francesco came by chance. Late in the fall after Francesco had returned to Esch-sur-Alzette following his proposal to Rosa, Lucca traveled to Gubbio and the Monastery of San Secondo. As usual, he rode his horse over the pass beside Monte Ingino. It was time to deliver to his employer's emissary, the Abbot's secretary, the money from the holdings. The secretary, with the approval of the Abbot, would decide how it should be parceled out, with the Bishop of Perugia receiving the largest sum, and amounts given to the cloisters and hermitages in the mountains surrounding Sigillo. Lucca did not know how or when these payments were decided, nor how the Abbot's cousin came to own them before passing them on to his sister's son, but this was the reason he was manager of the Sigillo estates. Lucca knew the road by heart. He had lived his entire life in Gubbio before moving to Sigillo.

The Abbot of San Secondo saw to it that Lucca was well taken care of with food and wine and a warm room for the night, although he never met the Abbot after he became manager of the estates in Sigillo, only his secretary. He received his salary, and a very substantial sum in addition. The harvest had been exceptionally good. Lucca stayed at the monastery because there were no family members left in Gubbio with whom he could board. His parents had died when he was very young, and he was raised by his father's parents. His grandfather was a chimney sweep. His father had been one as well, which is how he died. He fell from a roof, and when he did, his safety line wrapped around his neck and strangled him. Lucca swept chimneys with his grandfather until he was fourteen. Then, he apprenticed himself to a tailor, a friend of his grandfather, and that is when his fate changed.

The tailor sewed the suits that the priests in Gubbio wore when they were not celebrating mass. Like all such services to The Church, such as delivering porcelain or cutlery, providing coal for the stoves, or even sweeping chimneys, they were handed down from father to son. The tailor had no sons, although he had been blest, he said, with three lovely daughters. The oldest was as old as Lucca. When Lucca was twenty, he married the tailor's middle daughter. He had learned his trade well, and

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he and his father-in-law became known as the best tailors throughout the province of Perugia. They began sewing clothes for the Bishop and Archbishop and then the Cardinal.

Lucca was traveling regularly to Perugia. When his customers were promoted from priest to monsignor to Bishop to cardinal, he followed them all the way to Roma. It was on one of his trips to Roma that life changed again. One evening, as he worked in his room to finish sewing a new suit for the cardinal's secretary, there was a knock on the door. It was the secretary for whom he was sewing the suit. Lucca began to apologize for not having his suit finished. The secretary told him that he was not there for his suit, but to delivery some very bad news. There had been a fire in Gubbio just after Lucca had reached Roma two weeks ago. An entire quarter had burned. The tailor and his wife had perished. Lucca's wife and two children were also dead.

After the burials, Lucca tried to return to what he knew and could do well. But, for him, Gubbio constantly smelled of ash, the ash he breathed as a child cleaning the city's chimneys, and the ash of the houses and the lives they sheltered until an errant spark set his dreams aflame. He decided that he would leave Gubbio and move to Roma when he had finished the last suits for the Abbot of the Monastery of San Secondo, Emilio Umbra.

When Lucca delivered the suits and told the Abbot of his decision to leave Gubbio, the Abbot said that he had a better plan for his future. The Bishop of Perugia, Salvatore D'Invito, had recently died and had left all of his estates to his only nephew, his sister's son. The Bishop's family had received the estates over eighty years before as a *donum*. The Bishop was the only son still alive, and his now deceased brothers had had no sons of their own. He had just one sister who had married late in life to a lawyer. They had one son. The Bishop had written in his testament that this nephew was not in a position to run the estates, so he was giving this task to the Abbot, his cousin, the son of his mother's sister, as caretaker for a period of ten years. The Abbot had grown up in the shadow of his much wealthier cousin. He did not know until his cousin died what was the source of the wealth. It was land, as it turned out. His cousin was destined to enter The Church and to eventually become a bishop. The Abbot was certain that he himself had received his position because of his connection through his mother to the Bishop's

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family, and was never sure whether to acknowledge this publicly and show his gratitude, nor how he would if he did.

A manager was needed who could take full responsibility for all operations, explained the Abbot. This manager would report directly to the Abbot's secretary. A suitable salary would be arranged, and an annual sum would be provided should the returns from the estates be larger than the previous years. He would also be given a house with a servant and cook. The house and the estates were in a village called Sigillo on the other side of the mountain. There were two conditions of his continued employment: he must never divulge who is his employer; and, he must never try to determine who is the owner of the estates. The *contadini* who farm the lands would be told that the property has been sold to a family that lives in the southern part of the province. That is all they need to know. Lucca agreed to accept the position with its strict conditions. He left the next day for Sigillo.

As Lucca rode away from the monastery in the early morning eight years after he became manager of the Sigillo estates, he ascended the hill to the north of the city. Just as he was about to pass through Porta Metauro, his horse went lame. It was only a shoe that had fallen off. He knew the way to the blacksmith, and led his faltering horse to the shop. The smithy's brother was helping in the shop while he was home for a short visit. The brother had left Gubbio to work in the mines of Luxembourg. When he learned that Lucca lived in Sigillo, he asked him if he knew the Rosati boy, Francesco, who was a shopkeeper and innkeeper in the town where he lived, Esch-sur-Alzette. Yes, said Lucca. He knew him and his family very well. They were hard workers and good *contadini*. But the Rosati boy he knew was a miner. He was a miner, said the brother, until good fortune struck.

With his newly shod horse, and new information, Lucca rode back to Sigillo. One of his main pleasures in life, besides seeing his pile of money growing in the chest under his bed, was whipping his horse through the narrow turns on the descent from the top of Monte Ingino, on the way down to Scheggia. He knew it was dangerous, but it seemed that only danger satisfied him since he lost his family. His horse responded to the whip and charged downhill. Lucca moved his body to counter the weight of the wagon as it tried to lift itself onto its outer wheels at each turn. Once on this ride, the wagon did manage to gain half flight during

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a few breathtaking seconds, but Lucca brought it back to earth by reigning in his horse. Horse, wagon and driver sailed into Scheggia, and once again, Lucca had cheated the devil. They maintained a more casual pace toward Sigillo.

Lucca met Tommaso on the road between Masseggio and the village center. He had decided to confront Tommaso as soon as he returned from his journey. Tommaso was in his wagon.

“Buongiorno, Signor Lucca,” offered Tommaso.

“This morning was better for you before we met Tommaso. It will not improve. Why have you been keeping your son’s good fortune from me. Surely you could not have thought that I would not find out, eventually,” said Lucca angrily.

“What do you mean?”

“You know what I mean. He is not a miner; he is a shopkeeper, a man of property.”

“Who told you this?” demanded Tommaso. “Whoever it was, he is a liar. My son owns nothing. He manages the properties for the owners. Whether he works in the mines or in a shop is none of your business. He works only to send money to feed the greed of your keeper. Or is it your greed only? Have you both conspired to bleed those who you believe are too weak or stupid to stand up for their rights, or are you using the cowardice of the owners of these lands to your advantage? Whatever the truth, I will see both of you in hell.”

Tommaso knew that he had finally let his pent-up anger out of the bottle where it had been kept for the past nine years. There was no putting it back. He stared at Lucca. Lucca stared back, then whipped his horse forward without saying another word.



Francesco visited Rosa on the evening before he left for Luxembourg, after he had eaten with his family. Francesco and Rosa were in the main room of the Notari family’s apartment, along with Angela, Domenico and three of their five sons, Antonio, Umberto and Celestino. Enrico, the oldest, and Tommaso were in America, Enrico having left home in 1901, and Tommaso in 1903, both leaving just after reaching their twenty-first birthdays. It was clear that the three remaining brothers were anxious to

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join them as soon as they were able. Enrico was now married. He had come back home to Sigillo a few years ago to marry Teresa Rosati, Francesco's first cousin, who also grew up at Masseggio, and to take her to America. Not all the men took their wives, and not all the wives wanted to go with them.

The room in which they now sat was the room where all the cooking was done and where meals were taken. It was also where sewing, knitting, cleaning and polishing of guns, repair of shoes and everything else a family needed to do to keep running was done. The room was entered from a small, square entry hall, lit by two very small windows above eye level on either side of the heavy wooden door. The door led directly to the narrow street which connected to via Flaminia.

An open fireplace filled one corner of the large room. It was much smaller than the one at Masseggio, thought Francesco. But then there were only eight people to feed in this dwelling before they started leaving, not fifty as in his home. A wall separated the eating and sleeping quarters. Domenico had put up wooden walls to make three rooms on the other side of the wall, one large one on the street side of the apartment for the three boys, and one for Angela and himself, and a small one for Rosa, facing towards the garden. There was a fire burning to take the chill out of the autumn evening.

Angela and Rosa sat together at one end of the long table, closest to the fire. Domenico sat at the other end. Rosa's three brothers and Francesco were on both sides of the table, with Francesco purposely placed next to Domenico. Francesco knew that this evening would be less of a social event than an interrogation, and that his future mother-in-law was going to be the chief inquisitor.

"What is the apartment like where you and Rosa will live?" asked Angela in a voice that dampened the fire and added a further chill to the air.

"It has two large rooms and one small one that is used for storage. It is on the ground floor so we have the garden outside the back door, and a basement where I can make the prosciutto and sausages and wine," replied Francesco in his usually friendly manner. "And we have a large coal stove. I bought it on the recommendation of Stephane. He is the husband of one of the family Lecroix's daughters, the younger one, Christine, the one who works in the bank. Stephane works in the bank,

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not his wife, Christine. The Lecroix family owns the house and the store that I run for them.”

“Where is the church you will attend? You have been attending mass since you left Sigillo, haven’t you, or have you been too busy with all of your businesses?” demanded Angela.

Francesco was determined that since he had gotten this far with Angela, that she had consented to allow her daughter marry him and travel with him to a far-off country, he was not going to be disrespectful or show any sign of anger or irritation. He smiled when he answered.

“The Lecroix family are very religious. Madame Lecroix attends mass every day, as do her two daughters. Monsieur Lecroix was very active in the church before he died. Madame Lecroix made certain that I was with them every Sunday and holy day since I moved to Esch-sur-Alzette. I am one of the church wardens now, and I can tell you that I am on very friendly terms with the priests in the church, which is L’Eglise de Saint Joseph. Père Michel, the pastor of the church, and his assistants are all looking forward to the day when Rosa will join us at mass.”

Rosa smiled at Francesco’s bravery in standing up to her mother. She was embarrassed by her mother’s overbearing and accusing attitude. She knew that her mother was still not reconciled with the idea of her leaving Sigillo for a far-off home in a foreign country, even if the country was only a few day’s journey by train away, rather than a week’s sailing on a ship. She, on the other hand, was thrilled by the adventure of it all, even though she had no illusions that it would be easy. There were twenty boarders who would need feeding and caring for. She would miss her parents, her brothers, her cousins and all of her friends. Her childhood was coming to an end. She would become an adult by the time they reached their new home. She would have children.

Rosa looked at Francesco sitting between her father and brother. He smiles easily, she thought, but there is a serious force that is driving him. Is he truly happy with his life away from Sigillo? How long will it be before we are able to return, and what is the real reason why he stays away? His answer to the first question had always been that he wanted to be independent, to be able to own his house on his own land. His answer to the second question was always When I have enough money. How much is enough, thought Rosa? Will he try to buy Masseggio? Was that possible? Who actually owns the farm? No one in the village

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seemed to know. Signor Lucca guarded that secret like his very life depended on it. Perhaps it did. Maybe, after they were married, she would learn more. Since her betrothed was leaving the next day and not returning until just before the date they had set for the wedding, April 21, 1909, it was certain she would not know any more before they were man and wife.



Tommaso was waiting in Fossato di Vico at the train station when his son arrived. He was alone. It was early April, just a few weeks before the wedding. March had been cold with heavy rains. The roads over the pass from Sigillo were thick with mud and barely drivable. He had a horse now, and with a good surface she was faster than their old mule. On this day, the mule would have been a better choice, thought Tommaso, as he considered the journey back with double the load. His and his son's boots would need heavy cleaning when this day was over.

It had not been easy leaving Masseggio without company. He needed to talk with Francesco before they were back in the village where there were ears attached to every leaf, blade of grass and the wind. It was his son's future, and now the future of his son's bride-to-be that he had to discuss with Francesco. This was best done alone, away from the village and before they returned home.

The train arrived within an hour late of its scheduled time, an event that was cause for celebration among the staff at the station and onboard the train since two-hour delays, or more, were normal. Francesco stepped down from the train to the platform, searching for his father amongst the crowd. Tommaso was sitting up on the wagon in his usual place near the gate where luggage carts were carried in and out to the platform. When he reached him, his father had climbed down to embrace his son. He was alone, thought Francesco; we must have many things to talk about. His father confirmed this thought, but talk would wait. First they would eat the lunch his mother had packed in a basket.

When they had finished, they turned the horse toward home and started out of town.

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“Lucca knows that you are no longer mining,” sighed Tommaso. “He knows that you are running a store and boarding houses. Someone told him that you were the owner, but I denied this when he confronted me with what he had found out.”

“It was only a matter of time,” replied Francesco, not showing any degree of excitement or emotion. “Did he say what he would do with this new knowledge?”

“No, not yet. We need to stop this, Francesco. That’s why I wanted to talk to you, alone.”

“I am certain that Lucca is keeping our money for himself, that the landowner, whoever he is, knows nothing about his extortion,” said Francesco. “He has probably paid the carabinieri, so trying to expose his crime would be useless.”

“Yes, I realized this as well some years ago,” lamented Tommaso. “This has to stop. You must be able to return home if that is what you want. Rosa’s family has accepted that she will leave with you after you are married, but it is not fair to them either if you both must live as exiles because of the greed of one man.

“I have talked with the family about what else we could do,” continued Tommaso. “We could kill him, or we could leave Masseggio. Choosing the first would mean the family loses its soul; choosing the second tears out its heart. Neither is acceptable, but we cannot allow you to shoulder this burden any longer. We want you to come home. Your brothers have agreed to find work. They will tell you this themselves when we are back at Masseggio.”

Francesco had wanted to hear these words during the years he was in Sardegna and while he labored in the mines in Esch-sur-Alzette. Now, he was sure that he preferred the life he had to the one that was waiting for him in Sigillo should he return. He enjoyed working with his hands in the garden, but he also felt that he was good as a shopkeeper and property manager. He was respected in his new community, not just for what generations of Rosatis had done before him, but for what he had done himself since he arrived in his new home. He wanted to stay in Esch-sur-Alzette with his new bride. Rosa would want to stay there as well as soon as she experienced it for herself. He was sure of that.

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Why has my family remained slaves for almost three hundred years, he thought? After the unification, when Italia became a single country, Sigillo and the entire province of Perugia were freed from the governance of The Church. The Pope was no longer the ruler of what had been part of the Papal States. The people of the region were no longer subject to the laws of The Church, but to the laws of The State. They were free to leave the estates which they had never owned, but which owned them, and move to any part of their country, or to emigrate to countries in the world that were begging for hard-working men and women, like America. Why do they cling to Masseggio as if it were theirs?

This is what he thought as he listened to his father, but he could never say this to him or to anyone else in the family. It would hurt them deeply. Masseggio was more than a place; it was the collective state of mind of a family.

“I cannot let them do that,” said Francesco, quietly. “I will find a way to get us back to Sigillo in good time. Lucca may raise his demands for money, but he knows that if he starves the cow he will have no milk to drink while it still lives, and there will be no meat on its bones to feed on when it finally dies.”

They were crossing the stream at the southern edge of the village when Francesco said this, and Tommaso let his horse find her own pace up the hill to the piazza, and then down past the cemetery to Masseggio. They rode in silence the rest of the way. The sun was setting in front of them when the horse, without any guidance, turned into the road leading to their home.



A wedding in Sigillo was a festive affair that lasted for many days. The marriage of Francesco Rosati and Rosa Notari was a special event. Francesco was the oldest Rosati who would become the family head when Tommaso grew too old to continue in that role. Rosa was the only daughter in a large, but poor, family. This would be Domenico's and Angela's only chance to give away a daughter, and they were determined to show their relatives and friends and the entire village that they knew how to do it, although they were not quite sure how. On this point there

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was no disagreement between Domenico and Angela; on almost everything else, there was.

Domenico and Angela rarely saw things the same way, and neither of them was very good at compromise. They often disagreed about what was good for their Rosa. Domenico admitted that he spoiled her with gifts that he brought back from the market in Fossato di Vico. Angela did not like Domenico wasting their money on presents, and she did not at all like Rosa wasting her time reading books that Domenico borrowed from Don Antonio. She had learned to read in the church school. Rosa should be helping more with the house chores, Angela would say to Domenico. One day you will be happy that your daughter can read and write, Domenico would say. Angela could not imagine why that would ever please her.

Angela wanted to have the wedding feast close to their home in the village, where most of the wedding celebrations were held. Anna Maria wanted the dinner to be at Masseggio, especially because she wanted the Rosatis to provide the food and wine, but she knew that Angela would have a difficult time accepting this generous offer. It would look like Anna Maria and Tommaso were giving the wedding, rather than Domenico and Angela. She asked Tommaso to talk to Domenico about this, and he did. Tommaso and Anna Maria almost never disagreed on anything, not because they resolved possible conflicts by talking about them, but because each one knew when the other had made up their mind, and there was no use arguing. Anna Maria was disappointed when Tommaso came back from his meeting with Domenico and told her that Angela insisted on having the wedding in the village. This would not be a test of female wills, Anna Maria decided. It was Angela's decision to make, and that was the end of it, she told Tommaso. But that was not the end of it. She would speak to Angela herself, in private, she resolved.

As planned, the wedding took place on Wednesday, April 21, 1909 in the Church of Sant'Andrea, with the still young Don Antonio presiding. It was a fine wedding. The church was filled with the Notari, Rosati, Sabatini and Mascioni families, and many of the other families who were related to one or the other or to both. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, cousins and friends of the family were all there.

After the services, the bride and groom climbed into the back of a wagon decorated with spring flowers and ribbons. The wagon was

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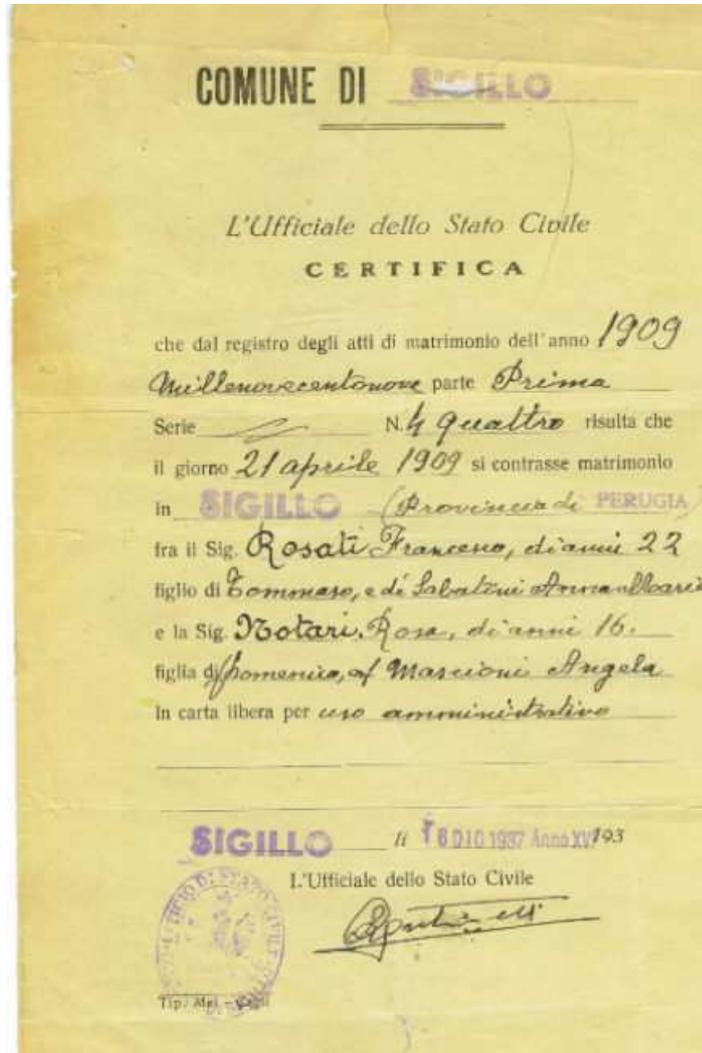
driven by Francesco's and Rosa's youngest brothers. Ahead of the wagon walked Domenico and Angela. As the wagon reached the via Flaminia, the horses drawing the wagon were turned toward Masseggio. When they reached Masseggio, the guests saw that there were tables and benches for everyone. There was a long table covered with a white linen tablecloth and set with a large vase filled with flowers. This was the table where the bride and groom, the best man and maid of honor, and the parents of the wedding couple would sit.

Domenico welcomed the guests and thanked Tommaso and Anna Maria and the Rosati family for offering to have the wedding feast at Masseggio. Angela appeared at the top of the stairs leading from the house. She was holding a large cake that she had made. She descended the stairs and walked slowly to the head of the table, holding the cake before her in outstretched arms. When she finally placed the cake on the table, she smiled broadly, waved her arms toward the wedding pair, and proclaimed in a loud voice, "Salute!" And everyone raised their glass that had been filled with rosé wine that was a specialty of Masseggio and toasted Francesco and Rosa.

Tommaso looked over at his wife, who was full of pleasure for this moment, and raised his glass to her. She had succeeded in finding a way to make everyone happy.

They all ate and danced and sang until the sun set and the stars appeared, one by one, in the night sky. It was still early spring, and the night air was cool. Guests would not leave before the bride and groom had a last dance and retired. Finally, Francesco led his young bride up the stairs, accompanied by cheers from the guests. At the landing at the top of the stairs, they turned and waved, and then disappeared into the house. A corner of the large room, made more private with wooden walls covered with heavy linen, always served as the room for newlyweds, as well as the very ill. Francesco and Rosa would stay in this room during the next few weeks, before they left for Luxembourg.

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Francesco had made the journey from Sigillo to Esch-sur-Alzette seven times before this day when he and his new bride left Masseggio for the train station in Fossato di Vico. They were riding in the same wagon that carried him to and from the station on all those previous trips, and on his first journey away from home, to Sardegna. This time, instead of his father, his brother Peppe drove the wagon. Rosa's father sat by Peppe's

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side. Rosa and Francesco sat on a bench that had been specially fastened in the back of the wagon. Two medium-sized trunks were also in the back, one containing Rosa's clothes and belongings, and the other containing Rosa's dowry. Besides the two sets of sheets and pillow cases and the quilt Rosa had sewn, there were a set of four plates and soup bowls, four sets of forks, knives and spoons, a rolling pin, a mixing bowl, one large and one small pot, a cheese grater.

The couple had had four weeks to prepare for this day. Angela Notari had wept for most of that time, and for weeks before the wedding. Her children were disappearing, leaving for far off places. Who would care for her and Domenico in their old age? Domenico, riding alongside Peppe, knew he would have no peace in his life until his daughter returned to Sigillo. Rosa had been all resolve until she and Francesco were about to board the train, but then she felt a wave of anguish and guilt for leaving her parents and brothers. She began to weep, and held on to her father until, at last, the train was about to leave the station. Francesco could not console her during the entire trip.

At the station in Esch-sur-Alzette, Francesco hired a wagon and driver to take them and their belongings to their new home. When they arrived, the entire Lecroix family—mother, daughters, their husbands and children—were there to greet them. Rosa met them all at once, some speaking Italian, others French. The trunks were carried into their apartment while Rosa and Francesco were surrounded by their dotting friends who moved in unison up the stairs and into Charlotte's rooms where a dinner had been laid.

Charlotte, Estelle and Christine spoke to Rosa in Italian. Rosa had never before heard a dialect of her language. She had never been farther from Sigillo than Gubbio. That was last May when she and her family had visited the city during *La Festa dei Ceri*, the Feast of the Candles. These women spoke familiar words, but made them sound like a foreign language. Across the table, her husband was speaking a language that she did not understand at all. It was French, he told her later. He had to speak different languages, to take care of the people in his store. He spoke German as well, and he could mix in the local dialect. How did he learn this magic, she had asked him. He laughed and said that God had given him the gift because he never taught him to read or write.

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Satisfied that they had impressed upon Rosa that anything she needed, and any help she required to make her move to her new home comfortable, they would provide, they allowed the couple to retire to their own apartment. Rosa and Francesco descended the stairs and Francesco opened the door. Finally, she was smiling. He picked up his bride and carried her over the threshold, as was the custom. It was dark by now, but candles had been lit by their friends. The bed was made with sheets, pillows, pillow cases and a quilt that were wedding gifts from Estelle and Christine. They slept in their own bed, inside their own apartment, not separated by linen curtains from forty other sleeping relatives, alone for the first time.

Rosa and Francesco worked hard each day. Rosa took care of the boarders and Francesco tended to the store. Rosa also helped in the garden. She wondered how her husband had managed to pack so many plants into the small space. The area was not totally filled with vegetables and fruit trees. There was a small patio where Francesco had laid paving stones in sand and set a table and chairs so that they would be able to sit outside in fine weather. The rest was all vegetation, lettuce, tomatoes, carrots, red beets and a host of other plants, all in neat rows, and all looking extremely healthy. Her husband could made things grow.

Washing the miners' clothes was the most strenuous work that Rosa had to do. The washing was done in the river, downstream from where the drinking water was drawn into cisterns. Francesco had bought Rosa a dog, an Alsatian shepherd she called Cocco, who pulled a small wagon down to the river piled high with clothes to be laundered, and then pulled the wagon back to the their home with the washed clothes that would be hung to dry above the garden. Rosa prepared breakfast and dinner for the two dozen miners living in the boarding house. She cleaned and made up the beds each day. She had help from one of Charlotte's nieces. When she had time in between her chores, she made breads and sweets that could be sold in Francesco's store, although Francesco continued to commission the local women because he felt that it was a good way to keep them as loyal customers.

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Francesco Rosati and Rosa Notari Rosati

The store and boarding house business grew and prospered. Francesco was able to make the regular payments to his father for passing on to Lucca. Even after making his payments to Charlotte Lecroix and covering their own expenses, he still had enough to put some money in the metal chest he had exchanged for the wooden one a few years earlier. They prayed for a child and after almost two years of marriage, God granted their wish. Rosa's and Francesco's first child was

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a boy, born on the 30th of July, 1911. They named him Celeste, a break in tradition from naming the first born son after the father's father. He was named after one of Rosa's brothers, Celestino, who had died in a coal mining accident in the United States of America. He had gone there the year after Rosa and Francesco were married, and he died only a few months after his arrival. Celestino had never been in the grottos inside Monte Cucco. He was not meant to be a miner. The newborn carried the spirit of the departed, and helped to ease the grief of Domenico and Angela.

The distance was too far and the journey too costly for Francesco's and Rosa's families to attend the baptism. There would be time enough for celebrations back in Sigillo when they traveled back with their son on their next holiday. This is what they thought as Rosa made a list of the people they would invite to the baptism lunch, but they were both sad to think that such an event would pass without their parents and families being present.

One week before the baptism, a surprise guest appeared at the boarding house. It was Guillermo from Sardegna. He said that he was planning to make this trip from the day he last saw Francesco, and now he had enough money to do so. He had written to his friend, Giancarlo Cardoni, the foreman of the Italian crew, asking him for a job and a place to stay. He had also asked him to keep it a secret from Francesco until he arrived. Now he was here. This was a happy reunion for the two friends after so many years, just in time for Francesco's son's baptism.

Celeste's baptism in L'Eglise de Saint Joseph was presided over by Père Michel and his two assistants. The infant's Godparents were Christine and her husband Stephane. Francesco and Rosa were very generous with gifts of food to the priests, both from the store and from their own garden and kitchen. The priests were only too happy to return the favor by showing special attention to their infant son.

Celeste was born into a Europe that was becoming unstable once again. Francesco had grown up in a place that had not been affected by politics since the beginning of the 17th century, when the Papal States were formed. Not even the unification of Italia in 1861 had much of an impact on Sigillo and his family. Now he found that he was living along the traditional path of war between France and Germany. Guillermo explained to him what was happening in Europe as they sat in

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Francesco's garden on a warm and sunny late Autumn Sunday afternoon in 1911.

"There will be a war," said Guillermo. "Of that I am sure. It is only a matter of time. Germany and her allies will be on one side, and on the other will be France and her allies. Italia and Austria-Hungary have been allied with Germany since before you were born. Russia and Great Britain joined France in an alliance just a few years ago, in 1907. These are not trade agreements, they are guarantees that the countries in the alliance will not invade each other. It also means that if one of the countries is invaded, the other countries will come to her assistance."

Francesco listened to Guillermo talking as if he was a member of parliament, or even the head of state. He was very impressed by his friend's knowledge and his ability to explain complex things in very simple ways.

"Italia is still a young country. It is weak," continued Guillermo. "The regions still act as if they are their own states, rather than part of a single country. Italia joined the German-Austria-Hungary alliance in order to protect its north eastern region against annexation by Austria, and to eventually win back the territory it gave up to France for that country's help during the Risorgimento.

"And now, as if to show that it can play a role on the stage of world power, Italia has just declared war on the failing Ottoman Empire in order to get their colony in Africa. Our country's leaders are fools. They think that they have to own a piece of Africa to be taken seriously. So they will send their sons to die in the desert to win a region called Libya. It is a big sandbox, that is all, *scatolone di sabbia*.

"Often the poor trade enslavement on a farm for enslavement in an army. They become pawns in a game of deadly chess, dumb, mute forms moved by invisible hands belonging to powerful men far removed from the battlefields. The soldiers shift to commands: eat, sleep, defecate, kill and die when told, and only when told. Most of them are forcibly conscripted, while some are enticed to volunteer by promises of adventure, glory and money. There is no glory in dying."

Guillermo described Europe as a powder keg needing only a small spark to set off an explosion over the entire continent. When that happened, he said, German soldiers would march straight through

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Luxembourg and into France—unless the French managed to do the same thing in reverse, marching into Germany.

“When that happens, you and I will have to fight, Francesco, and who you fight for will depend on whether you stay or whether you return to Italia. You need to prepare yourself for that day, because it will surely come.”



Rosa missed her family. They had not been able to return to Sigillo since they arrived together in Esch-sur-Alzette almost three years before. They had planned to return before she became pregnant with Celeste, to attend the wedding of Francesco’s sister, Consiglia, with Quinto Adalberto, but they were very busy in the store and many new boarders had just arrived. Then, after Celeste’s birth, Italia decided to declare war on Turkey. Francesco feared that if he returned while the war was on he would be drafted. Now, the war was over, there was still plenty of time before the busy Christmas season, and Celeste was over one year old. There was another reason to go to Sigillo. They needed documents to show their places and dates of birth, as well as their marriage. The Luxembourg authorities were becoming more strict with immigrant workers, and Francesco had been advised to obtain permanent residency papers for both himself and Rosa. They decided to make the journey. It was October, 1912.

Nothing was familiar to Rosa as she looked out of the train window passing through the French countryside and over the Alps into Italia. The train stopped, as it had on the way to Luxembourg three years ago, in Mondovi, where their papers were checked. They got off the train, carrying their young son, and lined up with the other passengers to use the latrines at the side of the station. There were men in uniform everywhere. He could hear that some of them were speaking German. He was nervous. He was always uneasy around soldiers, Rosa noticed.

They went back on board the train. Night was falling. They would sleep in their seats with the other third class passengers. There were sleeping cabins for those who could afford to pay for them. Francesco vowed that one day he and his family would ride in at least the second

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class wagons and have a sleeping berth where they could spend the night. He said this to Rosa.

“You’re a dreamer, my husband. We are poor farming people. We will always be poor farming people. Be satisfied with what you have, with what God gave you, and stop trying to be something else. You will make us unhappy. I don’t mind sleeping in a chair. What I mind is having to make a long journey to go where we never should have left.”

Francesco did not want to have this discussion. This was not the first time Rosa told him she was dissatisfied with living away from Sigillo. She always expressed it in the same way, that he was trying to become more than what his birthright dictated or allowed. If only he could be content with being a farmer and living at Masseggio, all would be well. Because he did not feel that he could tell her the real reason he had left home, and continued to stay away, there was no point in arguing with her. So he let her believe that he was a dreamer, that he was aspiring to be more than a poor farmer who worked on other people’s property in order to make them rich. At times, it comforted him to believe this himself. This was such a time.

Francesco had always been met by one or two family members when he arrived in Fossato di Vico. He never before had a welcoming party that filled the platform and overflowed into the street. All of the Notaris in Sigillo were there when they arrived, and they had taken his parents and grandparents, and many others members of his family. Rosa had planned the visit so that they arrived on Sunday, and had sent a letter telling her family that they were coming. The train pulled into the station late in the afternoon, so there was no interference with Sunday mass. It was an hour before they greeted everyone and were able to climb into one of the wagons for the ride back to Sigillo. The sun had set long ago when they arrived at Masseggio. It did not matter that they were tired from their three-day journey. There would be food and drink and singing and dancing. Their son and daughter were now home, and there was a grandson to celebrate.

When Francesco and Rosa awoke the next morning, the men were in the fields and the women were doing what they always did. They let Celeste sleep. Anna Maria brought them their breakfast and sat with them while they drank their coffee and ate their bread. Rosa had written a letter that Don Antonio had read to the entire family describing

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Celeste's baptism. Anna Maria asked her to retell the story. Is it such a large church in their town, she asked? Were there so many people who came to her grandson's christening? They wanted to come, and even talked about how they could make the journey. But, in the end, it was too much money, and Tommaso could not be away from the farm for so long.

It was tragic about Rosa's brother, Celestino, said Anna Maria. He was in America for such a short while when the accident happened. He should never have gone. He was a good farm laborer, but he had never been a miner like Rosa's brothers, or like her son. He should have stayed in Sigillo, declared Anna Maria. Rosa had cried the evening before with her mother and father over her brother's death. Her mother asked her to come to their home as soon as they were able today so that Rosa could read the letter that Celestino had written before he died. Rosa had taught Celestino to write. He had told Rosa when she was learning to read and write that when he went to America, he wanted to be able to write letters to her, and read the letters she would write to him. When Francesco and Rosa had finished their breakfast and gotten Celeste ready for the walk to his other grandparent's home, they walked into the village.

Domenico and Angela were sitting at the table when they arrived. Rosa's two brothers were working on building a new road, and they had left early that morning, in spite of their late night festivities. Angela poured cups of coffee, cut the cake she had made earlier, and gave Celeste a cookie, which held his attention briefly until he discovered his mother's cake. Angela took out the letter from Celestino that she kept in the small wooden box on the table next to their bed and handed it to Rosa. Rosa read the letter to herself. She had taught her brother to write as best she could, but she would not read his letter exactly as he had written it. "I come to America. I now here." She would read it as Celestino would have told his tale if he were sitting at the table with them. He spoke eloquently, and she would not diminish his stature as the family orator by reading his words turned to letters on paper. She felt his presence as she held the letter with her fingers and felt the stroke of his pen.

Old Forge, Pennsylvania
February 24, 1911

Farther Away from Home

Dearest Mamma and Babbo,

I am finally in America, and I am now with Enrico and Teresa and Tommaso. They live in a very nice house in what is called The Orchard in Old Forge. Their house is full now with their children and relatives and some borders. The first part of the journey on board the ship was very bad. There were high winds and storms. Almost everyone became sick from the rolling of the ship. They called it "sea sickness". I was not troubled. The men who worked on board the ship asked me if I had sailed before because I did not get sick. I told them I had never before in my life been on water. They said I should become a sailor. Maybe one day I will do that. After three days the storms stopped and the sea became flat for the last four days of the journey. Then everyone felt better. We sang and danced and told stories. Some of the men had been to America, so they told us what would happen when we landed.

When we saw the Statue of Liberty, we knew we had arrived in America. The ship came to land and we all left the ship and were led to a small boat that took us to an island with big buildings. They called it Ellis Island. We were examined by a doctor. If we passed the examination, we could be registered as immigrants entering the United States of America. We received papers and they said that we had to report to the police when we came to the place where we would live. There were some people who were told that they could not come into the country. They had sicknesses. They were sent back home on ships. This was very sad. I passed the examination, so I am here.

After the examination and registration, we were put back on the small boat and returned to the place where the ship was stopped. Everyone said good-bye and we all went in different directions. When Tommaso was home in Sigillo, he told me what I should do to get to Enrico's house in Old Forge. Take the ferry to Hoboken, he said. Then take the train to Scranton. In Scranton, walk out of the front of the station, turn left, walk down the street, over a bridge and to the New Jersey Central railroad station. Take the train to Old Forge. In Old Forge, go out of the station, turn left, walk up the hill and turn right on the first road. That leads to The Orchard. This is where Enrico and Teresa live, and where Tommaso lives when he is in America. This is where I am now. It is a fine house.

I have already been into the mines. I don't like it. Enrico and Tommaso helped me the first days to get used to being in a hole far down

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in the earth. It is cold and dark and wet all the time. I load the coal into the carts that they mine. I still do not like it, but the pay is very good I will earn enough money in one or two years, and then I will come home. I will work again with the sky above my head, or maybe I will become a sailor.

This is my first letter to you. I promise to write often. I am happy that Rosa taught me how to write so that you can hear the news from me. I hope to see both of you and Rosa and my two other brothers soon.

Your devoted son,

Celestino



Rosa's eyes are filled with tears as she finishes the letter. It was his first and last letter. He died when a piling collapsed and a section of the roof fell on him. He was picking up blocks of coal that had fallen into the base of the piling from an overturned cart. It was an accident, the kind of accident that occurs often under the earth in mines like the one where Celestino died. A cable like the one they received announcing Celestino's death could arrive any day with the same news for Tommaso or Enrico. There is a deep sadness in the Notari house.

Francesco leaves Rosa and Celeste with Rosa's parents and walks to the square. He tells them that he will be back soon, that he wants to talk to Lucca. They had seen Lucca sitting in his usual place on their way to Angela and Domenico, his black broad brimmed hat pulled down so that it covered his face. Rosa does not ask Francesco why he must talk to the person who is responsible for their exile. He offers no reason.

Lucca is alone when Francesco approaches. He is leafing through a newspaper.

"Buongiorno, signor Lucca. May I speak to you?"

"Well, it's the young and prosperous Rosati boy, home in his little village to show us all how successful he has become. Yes, sit down. What can I do for you?"

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Francesco had made up his mind that he would not be forced into an argument with the quick-tongued and irritable Lucca. He is there for another purpose.

“I understand that Maseggio is not for sale, but if it was, could you tell me how much it would cost?”

“Why punish yourself with such thoughts. There is no price that could be put on a property like Maseggio or any of the other farms here. They are not owned by people who think about their value in terms of money, but by how many people’s lives they control. It is this that gives their owners power. If they sold the properties, all they would have is money that would soon be used up, but they would lose their power. Do you understand?”

“I understand that I am powerless to do anything about making the final payment on the debt that my family has to the landowner,” says Francesco quietly but firmly.

“That’s correct, Rosati, you are powerless because the landowner has all the rights. Your family can be moved out at any time. This is how it has always been, and will always be. The landowners took the land, or, like The Church, received it from others who took it. To have it, you must take it. Are you ready to fight for it, to make a revolution in your country. That is what it will cost you, possibly your life or the lives of those who fight with you. Did anything change for the peasants as a result of the *risorgimento*? No. The Church and the Pope resisted unification, but when it came, they gave up nothing. We exchanged one set of lords for another. When wars come, the peasants are sent to fight other people like ourselves from our neighboring countries, or from far off lands. We fight so that those who are in control of your lives can continue to have their power. When the war is over, if we are still alive, we return to our positions as a slaves of the land.”

“I am not a slave in Luxembourg. I work hard and keep the money I earn. I feed my family and send the rest to you.” He could feel the back of his neck growing warm. His cheeks begin to burn.

“This is between you and your family. It is none of my business. Your family made you the Isaac, chose you as the sacrificial lamb. Let your brothers take over your responsibility. You have had it for twelve years, if I count correctly. Stay in Luxembourg as a free man.”

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“I cannot do that,” Francesco says, regaining his calm. “One day I will make the owner of Masseggio an offer that he will not be able to turn away from. We have worked this land for too many generations to simply leave it. It is ours, and we will have it.”

“Like I said, Rosati, you will have to fight for it. Money will not buy it. But you won’t be fighting me. I am a pawn just like you. It is the same hand moving both of us. I own no more than you do.”

Francesco says no more. He leaves Lucca and walks slowly back to collect Rosa and his son. He had told Lucca what he had come to say, that one day he would have what was rightfully theirs. Still, Lucca’s words would not stop ringing in his ears. We are slaves. We are powerless. He knows that Lucca was lying about being an innocent party. He is keeping the money, perhaps to one day buy his own freedom. And yet he sees clearly that Lucca is being used, just as he and his family and his departed brother-in-law and all of the other landless are being used, to feed the insatiable greed of the landed.

Rosa and her parents are sitting in the same places as when he left. Rosa says that she would like them to stay there while they are visiting in Sigillo. They would have her former room. Even though it is small, it offers more privacy than the linen curtains at Masseggio. She says that she wants to spend as much time as possible with her mother. Francesco offers no resistance to this plan. He says that he will walk back to Masseggio and return the next morning with their bags. Anna Maria is prepared for this news when Francesco returns that evening alone. The next morning, Tommaso and Anna Maria are in the wagon together with Francesco when he goes back to the Notari apartment. They all spend the day together, taking turns holding Celeste, talking about what they will do when Rosa and Francesco return for good. There is a sense that this moment must be savored as long as possible.

The two weeks pass quickly. When Rosa says her farewells to her mother and father, Angela hands her the letter from Celestino. “Keep it,” she says. “You will be able to read it. I have happier things to remind me of him.” She manages a smile for her grandson. Rosa and Celeste board the wagon, and Domenico comes up to sit with them. Francesco asks his father if he can lead the team, and Domenico takes the place next to his son on the driver’s bench. Francesco’s oldest sister, Consiglia, and

Farther Away from Home

her husband Quinto, come to wave them off, and they promise to visit them in the coming months.

“We will come for the baptism of your next child,” called Consiglia.

Rosa and Francesco return to Luxembourg. In the following year, 1913, their second child is born, a girl they name Elena. Rosa had decided that her girls would be given the names of the women in the Italian royal family, starting with the Queen of Italia and continuing with the princesses. Vittorio Emanuele III became the King of Italia when his father, Umberto, was assassinated. It was in 1900, the year Rosa turned six, and the year Francesco left Sigillo. Vittorio married Elena Petrovich, daughter of King Nicholas I of Montenegro in 1896. Their first child was a girl, Jolanda Margherita Milena Elisabetta Romana Maria, born in 1901. By the time Elena was born, the royal couple had had four children, three girls, Jolanda, Mafalda Maria Elisabetta Anna Romana, and Giovanna Elisabetta Antonia Romana Maria, and a boy, the Crown Prince Umberto.

Rosa told Francesco that she would follow the traditions of family names with their boys, but the girls would have special names. It was time their families started to use more imagination, to allow the world to come in and shine more light on their lives. If queens and princesses could have certain names, there was no reason why their children could not have these same names as well. She had no particular love for the king or queen or any of the royalty. She just thought that normal people had as much right to being treated like royalty as the rich and the nobility.

This was her book knowledge talking, thought Francesco, but he liked her thinking. He admired his wife for the way she was able to see the ordinary in an extraordinary way, like choosing names for their children. With two children and a growing number of boarders, Rosa had little time to read books. She still read the bible. She knew the stories and the characters in them by heart. Without telling her that it was Lucca who had said to him when they met in the square, that his family had chosen him to be Isaac, he had asked Rosa if she knew the story about Isaac. She told him how God instructed Abraham to take his son Isaac up to the top of the mountain and to sacrifice him, and how Abraham obeyed him. At the last moment, just before the knife would send his son to his Master, an angel stopped him. God spared his son, satisfied that

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Abraham had showed his total faith in Him. How could Lucca possibly know what is in the bible, Francesco had thought to himself.

Consiglia and Quinto kept their promise to visit. They arrived, representing the entire family, for Elena's baptism. The celebration was no less impressive than the one they had for their son. Francesco and Rosa were not sure that Consiglia and Quinto would be present at Elena's baptism, so they asked Estelle and her husband Christophe to be her Godparents. When Consiglia and Quinto did arrive, it was natural that, as family, they should have the honor, but Rosa insisted that her friends should not be left out of the ceremony and her daughter's life. So Elena had four Godparents to help to guide her through life.



Francesco had first registered with the Luxembourg authorities upon his arrival in Esch-sur-Alzette nine years previously. He returned each year to the local police station to repeat the process, to tell the authorities of his intention to remain in Luxembourg, and to pay them their bribes to keep them from drafting him into the army. It was not a large sum of money that he had to pay. There were always enough young men who were without the means to pay, or who had no useful trade or skill with which they could earn a decent wage. The army did not need Francesco or the other men who kept their country running, not until the spring of 1914 when war was imminent.

When Francesco appeared as usual on the first day of May 1914, he was told that he would have to report to the barracks in Luxembourg on the following week. There would be no exceptions. He could not pay a larger bribe because the military had decided that whatever happened, they would not be embarrassed by having an army of insubstantial size. If he did not agree to be conscripted in the army of his adopted country, he would be deported to Italia at once and all his possessions confiscated.

Francesco tried to stay calm. Maybe he could reason with these men. "What will happen to my businesses, my store and boarding house?" he asked. "War or no war, people still have to eat, work in the mines. They need some place to live."

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“If you cannot find someone to run your businesses for you while you are in the army, you will have to close them. There will be a war soon, Monsieur Rosati,” said one of the policemen. “Everyone will be affected. Do you think that any of us knows what will happen to us, to our families? We will take our chances, hope that the war will be short and that we will live through it, and, if we do, try to pick up the pieces once it is over, whoever wins. You are being called into the army. You will have to serve or leave.”

Francesco went back to his store. He mentioned nothing of what had happened to Rosa as they ate their lunch together. Celeste and Elena played on the floor, close to their mother’s feet. He returned to the store. He had to think this through. Whether he went into the Luxembourg army or returned to Italia, the result would be the same. He would lose everything he had worked for in Sardegna and Esch-sur-Alzette. There would be no possibility for satisfying Lucca’s money demands. Masseggio would be lost, and he would be no further in life than when he left home at the age of fourteen. He had married and started a family with a hope in the future, with belief that he controlled his own destiny. Today, one old and one young policeman had demonstrated that invisible men continued to control his life, men starting wars that would affect his life along with the lives of millions of others whom they had never met. How did these men get such power? How did God allow mortals to wield such power?

As Francesco mused and fretted and weighed the consequences of taking one decision or another, his friend Guillermo came into the store. This was exactly the person Francesco needed see. He hung up the “closed” sign, pulled down the blinds, drew his friend into the back room, filled two glasses with wine, and told him what had happened to him earlier in the day. Guillermo said that he expected to be given the same news when he reported next week. Maybe they would be in the same regiment, he said with a laugh. Francesco told his friend that he could not join the Luxembourg army, and he could not return to Italia. He had to go to a place that would not be involved in the war, where he could continue to support his family.

“This will be a war that will draw in all of Europe. Few if any places will escape. Perhaps the Swiss will not fight, but neither will they allow others who would not fight to enter their country. The northern

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countries, like Sweden and Norway, may also stay out of the conflict. Many of their own people have already left those countries because they are poor and starving. You will not be able to find work even if they let you enter. Your best choice is America, the United States of America, not Canada, because the Canadians will have to fight with the British. You have told me that you have family in America. There are mines where you could work as a last resort. You have not forgotten how to handle a pick and shovel, have you Francesco? Go to America.”

“What will you do, my friend?” asked Francesco.

“My family is gone. This is now my home. If they tell me that I am too old to become a soldier, then I will continue to work in the mines. Whoever gets here first, it will not matter. They will need the coal that I dig out for them. If they put me into a uniform, then I will do my best to stay alive and not shoot anyone. Do unto others as you would have others do unto you. When it comes to killing, that is my motto.”

A few more glasses of wine were drunk before the two men parted. Francesco would miss his friend. He offered excellent council. His first advice had been good up to now. He would follow his second suggestion. He would leave as soon as he could put everything in order and travel to the United States of America.

When Francesco climbed the stairs to their apartment, he could see that Rosa was upset. Why had he closed the store? What was he doing drinking in the middle of the afternoon? Was it his friend Guillermo again making him neglect his business and customers? Francesco could have used a clearer head to meet these questions from his wife. She had proved to be both strong-willed and strong-headed, not unlike her mother. She would now have to be very brave, he thought, as he prepared to tell her what he planned to do. Still, he could not tell her the real reason that lay behind his resolve.

He explained what had happened at the police station in the morning, that he was given two options, to go into the Luxembourg army or return to Italia. Fighting in the Luxembourg army was sure death since he would first be put up against the invader, and, if he survived, he would be put into the front lines to fight on the side of the conqueror. Returning to Italia could mean eventually fighting with or against the Germans, depending on which side Italia finally chose to ally themselves. Neither of those options looked very promising. He would be a burden to his

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family, rather than the support that he had been for the past years. He still had not saved enough money to buy Masseggio or any other farm in Sigillo.

Francesco told Rosa that he had decided to travel to America. That was what he was discussing with Guillermo. He would take whatever money and possessions with him that he could carry.

“The rest will go back to Sigillo with you and the children,” he told her. “We will have to leave most of what we have, but we would suffer the same fate if I chose to carry a weapon and die for them.”

“Why cannot we come with you? Why do we have to separate? We could make the trip together. My brothers, Enrico and Tommaso, are already there. We could stay with Enrico and Teresa, your cousin. Why must I go back to Sigillo without you? How will I explain what you have done? We will be shamed, Francesco. Let us all go together,” Rosa pleaded.

Francesco was not prepared for an argument. He had made up his mind that he would make this trip on his own, get settled into a business in America, and then send for his family. He saw this path clearly. Others had done it, leaving from Sigillo. This would be no different. The only difference was that he was fleeing.

“We cannot leave together. The police would capture us immediately and deport us officially. This would make it impossible to travel into Italia without bringing attention to myself as someone who would not fight in the army. I would be made a soldier before we could get back to Sigillo. No Rosa, I will go alone. As soon as I have set up my business, I will send for you. In the meantime, I will send whatever money I earn to you and the children, and to my family.”

“I will not stay in Sigillo any longer than it takes to book passage on a boat for me and the children. I do not intend to be one of those women who is visited by her husband every few years to get pregnant with another child and who lives on the money he sends in between the visits. And why do you continue to send money to your family?” cried Rosa. “The farm is doing well. You have brothers, uncles, cousins who are working there? If we should send money anywhere it should be to my parents. They are poor, and their sons are leaving. One has already died trying to make a better life. Why, Francesco?”

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Rosa had just entered a chamber that she had thought many times before of approaching, but had always turned back. This was a place that he had always maintained for himself. She was now inside. Without even knocking, she had opened the door and walked straight to the center. She was standing squarely in front of her husband waiting for his reply.

Francesco knew that one day he would tell Rosa the reason. Every person at Masseggio knew why he had left. They carried the secret with them, and they would never tell anyone. They knew that if they did tell someone outside of the house, even someone they trusted with their life, the secret would be released without control and it would find its way back to Lucca. Then their home would be taken away from them, and the family scattered to the wind. Fear and love are two powerful motives for burying knowledge. Could he trust his wife to keep the secret in the same way that his family kept it? Could he convince her that if she possessed the secret that she would never use it to exercise her will against his family for whatever reason? He was not sure at this moment, even after five years of marriage in which they shared everything, in which they had shown their love and devotion to each other without any reserve.

And yet, he could not continue to avoid the question or to lie to his wife. She deserved to know why he was taking an action that seemed neither noble nor intelligent. It was one thing to avoid fighting for an adopted country, but it was quite another to place your entire family at risk because you believed that the consequences for yourself were dangerous.

“Rosa, I am going to tell you something that you must promise not to repeat to anyone, not to our children, not to your parents or brothers, not to anyone. It is the reason I am doing what I have decided to do, and it is also the reason why I continue to send money home to my father. Will you promise?”

“Yes, I promise.”

“This cannot be an idle promise, Rosa. I must be sure that you will never tell anyone, or else I will not tell you. I will still leave for America, and you will have to decide yourself whether you will follow.”

“Yes, I promise never to repeat it to anyone.”

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When he had told her, she took his hand gently in hers.

“I always knew that something was pushing you. I have tried many times to guess what or who it was. You cannot imagine how many stories I made up in my mind. Now that I know the truth, I share your burden. It is safe with me. Let us make plans for leaving this place that has been our temporary home. It has been good to you for twelve years, and good to us for the past five. It is time to go.”

They slept well that night. They would get no sleep for the next few days. Francesco confided in Stephane and Christophe, and they had called Prêtre Michel to help with getting Francesco out of Luxembourg and into France. Francesco packed only the bare necessities. He needed space to carry as much money as he could gather. The rest would go with Rosa to Italia to keep Lucca satisfied for as long as it would take for him to send money back from America. Rosa had given him the letter from Celestino. This would be his guide. Although he could not read it himself, he had memorized the words that Rosa had read and re-read to him many times during the past days.

Charlotte, Estelle and Christine helped Rosa to pack whatever was most valuable in a few trunks that she would try to take with her when the police came looking for Francesco. They took the rest and packed it in boxes that they would ship to them in America, or wherever they settled, as soon as the war was over and it was safe.

On the night before the day that Francesco was scheduled to appear back at the police station to become a soldier for Luxembourg, Père Michel and Francesco left the apartment together. Francesco had earlier said his good-byes to Rosa and his two small children. Elena was too young to understand, but Celeste listened carefully to what his father said. He told him that he was going on a journey, and that he and Elena would soon follow with their mother. He should always listen to what she told him, and that he should help her with his sister.

Stephane and Christophe carried the boxes down to their wagon, and after many tears and embraces, Charlotte, Estelle and Christine left Rosa alone in her apartment with her children. Charlotte returned to her apartment, and the two sisters joined their husbands in the wagon for the journey home. They would soon need to prepare themselves and their families for the coming storm.

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Bread and Tears

THE FRENCH BORDER WAS HEAVILY GUARDED. The plan was simple. Francesco would put on the friar's robe that Pêre Michel had brought with him. They would ride the cart through the border crossing on the northwestern edge of Esch-sur-Alzette. Christophe had arranged for papers that would get Francesco through and out of France, Stephane had converted most of Francesco's money to French francs, and Pêre Michel had borrowed the identity papers from one of the brothers in the local monastery, along with two habits. He wore one, and Francesco the other. Francesco would use the papers to get over to the other side of the Luxembourg-France border. The cart moved slowly through the deserted streets and came to a stop at the newly erected guardhouse.

Pêre Michel was a careful man. His clothes were always spotless, his collars unstained. He did not sweat under his priestly garments. Whenever he removed his black priest's hat, his full head of chestnut brown hair was neatly combed, and the line from the brim neatly formed a celestial crown. The nails at the ends of his small fingers were free of the smallest speck of dirt, ready to bless or place a host on the tongue of a communicant. Francesco had been a generous parishioner since he and Rosa attended their first mass in his church. When both Celeste and Elena were born, Francesco had made a special gift to Saint Joseph, and Pêre Michel had shown his gratitude at the baptisms and also by visiting the young family, especially after returning from one of his many pilgrimages to Roma when he could offer them a relic.

Pêre Michel did not look at all neat and tidy this night. He looked like a poor, weary monk. Helping Francesco escape was something that the young priest truly wanted to do, and he needed to be convincing in his role.

"It's very late for you two holy men to be out. Where are you going at this time of the evening?" demanded the border guard.

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“Our Abbot has sent us on an urgent mission of mercy. One of our brothers has taken ill while on a pilgrimage to Lourdes. He is in Rossange. We hope to be able to carry him home so that he may die in peace in his cell among the brothers with whom he has spent most of his life,” said Père Michel while praying silently for forgiveness for his lie.

“Your papers!” the guard commanded.

The guard looked at Francesco to see if he fit the written description on the identity papers that the government had recently issued to all residents of the country.

“You’re very quiet. Are you hiding something?” said the guard to Francesco.

“He took a vow of *silencio* when he joined the order. He had a very difficult life, we were told, but since he became a brother, he has been at complete peace,” offered Père Michel, hoping that he would not be struck dead at that moment since he would be sent straight to hell for these falsehoods. He prayed silently for God to allow him to live long enough to complete his penance. He would confess as soon as he was back at his church.

“I don’t like all of these questions either, especially when it comes to holy men like you two. We have to make sure that all able-bodied men go into uniform and fight our enemies. I am sure you understand.”

“Yes,” said Père Michel, “but it is painful to think of all those young men dying. I will pray for you, my son.”

“Thank you, Brother. May God speed you on your journey.”

And with that, Francesco and Père Michel crossed the border to France and continued unhindered all the way to Rossange.



The police came for Francesco the next morning after he failed to appear at the police station at the appointed time. Rosa was ready. She had been up all night, and at dawn, she went down to feed Cocco, her constant friend for almost the entire time she had lived in Esch-sur-Alzette. Cocco lived in the garden, and slept in a house that Francesco had built for him that was large enough for a large dog. He never barked. He was a very happy dog, greeting Rosa each morning with his warm,

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outstretched tongue when she came to him with his food. He was gentle with the children when they played in the small patch of grass amidst the sea of vegetables and fruit that grew in their oasis. Charlotte had promised Rosa to take care of her friend until she and her family returned. As Rosa gently stroked the soft patch of fur on the top of Cocco's head and ran her hand down his nose, she knew that this was the last time she would see him.

Charlotte had come back early that morning. She and Rosa sat at Rosa's table. The children played. Their bags and trunk were packed and were close to the door. The police spoke to Charlotte, who explained to Rosa that she would be taken to the station and placed on a train to Italia. Charlotte said to the police that Rosa understood. The police asked where Francesco had gone, and, without lying, Charlotte said that she did not know. That part of the plan had been kept between the men. Rosa did not know either, she said. They helped carry the bags and the trunk down the stairs. Rosa gathered up the children. She and Charlotte embraced one last time, and they left.

On this, her fourth trip through the mountains of southern France and northern Italia, Rosa was too absorbed in what would happen when she returned to Sigillo without her husband to be aware of the scenery passing outside the train window. If she had observed, she would have seen troops in camps along the way. Preparations for the coming war were well underway. Rosa saw nothing, just the train arriving in Fossato di Vico, the wagon ride over the hills and down into Sigillo, the looks on the faces of her mother and father, her brothers and her in-laws at Masseggio. She took herself through each step, thought about what she would say, how she would act and react. No one should know where Francesco was until she had made her plans to leave for America.

She decided that Celeste would stay with his grandparents at Masseggio while she and Elena would spend their nights in town with her parents. This would perhaps be the only opportunity for their son to become attached to Masseggio, to become one with the stones and timbers, to make its history part of his own being. If one day he would return to become *il capo di Masseggio*, to be the family head, he would have to know Masseggio as well as the others. It would be painful to be separated from her son, but she was sure that he would think it a splendid idea, an adventure, so she would have no trouble convincing him. And

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Tommaso and Anna Maria will be very happy to have their grandson living with them and the rest of the family. If she and Francesco and the children were living in Sigillo, as they should have been doing, they would all be at Masseggio.

Rosa with Elena and Celeste arrived in Fossato di Vico in the middle of the day. She carried Elena while Celeste, almost three years old, walked close by her side. She asked for help with the bags and trunk from a porter. He led them to the place where on her previous visits either her father, one of her brothers, or Francesco's father, or one of his brothers had been waiting. After agreeing on a price for the journey to Sigillo, the driver lifted the luggage aboard his wagon, helped Rosa up and then handed her Elena and Celeste.

Rosa explained as much as she could to her parents. They seemed to understand, but at the same time, did not seem to care why she was home, just that she was there. Francesco was taking care of their affairs, she explained. He was sure that the war would start any day and he wanted them to be safe. Yes, it was a long journey for them to take on their own, but they were well looked after. She asked her father to take them to Masseggio so that she could relate the same story to the Rosatis.

With all of the Rosati family gathered around her and the children, Rosa re-told the story about why she left alone with the children. It was agreed that Rosa would work at Masseggio each day, and the family was very pleased that Celeste would be staying with them. Rosa said that she wanted to send a telegram to Francesco so that he would know that they were all safe. Tommaso took them back to town in his wagon. Rosa left the children with her mother and walked to the square where her cousin occupied a small corner of the post office with his telegraph machine. It wasn't to Esch-sur-Alzette that Rosa directed her telegram, but to her brother in Old Forge.

Enrico. Arrived in Sigillo. Sending a package to you. It will arrive soon. Rosa.

If Francesco had already arrived at their home, her brother would understand. If he had not, he would learn soon enough the meaning of her mysterious message.



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Père Michel saw Francesco on to the train and away from the station before he turned to make his own journey home to Esch-sur-Alzette, where he would quickly confess his sins of the past night. The train wagon was full, but Francesco was alone with his thoughts. What had happened to him during these last few days, and what was going to happen now? He had put his full trust in the Luxembourg authorities to see Rosa and his two children safely out of the country and back to Sigillo. These people had been his friends. They would not turn against him now, in spite of what he had done. What had he done? Saved his life to save the Rosati family in Sigillo. Was that so bad? He would not let himself think that his wife and children would come to harm because of his actions. The Lecroix women and the girls' husbands would not let anything go wrong. But trouble would start when they were back in Sigillo, of this he was certain. Would it be the *carabinieri* who would start asking questions and try to get him to return to Italia to fight in the army? Would it be Lucca who would make trouble when he learned that Rosa's husband was far out of reach and perhaps had grown tired of paying his bribes?

Rosa had to leave Italia as soon as possible, before Italia got involved in the fighting. He had told her this just before he left. He hoped she would listen.

Daylight was breaking as the train entered Gare de l'Est. No one had yet asked to see his papers. He had left his religious identity back on the train. He was now Francesco Vincenzo Arcangelo Rosati once again, traveling to Le Havre to take a boat to America. He had just arrived from Italia, he would tell them when they asked, with Mondovi as the last place he had lived before crossing into France. His twelve years in the Duchy of Luxembourg were being covered, but not erased, like a painter reusing a canvas on which he had earlier painted an imperfect image. Francesco was painting over his life's canvas to start again. There was nothing wrong with the last one. In fact, it was ideal except for Rosa's constant yearnings to return to their home village.

Crossing Paris in a tram that would take him to Gare Saint Lazare, where the train would leave for Le Havre, Francesco saw a city that did not at all look like a war was about to start. It had rained during the night, and the air was as fresh as air can be in any city the size of Paris. Smoke drifted from the city's millions of chimneys no matter what time

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of the day or year. If the fires were not needed for warmth, as on this late spring day, they were needed for cooking. The smoke mixed with the smells of waste from the mass of people and animals and production. Esch-sur-Alzette also did not smell sweet, but it was a tiny city in comparison to the sprawling Paris, and its smells could never compete with those of such a great capital.

Francesco did not feel a stranger while he moved among the Parisienne. His command of the French language was quite good, having spoken it each day since he arrived in Luxembourg. With his fair skin and red hair, he could have passed for a visitor to the city from the countryside, Normandy perhaps, looking for a market for his products. People were very helpful when he asked for assistance or directions. *Merci. Merci beau coup*, he would say, and smile. He always smiled. They would smile back.

He arrived in Le Havre in the early morning. He saw the ships lined up at the dock, a dozen or more, the ships that would take their passengers to England, Portugal and Spain, to the African Coast, and to America. He had not been on a ship since he returned home from Sardegna. He had hoped that would be the last he would see of the sea. Now he was about to board an even larger vessel on a journey that would last seven days, if the weather was good, and longer, he was told, if the weather turned foul. God had made the earth in six days, he thought. Much can happen in seven days, and he would be on a ship in the middle of the vast ocean. This was a good time to travel, he was assured by one of the men on the train from Paris. The man, Giovanni Cerino from San Giorgio, was going back to America after a short visit with his wife and children in Genoa. He was taking his oldest son Lorenzo with him. He lived in New York City and worked at the Fulton Fish Market. His son would begin working there with him. Giovanni said that he preferred sailing from Le Havre, rather than Napoli because it meant fewer days aboard the ship. Francesco agreed.

From the railroad station it was a short walk to the piers. Francesco, with Giovanni and Lorenzo and the other men who had come from Paris, walked along the Quai Colbert and across a short bridge to the Terminal de la Citadelle. Giovanni led the way to the ticket hall. He and his son had tickets on the ship La Lorraine leaving the next day. Francesco spoke to the ticket seller in French, which surprised his new friends.

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There was space on the same ship, said the ticket seller. He asked Francesco if he wanted a cabin or a berth in steerage. He said that he would take the same kind of space as Giovanni and Lorenzo. Steerage it was, then. He received a ticket for one place on board the ship La Lorraine departing from Le Havre at 10.00 a.m. on Saturday, June 27, 1914.

Giovanni knew of a hotel a short walk from the terminal, on Rue de Bretagne. It was small and run by an elderly woman and her son. They could have their supper there. The mother was an excellent cook, said Giovanni.

“It will be the last good meal you will have for the next week,” he warned Francesco and Lorenzo, “and even if I wanted to eat the food they serve on board the ship, I could not keep it down for more than a few minutes. Make sure you eat well tonight. That’s my advice.”

There was one thing that Francesco needed to do before he went to the hotel. He asked the ticket seller where he could post a letter. Across the hall was an office where letters and packages were readied for shipping to other ports, and where they arrived by ship and sorted for delivery. Francesco asked in a most polite voice whether anyone would be so kind to write a letter of a few lines to his wife. A young man obliged. Rosa would learn the name of the ship, the date of sailing and the destination. They would see the post office mark in Sigillo from where the letter was mailed. They would know immediately that he was on his way to America. But by the time the letter arrived, he would already be on the sea or at his destination.

Francesco did not sleep that night. He lay awake thinking one minute about what he would do when he arrived in America, and another minute whether he should get on the train back to Sigillo the next morning rather than boarding the ship. He had been so sure of his decision when he told Rosa, and ever since—until now, when he was about to follow through with it. Once he was on board the ship tomorrow, he thought, he would not be able to change his mind. If war did break out, as it certainly seemed it would, maybe it would not be safe for Rosa and the children to travel. They could be separated for years, perhaps forever. If the war came to Sigillo, he would not be there to protect them. How would he get money to Rosa and the family to continue to pay Lucca? There were no answers, just more questions and more doubts.

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When the first glimmer of daylight appeared, Francesco left his bed and dressed, trying not to disturb Giovanni and Lorenzo. Giovanni had followed his own advice and had eaten and drunk very well the evening before. Lorenzo and Francesco had helped Giovanni up the stairs and gotten him into bed. The ship would not sail until late morning, so there was no need to hurry. Francesco just did not want to continue to lie in bed and wrestle with his thoughts.

He walked down the stairs carrying his bag. He always kept it close, but he was not overly protective of his bag. Everything of value was strapped to his waste and thighs. He would be sleeping in his clothes for the next week, but this was not so unusual for laborers. Francesco had become used to another kind of life during the years that he and Rosa were in Esch-sur-Alzette. After an hour or so had passed, the elderly hotel owner came into the room where Francesco had placed himself. She was startled to see a man sitting upright in her armchair fast asleep. Francesco awoke, also startled. They both laughed.

“My husband sailed on one of those ships,” she said, “before they were steam. He was going to find gold in America. He died before he could pay for his return ticket. Are you going there to look for gold?”

“Work,” Francesco heard himself saying. “I want to work. When I have enough money to buy a gold watch, I will return home with my family.”

He had made up his mind. He was going to America. The other guests came into the room. They ate their breakfasts, walked to the ship in the bright late June sunlight, and went on board.



Before they went on board they had to stand before the ship’s purser to show their paid tickets, register and give him what he needed to fill in the manifest.

“They don’t ask many questions here. They save that for when we arrive in America. You have to stand there and tell them everything about yourself,” Giovanni had warned Francesco. “Don’t lie about where you are going in America, and if you don’t give them the right name for your closest relative, they will never know what happened to you if you die.” Francesco had already decided that he would not make it easy for

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the authorities in Italia or Luxembourg to find him, although he was sure they would not take the trouble to do so. And he would not tell them that he had a small fortune for a poor man strapped to his body underneath his shirts.

Giovanni knew the way to their place on the ship. They walked down the stairs as far as they could go and into a large open room. There were small round windows high up on the walls that let in light. When the ship was in port, they could be opened to let in air as well. When the ship was on sea, the windows would be sealed shut. Francesco and his two new friends found cots along one side of the room that they would share with twenty-seven other men on their voyage across the Atlantic. Among them there were two boys, ages nine and seven, traveling with their uncle. The boys' last name was Sabatini, the same as his mother's. Their uncle, Pietro Giovannini, was taking them from their home in Marliano to their father and mother who were already in America. He could see no relationship between the boys' father and Francesco's mother. Others on the ship included Faustino Del Longo from Valle di Cadore; Sebastiani Zago from Segusino; and Giuseppe Boccaleoni from Sassari. They were all going to America to find work, to save money and return home as soon as possible. The war was coming and it would be too difficult to cross the borders into Germany, France and Luxembourg. It would be safer in America, they all agreed.

Before the ship left port, Francesco lay down on his cot and fell asleep. He slept for most of the first two days, tired to the bone, staying awake only long enough to eat the hard bread and soup that they were fed. On the third day he ventured above deck, but quickly returned to their quarters when he saw only water in every direction, even though the sea was perfectly calm. They talked about their homes in Italia, and little was said about what they would find when they reached their destination, New York.

On the eighth morning, Lorenzo shook Francesco awake. It was still dark when they entered New York harbor.

"We're here!" shouted Lorenzo. "Wake up! Wake up!"

The lights of the great city combined with the glow of a late summer moon to give the ship full of immigrants a first view of their new home. Through the early morning mist they could see the silhouette of buildings taller than they had ever seen. Further in the distance, spotlights shone

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on the Statue of Liberty. This, they had been told, was the sign that they were in America. Francesco, like everyone else, was overwhelmed. Yesterday was Independence Day, Giovanni had said, July 4th. If they had arrived a day earlier they would have seen the celebrations with fireworks bursting over Liberty's head. Francesco had never seen fireworks, and he was not sure that he wanted to either. He was happy that they arrived after the celebrations were over.

The ship stopped and eventually everyone got off. Tying the ship to the pier and moving all the passengers down the stairs seemed to take forever. Giovanni had his papers for entry into America, but everyone else who were making their first entry in the country had to get on to smaller boats to go over to Ellis Island where they would be asked questions and examined by a doctor. Some people would not be able to enter the country, Giovanni had told them, if they had diseases. Others would be sent back if they were penniless and had no family or friends to care for them. Francesco did not think he had any diseases, and he was not penniless, which they would see when he was examined, but he was still worried.

When they arrived on the island and led into the buildings, Francesco felt a sense of panic. People in military uniforms were shouting in a language he could not understand. It was clear that they were giving orders—Come here; Go there; Take off your clothes; Do this; Don't do that—but he could not understand them. He looked at the men around him, and copied their movements. They were doing the same as he.

They were lined up in front of a desk where they were asked questions. This is what Giovanni had told him about when they boarded the ship. He would not give the name of his brother-in-law, Enrico Notari, where he would be staying, and he would not tell them where he had last lived. He gave them the first name of his uncle, Franco Sabatini, and the last name of his cousin Luigi Rosati living on Main Street in Old Forge. He told the man writing down the information that this was his brother. "Why doesn't he spell his name the same way as you do?" asked the man sitting at the desk. "Non capisco," answered Francesco, bewildered, and the man left it as *Rosato, Franco, brother* on the manifest. When the man asked where he had last been before leaving for America, Francesco told him that his last address was Mondovi, Italia.

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He would not make it easy for the authorities to find him if they would force him to become a soldier.

After some men in white coats poked at him in many different places, he was shoved into a group of men who were dressing. Lorenzo and the two young boys were among this group. They were led back to the boat that took them to the island, and then back to a pier on what the men were told was a bigger island called Manhattan.

Giovanni was waiting for them. During the journey, he had asked Francesco to come to his apartment. There was a place for him to sleep, and he could rest and get some food into his stomach before he left for Pennsylvania. It would also give him a chance to see New York. Maybe he would like to stay there. Many of the men and women who came from Italia never left the island once they landed. There was a large Italian community in the city, as well as in the boroughs of Brooklyn, Bronx, Queens and Staten Island. Those that came found a place to stay, a place to work, and they were among countrymen. They were also closer to the boats that would eventually take them home. They would all go home one day, Giovanni told Francesco.

“*Grazie mille, amico mio,*” said Francesco. “I have my traveling suit on, and if I take it off I may not want to put it back on again. I will visit you some day. I will come to the fish market where you work and ask for you. *Che Dio ti benedica,* God bless you for all your help on this journey. You helped to make it all very easy. I will always be grateful.”

Giovanni pointed the way to the ferry across the river to Hoboken, New Jersey where Francesco would start the next part of his journey, the train ride to Scranton. He had the piece of paper from Rosa’s brother, Celestino, with the directions and the crude map.

Francesco left his friends at the pier. He would visit them one day, he promised himself. He was alone again, in a country where he could not speak the language. He wished that he could read and write. He remembered leaving the station in Luxembourg over a decade ago. Everything was unfamiliar. He matched the letters on the paper in his hand with a sign and an arrow pointing toward the river. H·O·B·O·K·E·N. *Take the ferry across the Hudson River to Ho·Bō·Ken,* Rosa’s brother Celestino had written in his last letter. He had traded some American coins for his French francs. *Don’t let them cheat you,*

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Giovanni had warned him. *It's two of these coins for the ferry*, he had said.

Again he was on the water. He didn't recognize any of the faces from the ship on which he had just recently crossed the Atlantic. There were new sorts of faces, though many of them had his coloring of face and hair. There were also people with dark skin and black, curly hair, and people with yellow skin, narrow eyes and jet black straight hair. He had seen some of these people in Luxembourg and in Paris. He wondered what made them look different and where they came from.

The ferry deposited all of its passengers on the pier, and most of them walked toward the building that had the same letters above the entrance as on the paper. H·O·B·O·K·E·N, and something else. He walked to the place where others walked to buy a ticket.

"Scaan-toen," said Francesco. He had practiced this word.

"One dolla, fitty cents," said the ticket agent.

Francesco handed him one of the coins. *These are one dollar coins*, Giovanni had told him. *Give the man one of them for a ticket on the train. Give him another one if he doesn't look satisfied.* The ticket agent didn't look satisfied after one coin, so Francesco fed him another. A ticket and another coin passed under the steel grate that separated the agent from his customers.

"Next."

"Scaan-toen?" asked Francesco, unwilling to give up his place before he had been pointed in the correct direction.

The ticket agent pointed toward one side of the hall, and indicated that he was finished with this particular customer.

"NEXT!"

S·C·R·A·N·T·O·N. Francesco matched the letters with signs on the walls. He walked toward the door that had the same letters. What would he do when he ran out of words on Celestino's letter, he thought.

"Scaan-toen?" he asked to someone with a uniform when he reached the platform.

"Yeah, Scranton. Leaves in an hour."

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Francesco did not understand the last part, but he was now sure he was at the correct place for making the next leg of his journey. He sat on a bench with his suitcase next to him. It was small and contained very little. Rosa had packed most of what they would take from Esch-sur-Alzette. He took nothing of value, except what he was wearing around his body. His money was still there. He would have to find a way to exchange it for American money.

The platform was gradually populated with other travelers. He heard a few familiar words in German and Italian. It was a southern dialect, from the region around Napoli, he thought. He had worked with someone from Avellino during his first year in the mine in Esch-sur-Alzette. He understood most of what they said. It was a large family, father and mother, a son and his wife and their children, and a daughter with her husband and their children. They were going to visit the son of the older couple.

Everyone boarded the train when men in uniforms opened the doors to the passenger wagons. It was the Delaware Lackawanna and Western Railroad that connected Hoboken, New Jersey to Buffalo, New York. Scranton was a main stop along the way. The train steamed out of the terminal and through the back side of Hoboken and many other smaller towns until it was in the countryside. Two hours out of Hoboken and the train was winding through mountains. It reminded Francesco of the Ardennes in France and Luxembourg. The hillsides were forested, not clipped clean to the bone by ravenous sheep, as they were in the area around Sigillo. They crossed a large river and the train skirted its edge on a steep embankment for a short while before it labored up a steep slope and eventually slid into a village with more than a few houses. The conductor said something which Francesco did not hear. He leaned across the aisle and said to one his neighbor, "Scaan-toen?"

"No, not yet," his neighbor replied. "Another hour or so," he added and smiled. "I'll tell you when we get there."

This kindness was wasted on Francesco, except he did understand No, and he did appreciate the smile. He would wait until he could match the letters on the paper with the station sign.

The train moved slowly up over the mountains. No one lives here, thought Francesco. Like most of the people he knew, those who had never been to America, he had his own ideas about how it would look:

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Every city would have tall buildings just like New York; coal breakers would stretch as far as the eye could see at the edges of cities; there would be no farms or forests until very long distances from the coast. It was not like that, of course. He could see that now. It didn't look that much different from places he had seen on the other side of the ocean. Why would it be better here, he thought? Why do so many people want to come here? He wanted to find the answer to this question.

The mid-summer sun was still high in the sky when the DL&W train began its descent into the Lackawanna Valley and Scranton station. It curled along Roaring Brook with its many falls and pools, a tiny but powerful stream. The locomotive huffed and puffed into the platform area filling the canopy with thick billowing clouds of anthracite-fed smoke. Francesco could see the sign clearly set into the green tiles lining the exterior wall of the station. SCRANTON.

His neighbor called over to him, "We're here."

"Tank yu," returned Francesco. He had spoken his first words in English, he thought.

Many of the passengers left the train, and an equal number got on board. Francesco made his way through the crowd and into the main waiting room of the station. It was different from the stations he had seen on his trips in Italia, France and Luxembourg. It was both smaller and larger. It looked very new. He stopped in the middle of the room and looked up. Light came through stained glass in the ceiling. Stained glass belonged in a church, he thought.

As a porter passed, a man with very dark skin wearing a green coat with yellow braiding and a green hat with a black brim, Francesco said in a questioning tone, "Olda Forja?"

"What language yo speakun', mista? What's an 'olda forja'? I cain't help yo if yo cain't speak enlish."

"Non far caso a quello che dice quello li. He doesn't have time to help people who are here to take his job."

Francesco turned to see a man, somewhat older than he, who was standing with the family he had seen on the platform in Hoboken. He spoke Italian with the same accent as the family. A young girl, about ten, was holding his hand. He was dressed in a suit with a vest, a white shirt

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and a tie. He wore a straw hat with a wide brim. A silver chain hung from one pocket of the vest through a button hole over to a pocket on the opposite side. He owned a watch, thought Francesco. He must be important.

Francesco did not understand what he meant about taking the worker's job. He did not want to work in a railroad station carrying people's bags.

"I want to take the train to Olda Forja," replied Francesco, happy to find someone with whom he could communicate in his own language. "My brother-in-law lives there. I want to open a grocery store like the one I had in Luxembourg before we had to leave."

It was the other man's turn to not understand.

"Follow us to the trolley," he said, offering a smile. "I will show you when to get off and where to take the train to Old Forge."

They walked out of the station and almost immediately on to a trolley. It clanged down what seemed to be the main street of the city, past stores and picture theaters, and then past a large produce area that was closing up for the day. They crossed over a deep ravine on a concrete bridge. There was a river far below. Francesco saw the station before it was pointed out to him by the man.

As Francesco left the trolley, he thanked him and said, "I am Francesco Rosati. I hope one day I can return your kindness."

"I am Michele Sena. I hope one day to visit you in your grocery store in Old Forge."

Francesco knew that he was on the last part of his long journey. He remembered what the paper said about it. It would take only one-half hour. There would be a few stops along the way. When the train comes to Old Forge, the conductor will say the name very loud. He should leave the station, walk up the road to the left, and then turn on the first street on the right. That would lead to the house where Enrico and Teresa lived with their family, and where Enrico's brother, Tommaso was staying while he was in America.

The train arrived in Old Forge, and the conductor announced its arrival so that he could be heard back in Scranton. Francesco followed the mental directions. After he turned into The Orchard, a few hundred

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meters from the main road he saw his cousin Teresa. She was walking with a young girl along the side of their wooden house. Three men, Enrico, Tommaso and someone else he did not recognize sat on the stairs leading up to the entrance door. His cousin and brothers-in-law all saw him at the same time. He was tired from his long journey. They were tired from a long day's work. But they ran as fast as their tired, aching bodies could carry them. They ran to greet each other. Explanations for this surprise visit could wait until the tears were wiped away and they had caught their breaths following the hugs and kisses.



Teresa (Rosati) Notari and her husband Enrico Notari with their children Pietro (sitting), Angelina (between them), Erminia, Orlando and Dusala (behind left to right).

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Enrico drew from his pocket the telegram he had received from his sister a week earlier. He still did not understand why Francesco was standing in front of them, but he now understood the meaning of the words Rosa had written. The next day, while the men worked, Teresa walked to the village center with her cousin to send a return telegram.

Rosa. Package arrived. Enrico.



Lucca saw Rosa walking out of the village toward Masseggio. It was a hot, early August day. She was carrying her daughter. Lucca had not seen Francesco. Did he send his family home because of the troubles in Luxembourg? Lucca had read in the newspaper that very morning that Germany now occupied the tiny country. The German Chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, claimed that it was purely a defensive measure, to block the most likely invasion path for the French. The French President, Raymond Poincaré, argued that his country had no intention of attacking their neighbor, and if they did, they would not involve the neutral and defenseless Duchy of Luxembourg. Italia's Prime Minister Giolitti claimed that they would remain neutral since its Triple Alliance ally, Austria-Hungary, had not been attacked but itself declared war.

Was Rosa's husband now in the Luxembourg army, fighting for his adopted country? If so, how would the family afford to keep up their payments? He decided to approach Rosa with his question. He drove his wagon alongside her.

“Signora Rosati, buongiorno.”

Rosa, who was now aware that she was in the presence of her husband's, and therefore her own enemy, simply returned the greeting and continued walking.

“Could I offer you a ride to Masseggio?” Lucca offered, trying to sound as friendly as was appropriate.

“Grazie, Signor Lucca, but no. I enjoy the walk in the fresh air after life in the city.”

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“Are you home for a short holiday? I have not seen your husband. And now that Germany has invaded Luxembourg, it may be difficult for him to leave.”

Rosa tried to hide her shock at the news of the German invasion. Stay calm, she told herself. Do not let him know what you know. During the train journey home, she had prepared for this question that would inevitably come from the villagers, and especially from this man. She had explained to her parents and to her in-laws what Francesco had told her to say. No one was to know that he had left for America, not until she was safely there with him.

“He will be here soon. He is taking care of our affairs. I will tell him that you have asked for him as soon as he arrives home. I understand that you have business to discuss. Good day, Signor Lucca.”

Lucca understood that he would get no more from Francesco’s wife on this day. As long as the payments kept coming, he didn’t care where her husband was, or whether he was alive or dead. He looked at Rosa as she walked away. “I understand that you have business to discuss,” she had said. Did she know the nature of this business? She had grown into a handsome woman, he thought. He remembered her as a pretty young girl walking to church with Domenico and Angela Notari when he had just arrived in Sigillo. She was the same age then as his daughter. His daughter would be her age now, perhaps married and with a small child of her own.

How different life would have been for me if my family were still alive. I would be a grandfather, and my son would be sitting next to me in our tailor shop. I have forced myself to substitute love of money for personal love. I try to make others as miserable as I am myself, and, with some, I succeed. So far, I have failed with the Rosatis. They seem to gain strength from the hardships I have caused them. I could relent, release them and perhaps all the others from my grip. Not yet. Maybe one day if I am able to forgive myself. But not before. Now, my only comfort is that I do not believe in Hell.

During this summer Rosa rose every morning before dawn with her mother and father and two brothers. She drank her coffee with warm milk and ate a piece of bread that had been toasted over the fire. Then she woke her daughter, fed her and made ready for her day at Masseggio. She and Elena walked out of the village, past the cemetery where she

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stopped, made the sign of the cross and said a short prayer for her deceased relatives and her brother, whose grave she hoped to see very soon.

They continued down the road and up the path leading to the house. She would spend the days doing what was needed. Tommaso's next oldest brother's wife was in charge of assigning the women their daily chores. This was a way of spreading the power evenly among the family members in order to keep the peace. It had worked for over four hundred years. There was never any talk of feuds among the brothers' families. Some days she would help with the cooking, other days she would work in the vegetable garden, and still other days she would toil in the fields alongside the men. It wasn't supposed to be like this, she thought many times. She had a good life in Esch-sur-Alzette. She was in charge of her own house. She was the one who decided how she would spend her day. She longed to have her family together again in her own home, wherever that would be. She waited for Francesco to tell her when she should travel to America. At least she knew that he was safe.



On the way back from sending Rosa the telegram at the train station, Teresa and Francesco walked up Main Street to visit his mother's brother, Zio Cichinno. This uncle had been Francesco's sponsor for coming to America. It was his name that should have been on the ship's record as the person who would take responsibility for the immigrant. Zio Cichinno was making a decent living importing products from Italia and selling them. Even though he had agreed to sponsor his nephews if they chose to come, he did not expect to see this nephew.

"Checco! Is that you? What are you doing here? Hello Teresa."

"Ciao, Zio Cichinno," said Francesco.

"Zio 'Frank' my boy. Everybody over here calls me 'Frank'. They can't pronounce names with more than two sounds, and they will only remember one of the two. Anyway, it is splendid to see you, nephew. But I thought you and your family were happy and prospering in Luxembourg."

And Francesco told his story again as he had the day before to his cousin and brothers-in-law.

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“I’m going to start over, Zio. I have some money. I just need help getting started. In Esch-sur-Alzette I took over a store with inventory. It was then just a matter of keeping it going and building it up with new products. I’m not sure where to start over here,” explained Francesco.

“I’ve been thinking about finally starting that bakery I talked about many years ago, Checco. I am getting too old for this work. Too much driving the wagon up and down the valley. If you want, I can help you get set up. I’ll show you how to build the ovens and make the bread. Once you get the hang of it, the business runs itself, I’ve been told. Everybody needs bread. I have even rented a small shop at the southern edge of town where all our *paesani* live. There’s a big room in the back where you can build the ovens, make the loaves and set them in racks to cool. You pay me rent for the space and a small percentage of the profits. What do you say?”

Francesco wasn’t sure he wanted to run a bakery. The local baker in Esch-sur-Alzette was a good friend of his, but he hardly ever saw him, not even at church on Sunday. He and his wife and children seemed to be in his shop at all hours. Francesco tried to press his uncle for help in starting a grocery business, but the response he got was: “There are plenty of grocery stores, too many, my boy. There is someone else, Agostini, who is interested in starting a bakery, but I told him I was waiting for someone in the family. Here you are.”

Francesco became a baker that day. He and Zio Cichinno worked together to build the ovens.

“How did you learn this trade, Zio. You’ve never been a baker, and I don’t remember you working in the bakery at home?” Francesco asked.

“I learned it with my eyes and my mouth, Checco,” answered his uncle with a laugh. “All of the ovens in the village were already built when I was growing up, built many years before I was born. There was no one to ask how an oven should be built. I stuck my head in all of them and saw the patterns of bricks. They were all different in size and shape. The fire bricks were all the same color because they were made from the clay from our valley that was famous even before the Romans. But with those bricks, everyone built a unique oven.

“The recipes for the bread were also different. Every woman has her own special mixture of the simple ingredients of flower, salt, water and

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yeast. Some add a little olive oil, some a little sugar. The sugar gives the bread a more yellow color. The trick is to get a good, hard crust that is a golden brown with a soft and moist inside. That means the fire must be the right temperature, and the loaves cannot be overcooked. A little water in the pans does the trick. Everything must be perfect to get a perfect loaf of bread. When I decided who had the best tasting bread among the women in my family, I began to watch more closely when she made the dough, how she kneaded it, how long she let the dough rise before making the loaves, how big she made the loaves, how long she let the loaves rise before setting them in the oven, how she made the fire, how long she left the loaves in the oven.”

“Who made the best bread? Was it your mother?”

“I can’t give you all of my secrets, nephew. Not yet, anyway,” said Zio Cichinno.

“While we are talking about building,” continued Francesco, now that he had his uncle talking, “there is something I have wondered about since I came here. It’s the houses. They’re all made of wood. Why don’t they build real houses out of stone so that they can build in a fireplace with their own brick ovens?”

“Time, Checco. These people don’t have time to build proper houses. Fifty years ago, I am told, this area had a few farms and a handful of people. You could travel along Main Street—it wasn’t called Main Street back then—from Hyde Park to Wilkes-Barre and hardly meet anyone. Even twenty years ago, villages like Old Forge and Duryea and Taylor hardly existed. Look at how many people are coming here to live, just from our own town. Do you think they can wait for the stones to be plowed up from the fields and placed one on one to build shelter. No. They need to build quickly, and they use wood that is still plentiful. They have invented a way to make walls out of a few sticks, instead of logs. It means that the houses are steaming in the summer and freezing in the winter. But they usually keep the rain and snow out, and that’s what seems to be most important.”

“A country that does not build real houses where everyone can bake a good loaf of bread can never amount to much,” reflected Francesco.

“You’re probably right, nephew,” his uncle replied. “Make sure when you build your house you do it the right way.”

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“I already have a house, Zio,” said Francesco. “It’s waiting for me to return there with my family when this war is over and when I have enough money. It has stone walls and a fireplace with a good oven. It is cooled by the winds off the mountain in the summer as they blow through the opened windows. The same winds cure the *prosciutti* hanging in the drying room. The stones hold the heat from the fire in the winter to keep us warm. We will go back there when it is time.”

“Keep that dream, Checco. It will make you strong. But let it go when the time comes,” said Zio Cichinno as he laid in the last brick.

After a few weeks, Francesco began thinking about how he could make the business grow. Zio Cichinno had told him to sell the bread to people in the town from the small shop in front of the bakery. Storekeepers from Taylor in the north to Duryea in the south would drive their wagons to his bakery every morning to buy their day’s worth of bread, said his uncle convincingly. Francesco decided that he could sell more bread if he delivered it to the shops himself while he paid someone to sell the bread in the store. He bought a wagon and horse. There was a common barn and paddock in The Orchard where he kept the horse. On the Saturdays before he opened the bakery, before the ovens were finished, he drove the wagon north through Taylor and into Hyde Park. There were established Italian communities up and down the valley. They were mixed with Irish, Welsh, German, Polish, Ukranian and Jewish enclaves. These people might buy his bread as well.

He talked to the Italian shopkeepers, who were mostly Napolitano or from other parts of Avellino, or they were Sicilians. *Genovese’s*, *Catalano’s* and *Pizzo’s* were among the names on the signs that hung above the doors. Sure, they would sell his bread in their stores. They would pay him for what they sold, and he could take back the rest after the second day. His uncle had warned him about this type of arrangement. Make them pay up front, he had told him. ***Rosati’s Bakery*** would eventually become known in a wide area, just like his store in Esch-sur-Alzette became known, thought Francesco. People would want what he sold and pay for it. But just to get started, Francesco felt that he had to compromise.

Just before he was ready to make his first loaf of bread himself, his brother-in-law Tommaso told them all at dinner one evening that he had decided to return to Sigillo to be with his wife and son, Guelfo, in case

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the war came to Italia. Tommaso had been brooding since Rosa's letter arrived a few weeks before. One of the young men who was studying for the priesthood had done them the kindness of reading the letter to them on Sunday afternoon. He did this for all of the families on The Orchard. The letter had also worried Francesco.

Sigillo

August 24, 1914

My Dearest Husband Francesco,

God has been watching over us since we were last together. Celeste and Elena are behaving well and are in good health, thank God. It seems like so long ago that we saw you, and we miss you very much. The children are enjoying all of the attention they are receiving from their grandparents, aunts and uncles and cousins. I walk to Masseggio each day with Elena. Celeste is staying at Masseggio as you said he should. He watches his sister and they play with their cousins while I help with the chores during the day. We eat together with your family and then Elena and I walk back to my parents' home. On Sundays, Celeste is with me and Elena, my parents and brothers for dinner after church. Working on the farm is hard work, but it will all be worth it when we are together again.

Everyone in the village is talking about the war and wondering whether Italia can stay out of it. They say that Italia will have to fight on the side of the Germans and Austrians because we are their ally, whatever that means, but there are many who want to help Serbia and take land back from Austria that belongs to Italia. Your brother Peppe, says that he will join the army if Italia enters the war. He says that it is time that a Rosati shows we are Italians and not just peasants who farm land we do not own and pay tribute to the nobility, the wealthy and the Church. Your father does not know who has been talking to him and filling his head with such crazy ideas.

One of the men who just returned from America said to my father that if Italia fights on the side of France and England, the Italian boats won't be safe to travel in anymore across the ocean. He said that the Germans have made boats that swim under the water. You can't see them. They shoot cannons under the water too, with big bullets that you

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can't see either until they hit a ship and sink it. He said that English and French ships, like the one you sailed in to America, have already been blown up. What a cowardly way to fight, I think! This makes me worried about taking the children, but I will not leave them behind. We have to be together. Should we come now, before Italia goes into the war?

I visit with my brother Tommaso's wife, Rosa, and their son, Guelfo, very often. She misses Tommaso very much, as I miss you. She wants Tommaso to come home to be with her and Guelfo and find work here, especially with the war coming. I have asked her to come with us to America, but she says she is too frightened to make the trip on a ship. I am not afraid. There is no reason to go on living if we have to be separated.

Your father says that he has been told that the rent for the farm will be going up. He said that you would understand. Everyone knows that you are in America. That news was brought here by the land manager's cousin who saw you when you first arrived in Old Forge. So you don't need to send telegrams from Enrico anymore.

It is late in the evening. I am writing this letter in my old room. Elena has been asleep for a few hours. She has gotten used to falling asleep by candlelight, and she cries if she wakes up in the middle of the night when it is dark. I hope you don't mind that I spend a small part of our money to buy candles to keep the darkness away from us.

May God bless you and keep you safe, and speed our voyage over the ocean to you.

Your loving wife,

Rosa

There was something else on Tommaso's mind. He had told the men at work he was returning home to Italia. One of the men asked him if he could find him a wife. This was not an unusual request among the men working in America. Unless entire families came from Italia, and few did, there were still not many women of marrying age who had been born in America. For every girl there were hundreds of suitors.

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“Checco, your sister Filomena is old enough to marry, isn’t she?” asked Tommaso. Of course he knew the answer because he had already talked about this with his sister-in-law.

“Who is the man asking?”

“Antonio Volpi. He is a good man, hard working,” replied Tommaso. “He is from Regione Marche, a small town near Pésaro called Cantiano.”

“Does he pay the boat and money to the family?”

“He has the envelope with everything if I tell him yes.”

“My sister has a strong head, like my father’s sisters. Il signore Volpi will not have an easy life if he marries her. She will make sure he works even harder than he does now. Teresa, will you invite him to dinner before Tommaso leaves for home so that we can shake hands.”

“Si, Francesco,” said Teresa with a smile.

Francesco answered Rosa’s letter with a telegram.

Wait for Tommaso. He is coming home. Francesco.

Tommaso left shortly after Francesco sent his telegram. He said as he parted that he would return with his wife, with his own sister, his niece and nephew, and with Francesco’s sister, the bride-to-be of his friend, Antonio. He would do this before Italia entered the war. “We will celebrate Christmas together,” were his farewell words.

Francesco began baking bread and delivering it each day up the valley, while Zio Cichinno helped him by selling the bread in the store. Francesco rose each morning at three, hitched the horse to the wagon and drove the short distance to his bakery. After firing the ovens with coal, he readied the bread. Flour, water, yeast, a pinch of salt. He could not afford the olive oil and sugar at present, but he had promised himself to experiment with these ingredients as soon as his simple breads began earning him money. He cut the dough into sections and formed the loaves. He placed the loaves on trays and let them rise. When they were ready, he made three slices with a sharp knife on the top of each loaf, put a small amount of water in each tray and slid them into the oven. When a golden crust formed on the loaves, he took them out, set them on a rack to cool and put in a new batch. By the time it was 6.00 a.m., Francesco

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had baked enough loaves of bread to fill a dozen wicker baskets. He left six baskets for the store and loaded the rest in his wagon.

Flour was the main ingredient in bread, and this was Francesco's one big cost. The coal for the ovens he gathered on his way back from Scranton along the tracks where the coal trains carried their loads for destinations in the north. He was now paying for the flour, the rent on the building, and he was paying his uncle a share of the proceeds from selling the bread. He began sending some of the money he had brought with him to Rosa and to his father with men who were traveling back to the area around Sigillo. "The rent has increased." meant that Lucca was demanding more. Each night, before he slept for the few short hours until his bread-baking and delivering day started anew, he counted the francs that he had left. He was converting more of his francs to dollars to pay his costs than he was earning for his bread. If this continued, he thought, he would soon run out of money.

As the weeks passed and news from Europe grew darker, there were worries that the war would last a long time and that America would be forced to take sides. The price of flour rose. More people were buying his bread on the second day, not on the first. He was getting less for his loaves, and he was taking more of them back to give to the nuns, who in turn gave them to the poor.

He waited for word from Rosa, that she was on her way, but he hoped that she would not come yet. Not right now. Things would get better soon, he was sure. He wanted to have a place for his family to live before they arrived. He did not want them to have to share a room in Rosa's brother's house, or to live under another women's rules, even if it was his cousin and Rosa's sister-in-law. For the first time in Francesco's life he began having difficulty smiling. The last traces of hair on the top of his head disappeared.



Rosa was at home when her brother Tommaso walked into his parent's kitchen one evening in the early autumn, just after he arrived from America. He had come first to his parents to pay his respects. He had his brother Celestino's things in a small cardboard box. The emotion expressed by his mother when she saw him knew no boundaries. When his mother was finally able to control her tears and released him from her

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embrace, it was Rosa who held on to him until he had transmitted all of the energy he had absorbed from her husband. When Domenico was finally able to kiss his son, Tommaso was exhausted. They sat quietly for a long time with the fire burning down and the air growing cooler. Domenico got up and put another log on the fire, poured his son a glass of wine, and asked him to tell them about Celestino's last day.

In the box was the letter Celestino had written, the one Rosa had given to Francesco. Now it was Rosa's turn to take it with her to America. Celestino had not been working very long in the mines when the accident happened, said Tommaso. Enrico and Tommaso were digging at the face of one seam when they heard the sound of a collapsing seam in the distance, and the screams of men. Everyone rushed to help. The men who were close by said that it was the new man who was holding the wooden brace in place when it broke and the ceiling collapsed on him. Tommaso, Enrico and many of the other men dug away the rocks for hours until they were able to take free Celestino's body. He was buried in the cemetery up on the hill close to The Orchard.

They all sat quietly. Tommaso broke the silence by saying that he would convince his Rosa to come with him, and that they would travel together as soon as they could arrange the passage. He told them about his friend Antonio and his proposal to marry Filomena. This made Rosa very happy, to think that Francesco could have his sister close to them during the short time they would be there. Tommaso told Rosa about Francesco's bakery business, and how he was sure that everything would be fine when she arrived. Life is not easy in America, he said. It is not like everyone thinks when they go there, that there is gold in the street and all you have to do is pick it up and you are rich.

It was late in the evening when Tommaso left his mother and father and Rosa to go to his wife, who was living with her mother and father. She would be sleeping. Her mother and father would be sleeping as well. He would awaken them all, and he would live through another emotion draining reunion before he and his wife would retire to the privacy of their bed. He had thought of nothing else each night before falling asleep since he returned to America alone those few years ago. He would not return alone again, he vowed.

Tommaso Notari came to Masseggio with his wife and his sister and her two children after mass on the first Sunday following his return to

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Sigillo. Domenico and Angela Notari came as well. Celeste and Elena had never met this uncle before. Zio Tommaso was a good uncle. He had an easy smile and he was patient with his niece and nephew. He had come with presents for them. They were still not old enough to understand that this uncle had seen their father and that this was the reason for all of the excitement, why he was encircled by his grandparents, his aunts and other uncles and his older cousins.

Tommaso Rosati and Tommaso Notari had met earlier in the week to discuss the proposal of marriage from Antonio Volpi. His friend was a good man, explained the Notari Tommaso to the Rosati Tommaso. He would make the Rosati's daughter a good husband. He earned a good salary in the coal mines. He would build a house for Filomena. With Francesco and Rosa there, they would be able to look out for each other, until they were all able to come home to Sigillo one day. The Notari assured the Rosati that Francesco had met him and gave the marriage his blessing. The Rosati promised the Notari that he would talk to Anna Maria, and if she agreed, they would discuss it with Filomena. Come to dinner on Sunday with your wife. We will ask your parents to come as well. If the answer is no, we will tell you before so there is no embarrassment.

The harvest had been good this year, and Anna Maria decided that they would celebrate their daughter Filomena's betrothal with a special meal. She made *porchetta*. The bones are removed from a suckling pig. It is rubbed on the inside with rosemary and garlic, stuffed with its innards that have been seasoned with salt, pepper, onions and fennel, and roasted on a spit over hot coals from a wood fire. The festivities lasted into the late evening, well after the sun had set and the air began to take on an autumn chill.

Tommaso Notari traveled the next day to the shipping company office in Fossato de Vico to book passage for himself, his wife and their son, Rosa and her two children, and Filomena Rosati. Since the declarations of war in May by Germany, Austria-Hungary, Great Britain, France and Russia, the flow of emigrants leaving their homelands had increased from a modest stream to a raging river. Although Italia was still not involved in the fighting, most people believed that it was only a matter of time before they would be dragged into the conflict. Before The War, booking passage for steerage was usually done at the pier with, perhaps,

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a maximum wait of a week or two. When Tommaso reached the office, there was a long line of men and women, each waiting their turn to purchase their ticket to a new life.

February was the earliest they could leave. Tommaso bought seven tickets on a ship sailing from Napoli on February 14th. Tommaso knew that the longer the wait, the greater was the chance that his wife would change her mind. She had agreed to return with her husband, but not willingly. Tommaso never really could decide whether her explanation of being frightened of the sea journey was only an excuse to mask the fact that she simply did not want to leave her home. He convinced her that when he left this time, he would not be coming back. Tommaso's wife, Rosa, knew that her sister-in-law wanted to be reunited with her husband, Francesco, as soon as circumstances would allow. So she agreed to go, setting no terms, making no demands. They all agreed that they would try to go before Christmas. Now, Tommaso thought, they would have to wait two more months. So much could happen. He would now have to find work because he did not have enough money for such a prolonged stay. He had left all of his savings with his brother, taking only enough to get to Sigillo and back with his wife and child, and, of course, the money for Filomena. Finding work should not be difficult with all of the men leaving for America, but he would be earning only a small amount compared with his miner's pay.

While his wife could not hide her joy and relief at the news that they would not leave until February, his sister was deeply saddened. Rosa had been dreaming about being with her husband and celebrating the holidays together as a family. She had told Celeste and Elena that they would be seeing their father again soon, and that he would have presents for them when they arrived in America. Four months was too long to wait. But there was nothing to be done about it, Tommaso reassured her.

The telegram to Francesco was brief: *Earliest passage booked. Leaving Naples February 14. Your Rosa.*



Tommaso Rosati took his monthly walk to Lucca's office on the piazza to deliver his payment of rent and "interest". Lucca had arranged for the times with each of the tenants, and Tommaso's time was always in the middle of the day, just before lunchtime. The sun was warm, but

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the air was an October cool, with hints that the frosts would soon start to be more frequent. Two *carabinieri* stood close by. They would have a share of Lucca's collection in return for their protection.

"Well, Rosati," Lucca cried out when he saw Tommaso, "you look exceptionally well for a man who is losing so many of his workers to promises of riches in America. What news of your oldest boy? He seems to have a hard time staying in one place."

"Francesco is not rootless because of his or his family's wishes, but he knows that the devil never stops feeding," replied Tommaso coolly.

"You do me a grave injustice, Rosati. I am merely the intermediary."

"We both know the truth, Signor Lucca. There is no need to state it."

"Be careful, Rosati. Those *carabinieri* will be visiting you soon to tell you that your son will be called into the army if Italia enters the war, and he will have to come home. That will not be good for either of us. But perhaps there is another solution. Your oldest daughter is near marrying age. Perhaps I could convince the landowner to forgive the remainder of your debt if I were to have a new, young wife."

At that moment Tommaso wanted only to see this man bleeding at the end of the knife he carried in his coat pocket. He would be arrested and shot, but his family would finally be free.

"You know that is not possible," Tommaso said calmly.

"Everything is possible, Rosati, with friends in the right places."

"This is one thing that will not happen, Lucca. You will continue to receive your money, but if you try to cross this line you will not live to enjoy it."

Lucca laughed loudly. The *carabinieri* turned to see what was happening, but Lucca waved to them, signaling that all was well.

"You feel better now, I am sure, Rosati. Go home and tell them all at Masseggio that you stood up to the devil," taunted Lucca as he took the money from Tommaso and looked down to count it.

Tommaso walked to Sant'Andrea church to find Don Antonio. He wanted to say a confession to cleanse his soul from the foul thoughts he had let enter his mind. This was the second time he had wanted to kill

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this man. He feared that if he was provoked a third time, he would act on his instinct.

“Tommaso,” said Don Antonio, “you are as pale as a ghost. What is wrong? Are you ill?”

“My soul is ill, Don Antonio. A few minutes ago I thought of killing a man. Does God allow such thoughts to enter our minds to test our will?”

“God gives us a mind, Tommaso. He does not tell us what to think. Our will is our own. When we put it to good, it serves Him. When we put it to evil, it serves His sworn enemy, *Il Diavolo*. Taking a life is the most grievous of sins. But you resisted, and you are here to say your confession.”

“Yes, Don Antonio.”

“God forgives you, Tommaso. Pray for the soul of your tormenter for it is he who needs salvation.”



With Christmas and Epiphany celebrated, it was now only weeks before Rosa and the others would begin their travels. As the time approached for them to leave, Elena developed a fever. The day they should have left for Napoli, she was much too sick to be taken out of her bed. Tommaso tried to convince his wife to leave with him. He promised he would get a new booking for Rosa, Filomena and the children. Nothing Tommaso could do or say would change her mind. She would not leave without all of them. Angela and Domenico begged their daughter to ask Francesco to take the next ship back home to Sigillo. They could not understand why he had fled to America. Perhaps Italia would continue to stay out of The War. He was twenty-eight, almost twenty-nine. Surely he would be able to avoid being drafted. Rosa had no arguments to offer against their pleas. She listened, nodded. She would leave for America as soon as her brother could find a new ship for them to take.

Tommaso Notari took his father's wagon and drove alone to Fossato di Vico. He did not know if he would be able to change their tickets. What he was sure of was that they were running out of time. The next opening for them was on May 18th on the SS Sant'Anna, and with a small

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penalty, they could exchange their tickets. There were plenty of people waiting at the pier for a chance to take the place of someone who decided not to make the journey. When her brother returned home with the new tickets, Rosa sent another, slightly longer telegram to her Francesco: *Cannot leave yet. Will write letter. New passage booked. Leaving Naples May 18. Your Rosa.*

There were many stories of ships carrying passengers being sunk by the German U-boats. Everyone was careful around the children not to mention any dangers about the journey they would take. There was no need to put worrying thoughts into their little heads. After hearing her brother's stories about conditions aboard the ships, Rosa was sure that it would be difficult enough without the children being fearful during the voyage.

Winter turned to spring. Easter passed. The sun grew stronger, the night air warmer, and the children were healthy. It was two weeks before they were scheduled to leave from port. Everything looked hopeful for this sailing, when something terrible happened. Rosa read the headlines in the newspaper in the piazza as she walked to Maseggio one morning. A German U-boat sunk the British passenger liner, the *Lusitania*. One thousand one hundred ninety-eight people perished.

Tommaso's wife Rosa had told her husband just a few days before the *Lusitania* was sunk that she was going to have another baby. She was sure that it would be another boy, she said. When she heard the news about the tragedy, she decided that she would not leave Sigillo. How could she take a chance with their son by making such a perilous journey, she asked her husband. It was unthinkable. He could not ask her to do it. If he felt that he should return with his sister, he could go. She was staying. That was final. Tommaso was torn between his devotion to his wife and son, and love for his unborn child, and his duty to provide for them. He had spent years building up his savings and preparing for his family to live with him in America. He was so close this time to realizing his dream. He would stay with his wife, he decided.

Francesco's Rosa and her children were going to climb aboard the SS Sant Anna on the eighteenth of May, and nothing that her parents or her in-laws could say would prevent her from doing so. Filomena was as determined as Rosa to leave Sigillo and marry her Antonio. Elena was still too young to understand what was happening. Celeste knew that his

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father was waiting for him somewhere, but time and distance meant nothing to him at his age. He did not want to leave Masseggio, however. He wanted Masseggio, his grandparents, aunts and uncles and cousins, and all the animals, the fields, the hills, the church bells and the gravestones of his ancestors to come with him, wherever he was going.

The four travelers arrived in Napoli the day before the scheduled departure accompanied by Tommaso Notari, Domenico and Angela Notari, Tommaso and Anna Maria Rosati. This was the farthest that the parents of Rosa or Filomena, and the grandparents of Elena and Celeste, had ever been in their lives. They had never made the journey to Eschzur-Alzette during the years that Francesco or Rosa had lived there. Now their children and two of their grandchildren were leaving on a journey that was more dangerous than they could even imagine, and they were unsure if they would ever see each other again, even if the journey was completed safely.

Francesco had instructed Tommaso to tell his sister to register Celeste as a female, and to state that she was unmarried. It was normal for women to use their maiden names, not their married names, when signing papers, so there was nothing unusual about her traveling as Rosa Notari. Do not give the home village, Francesco had said to Tommaso. Just tell them you are from southern Italia, Tommaso told Rosa. All of this was to make it more difficult for the Italian authorities to trace Francesco in America, and to protect Celeste from being drafted into the Italian army at some time in the future.

The SS Sant'Anna left the port of Naples on the eighteenth of May, 1915. On the twenty-third of May, 1915, Italia declared war on Austria-Hungary and entered the war on the side of the Allies. The Sant Anna was half way to America in the dangerous waters of the North Atlantic where German U-boats prowled. News of the event spread through the ship as quickly as a watery tomato sauce spreads through spaghetti. The captain ordered a safety drill. The screaming sirens and order-shouting crewmen only served to frighten the already terrified passengers even more. Sleep was impossible as every noisy sway of the ship was heard as the approach of a deadly torpedo. Mental stress caused physical distress, and the sanitary conditions on board the ship deteriorated during the second week of the crossing to inhuman levels.

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On June 1, 1915, the Sant'Anna put into the port of New York carrying a shipload of nerve wracked and sleep starved passengers. Elena had developed a rash covering her entire body. She was feverish. "They will turn you back, put you on the next boat returning to Italia," one of their fellow passengers had warned Rosa. "My cousin was sick when he came to Ellis Island, where we will be examined. They said he was too sick to come into America, and sent him home. He's still there. He says he never will come back to a place that treats people like that."

Francesco saw his wife and children and his sister as he stood behind the high, metal fence that separated those who were waiting for their loved ones from the arriving passengers. Rosa's letter had arrived shortly after her telegram in February. One of the neighbor's children read it to him while his brother-in-law Enrico and his cousin Teresa listened. Most of the letter told him how much she and the children missed him, and how they talked every day about being together again very soon. She told him about the long waits for getting on the ships to America because so many people were worried about The War and about Italia starting to fight in it. She told him about Elena becoming so ill that they could not leave when they should, so they had to wait for the next available ship. That would be in May. Nothing would stop them from being on that ship, she promised Francesco. And if God willed that they should arrive safely in New York, she and the children would be among those getting off the ship. If Filomena and her brother Tommaso and his wife Rosa and their son Guelfo were with them when he met them in New York, that would be their choice.

Rosa was carrying Elena, holding her on her hip with one hand and carrying a large suitcase in the other hand. On her back was a bundle wrapped in a shawl tied to her shoulders. Filomena held Celeste's hand and also had a suitcase and back bundle. They descended the gangplank slowly, and their heads eventually disappeared beneath the surface of a sea of other heads. Their heads emerged again briefly as they climbed aboard the ferry to Ellis Island.

The first nurse who examined Elena called over an interpreter to tell Rosa to get her with their belongings and climb back aboard the ferry. They would have to take the next ship back to Italia. Rosa refused to understand. She would not move. She held Elena close to her. Filomena pulled away from the line that she was in when she understood

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that there was something happening and came with Celeste to Rosa's side. The nurse called for a man in a uniform and he called for more assistance. The two women held on tightly to each other with the children in between them. Their combined weight and determination made them a formidable force.



Immigrants waiting for the ferry to Ellis Island

“What is going on here!” demanded a tall man in a long white coat. “What is the problem?”

“This child is too ill to be allowed into the country, doctor,” replied the nurse.

“Bring her over here and let us have a look at her,” said the doctor in a calm voice.

Rosa looked at Filomena who looked at the interpreter. She explained that this was a doctor who would examine the child. Rosa released her grip on Filomena, and Filomena let go as well. She carried Elena, who was so weak that she could no longer cry.

“This poor child has a skin rash that started on her leg and spread to the rest of her body. She needs to be cleaned up and given some

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nourishment. Putting her back on a filthy ship for another miserable two weeks will simply kill her. Nurse, we are not police. We are responsible for caring for people, not sentencing them.”

“I’m sorry, doctor.”

Rosa did not understand his words, but she understood his meaning. The nurse led them to a place where they could bathe Elena, and wash themselves. Rosa could only repay her kindness with smiles and words that the nurse did not comprehend. Soon they were back on the ferry which would take them to the place where Francesco was waiting.



This had been the longest year in Francesco’s life. He thought about it the entire train trip from Scranton to Hoboken, on his way to meet Rosa, his children and his sister. Separated from his wife and children, in a strange country with people speaking many strange languages he could not understand. He was more confused than angry. Even his own countrymen acted differently here. He was working harder than he had ever worked before, but he was going backwards. His money was disappearing along with his hair. He had grown thinner, although his cousin did her best to make him eat. She and his brother-in-law had been very kind to him, and now they would be opening their home to Rosa and the two children. His sister would stay with them only as long as it took for Antonio to arrange for the wedding, a simple affair in the Exeter City Hall.

The last few hours of his longest year seemed to drag on forever. They had been over on Ellis Island for a long time. He had been there only one year before. He had asked Teresa whether the examinations were any different for the women and children. They did not need to take off all their clothes, she had told him. Everything moved much more slowly because the children were usually completely exhausted from the journey, and they did not understand why strange people in white coats were poking them and sticking things in them.

Finally, the ferry appeared at the dock and the passengers began walking off. He saw Rosa briefly until she reached the pier, and then again as they walked in the long line toward the gate.

“Rosa! Over here!” yelled Francesco.

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“Run to your father, Celeste,” cried Rosa.

“Babbo! Babbo!” sang Celeste.

“Never again will we be separated like this,” whispered Rosa to Francesco as he held her in his arms, with their daughter and Celeste between them, and with Filomena hugging her brother from the side.

When they were finally sitting on the train, Filomena and the children fell immediately to sleep, Elena with her head on her mother’s lap and her legs, covered with a blanket, draped over her aunt’s lap. Celeste was curled up under his father’s arm, who sat across from Rosa. Rosa looked out of the dusty window as they left Hoboken terminal and rolled westward through the back sides of one New Jersey town after another.

“What is this country like, America?” she asked her husband. “It looks so dirty and poor. This is not what I expected.”

“It’s not as bad as it looks from the train,” said Francesco. “The cities put their worst face to the tracks. But even its best side is not what I expected either, Rosa. But it’s all we have until we can go home. We will make the best of it. We’re together again. That’s all that matters.”

For the first few months after Rosa arrived, the four of them stayed in Enrico and Teresa Notari’s home in The Orchard. Rosa had not seen her brother since he left home fourteen years ago. She was only nine when he went to America. He had seemed so much older then. He did not seem to be so much older now. Teresa ran her household like the Rosati women at Masseggio. Everyone had their job to do, and everything was done according to a schedule set by the head woman of the household. Rosa was used to this from the last year when she spent her days at Masseggio. It is not how she had run her house in Esch-sur-Alzette, and it would not be how she would run her house when they had one again, she vowed. But Teresa did everything with a good humor, and there was harmony in the house, even though it was brimming over with people.

Rosa helped with all of the household chores during the mornings and evenings. In the afternoons, she and the children would walk to the bakery and she would help Francesco with the cleanup and preparations for the next day’s loaves. This was a big help to Francesco because in order to save money, he had been doing all the work himself. The summer passed. They moved into a small house in Babylon, just across from the bakery and behind Francesco’s cousin Francesco Rosati’s home

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on Main Street. A letter arrived in early December written by Don Antonio. It was signed by both the Rosati and Notari families. Francesco's and Rosa's youngest brothers were now in the army. Peppe had joined and Tino had been drafted. They were all confident that The War would be over soon. The boy that Tommaso Notari's Rosa had been carrying turned out to be a girl. She was born on November 24, 1915. They named her Livia, the shortened form of Olivia.

America seemed determined to stay out of The War, but they were helping the English and French against the Germans as much as they could. They were sending large convoys of ships filled with supplies that the countries that were fighting could not produce themselves because so many of their men were either dead, wounded, captured or occupying trenches. The cost of goods in America increased as more and more supplies were sent across the Atlantic. The price of flour began rising to new highs, and Francesco was faced with either raising the price of his bread and risking lower sales and more bad debts, or losing money. He chose to keep the price down, but the bad debts continued anyway.

As Christmas of their first year together in America approached, Rosa realized that she was pregnant. During the first six months of 1916, as Rosa grew larger with her baby, Francesco's debts were also increasing. The money he had brought with him was now gone. He had sent the last of it to his father to pay Lucca. He had borrowed from everyone who would loan him some money to keep the bakery going until The War ended or something else happened to make things better. He owed the most to Zio Cichinno, and there was no more to be had.

On Sunday, June 11, 1916, Rosa gave birth to a girl in Francesco's cousin's home on Main Street. She named her Maria Anna, after the most recently born daughter of the King and Queen of Italia, Maria Francesca Anna Romana, who had been born in 1914. Francesco liked the name because it was almost the same as his mother's, Anna Maria, although Rosa assured her husband that their second daughter's name had nothing to do with his mother's. She was a princess, like Elena, and had been given the name of a princess. Francesco agreed, his new daughter looked like princess.

When Rosa was strong enough to begin her full chores, the family left Old Forge. Francesco had made a decision a few months before to leave the bakery business and return to the mines. He had to earn money. That

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was why he had left Esch-sur-Alzette, why he had left Sardegna, and why he had left Sigillo in the first place. He had been lucky in Luxembourg, being handed a business that made more money in a week than he could earn in the mines in a month. It was not the same here. He did not know why. Something was different, but he could not understand what it was. He could not afford to continue searching for the answer.

There was very little of the bakery to sell, so Francesco turned it over for a small sum to the man who wanted to start it with backing from his uncle two years before, Nicolo Agostini. He kept one sack of flour. With the money he received from Agostini, Francesco paid the original loan he had gotten from his uncle to build the ovens. He promised everyone else who had loaned him money that they would be repaid. He felt ashamed for his debts and for his lack of success.

The wagon, the horse, a goat and a sack of flour were among the few belongings they had remaining. One Sunday, late in June, Francesco loaded the rest of what they owned onto the wagon, hitched the horse to it, tied the goat alongside, helped his family climb aboard, and drove south to a small village called Hilldale. There, he had found an abandoned house that had been used by the army as a barrack before they built more permanent quarters closer to Wilkes-Barre. His sister Filomena and her husband Antonio Volpi were already living in Hilldale, renting rooms in a house on Williams Street. It took over three hours to make the eight-mile journey. He moved especially slowly to protect the six tomato plants that he had grown from seeds in two-gallon tins. He had zucchini and other vegetables as well in tins. These would help to feed his family through the summer and into the winter, until they could have a large garden next season.

Rosa sighed heavily when she saw the shambles of a house that Francesco had found for them. Windows were broken, the front door hung on one hinge. It had been empty for months, and layers of black coal dust covered the floors and stairs and the few pieces of furniture that had been left by its former tenants. An American flag, tattered and faded, with forty-five stars, hung on the stair wall leading to the second floor. The number of stars meant that it was hung before 1912, when Arizona and New Mexico entered the Union, and even before 1907, when Oklahoma became a state. But Rosa and Francesco knew nothing of this, nor did they take time to count the stars.

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Silently, they set to work to make a portion of the house livable for that night, sweeping the dust and scrubbing the floors and walls. Rosa made a fire in the stove and boiled *tagliatelle* that she had made in Teresa Notari's kitchen the day before.

The men came at 5.30 anti meridian on Monday morning. The foreman met Francesco as he waited, standing, in front of the steps of his new home. William Thomas was Welsh, in his late fifties. He was a young boy when he started working in the mines. Back then, there were no Italians or Poles or Russians or Slovaks. Back then, there were Welshmen, Irishmen, and Englishmen. Everyone spoke English. There were Germans, but they learned to speak English quickly or else they could not work. When William Thomas began working in the mines, chances were small of surviving more than a few years. The Mollie Maguires, Irish Catholics, tried to help the workers, but their brutal methods eventually forced the hand of the law and the mine owners, both solidly Protestant at the time. They were first infiltrated by James McParlan, alias James McKenna, who had been hired by Alan Pinkerton. McKenna betrayed them, and they were brought before the courts. Twenty of their members swung by their necks on the gallows at the Carbon County Jail in Mauch Chunk on June 21, 1877, when William Thomas was eighteen. With these hangings the unions were also destroyed. It had been a hard life in the mines, but he had survived.

William Thomas could understand a few words of Italian, enough to know when the crew was complaining. The crew, except for one man, Salvio Lombardini, spoke only Italian. Salvio was a miner. He was responsible for the men when they were working a seam. He set the dynamite charges. He placed the laborers where they would do the most good. He received the pay from the foreman, and he paid the rest of the crew, after he deducted what they owed the foreman and him for their tools.

Salvio handed Francesco a shovel, a pick and a hat with a kerosene lamp. It would take Francesco six months to pay for his tools. William Thomas told Salvio to explain to the new worker the rules, how much of his pay he would turn over to him during the first six months, the second six months, the second and third years. This was the third time in his life that Francesco had ransomed his body to provide for his family. He knew that he would only be able to keep the money he earned with his

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labors if he outlasted his keepers, the foreman and the miner. He was thirty now, not fourteen or sixteen as he had been in Sardegna and Esch-sur-Alzette. What Salvio and the Welshman and the rest of the crew would learn was that Francesco had a strong heart, an iron will and a second sense for finding the rich seams of coal.

Summer passed. Each day, before dawn, Francesco disappeared into the mine opening at the end of the property. Rosa cared for the children and the few vegetables that were now planted in the ground. She had an endless task of cleaning years of filth from the walls, floors and ceilings to make the dwelling livable. At two-thirty, Francesco re-emerged from the hole in the hill. He was covered in coal dust, only his blue eyes piercing through his blackened face were not pitch black. Rosa had a tub of hot water waiting and a bar of lava soap. She helped him scrub his skin until it was clean, and then she washed his mining clothes. He then worked to prepare the ground for a vegetable garden that would be planted early the next spring. It would be even better than the one he had made twelve years earlier in Esch-sur-Alzette, he declared to himself.

Autumn turned quickly to winter. Broken panes of window glass had been replaced, but the loose sashes and unpainted, weather-beaten clapboards let the freezing wind pass through like water through a colander. Only the kitchen had a stove that first winter. Rosa was trying very hard to be strong in the face of such destitution. She tried to convince herself that they were not poor (which they were), that they had enough to eat (which they did not), and that they were warm (which they definitely were not). She could no longer hide her unhappiness with their fate. She prayed each morning for God to give her enough strength to survive the day, but her will was ebbing. There had been no letters from home although she had written one letter every month.

One day in early December, a Saturday, with the temperature both inside and outside their dwelling well below freezing, she placed Maria in their bed on the second floor. She wrapped her in layers of cotton and a heavy woolen scarf with only her tiny mouth and nose and eyes visible. Celeste and Elena, dressed in sweaters, woolen leggings and woolen caps, played on the floor in the kitchen while Rosa made *polenta*. Francesco would be home from work in a few hours, she thought, as she stirred. Her thoughts took her far away to her own kitchen in Esch-sur-

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Alzette. She and the children had never been cold or hungry in that kitchen.

It was a scream from Celeste that woke Rosa from her daydream.

“Mamma! Come! See Maria!”

Rosa hurried up the stairs to find her barely six-month-old daughter completely uncovered, her skin a light shade of blue.

Rosa screamed, “Dio mio. Not this! Not my baby!”

She picked up Maria, who was barely breathing. She began wrapping her daughter again in the cloths from which she had somehow managed to escape, a miniature Houdini. Rosa could think of nothing else to do but put Maria into the oven. She scrambled down the stairs, opened the oven and gently placed her daughter inside.

“Please don’t let her die, God. She is not yet baptized. Francesco would never forgive me. I could never forgive myself,” Rosa pleaded as she knelt before the stove as if it were an altar, and she prayed. She prayed very, very hard.

Her prayers were answered. Maria began crying loudly and her color returned. Rosa took her out of the oven and held her tightly as they both sobbed uncontrollably. Celeste and Elena cried out of fear that something, which they did not understand, was terribly wrong with their mother and baby sister. The *polenta* burned on the stove. Maria eventually cried herself to sleep. Rosa composed herself. Celeste and Elena stood silently by their mother’s side.

Never again, she vowed. Never again would she put herself before her children. Next Sunday they would baptize Maria. Rosa threw out the spoiled *polenta*, scrubbed the blackened pot clean, and started water boiling for the *tagliatelle*.

“Say nothing of this to your father,” warned Rosa.

“I thought we were having *polenta* tonight,” said Francesco as they sat down to dinner, looking disappointed. “I was thinking about eating *polenta* all day.”

“Tomorrow,” said Rosa. “Your dreams will be answered tomorrow.” She looked at Celeste with a look that clearly meant ‘Not one word!’

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“Next week we will baptize Maria. It is well past the time that we should have done it,” said Rosa, changing the subject. Her husband simply nodded his acceptance.

On the next Saturday, after Francesco finished work and washed, they climbed into the wagon and drove to Old Forge. They had not been back since they left six months before. It was dark when they arrived. Teresa had already fed her family, but she set to work immediately to feed her sister-in-law’s family. She could see that life had been difficult for them during the months since they had left. Rosa explained that they had waited too long to baptize Maria and she was worried that God would not be patient much longer. Would Enrico and Teresa be their daughter’s Godparents, she asked.

Early the next morning, after Rosa and Francesco and the children had all slept more comfortably and warmly than they had slept since the onset of winter, they rose with Enrico and Teresa and their children and went immediately to church. Teresa and Rosa talked to the priest, Father William Gislon and asked him to baptize Maria following the mass. Rosa had not been to mass since they left The Orchard. Before that, she had come with Teresa on most Sundays. Francesco had not been to church since before he opened the bakery. People needed bread on Sunday as well as the rest of the days of the week, he had told the young priest when he saw him during one of his deliveries to a store in the village.

“Your daughter is six months old, and still not baptized?” he scolded. “You must have a very strong faith to trust that God would keep her safe all this time. You must come to church and pray with your friends and family on Sundays and holy days.”

“It is a long way from our home, but we will try, Padre. Forgive us. One day we hope to return to return home where our families have prayed for many centuries,” offered Rosa.

Francesco heard this exchange. He decided not to take part because he was sure he would offend the priest, and then Maria would not be baptized. He saw how the priests up and down the valley preyed on the fears of the his fellow immigrants, on their need to feel that they belonged to something more solid than a loose band of fellow countrymen and women. It was not just the Italians who had these fears, but all the peoples who fled their homes on the other side of the Atlantic.

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The priests collected flocks and built one church after another. Many of the members of these churches were poor and could not afford to give money away to the priests so that they could build more churches. But the immigrants were convinced that the money was a sacrifice for which they and their families would be rewarded in the afterlife.

Francesco did not doubt that there was an afterlife, but he was unsure whether so many priests and so many churches were needed to fulfill the promise of life everlasting. After all, these priests needed to eat, and they needed shelter. He did not see them growing their own vegetables and raising livestock as they did in the hills around Sigillo. He did not see them repairing their own roofs and painting the walls of the churches. These priests had clean hands and pressed collars, like the kind Péré Michel, but unlike him, they seemed more concerned with building churches than with saving souls.



Early in the spring of 1917, Francesco began to work the vegetable garden that he and Rosa had prepared the summer before. Rosa had asked him why he was making the garden so large. They would never be able to eat all the vegetables such a garden would grow. He did not need to answer. She knew what he was doing. He was planning to sell what they could not eat or preserve. But how could he manage to work most of the day in the mine and then peddle vegetables, she asked. It is impossible.

“You are right, my dear wife,” said Francesco with his little smile. “It is impossible for me to dig coal, dig vegetables, and then become a seller of produce. So you will be our seller.”

“No, Francesco. I will not,” exclaimed Rosa, her face growing red with anger and embarrassment at the thought of her driving the wagon like a poor farmer’s wife. “I did not marry you and follow you first to Luxembourg and then to America to be forced to do what I would never have done at home in Sigillo. I will get on the next boat with the children if you force me to do this.”

“I cannot force you to do anything, Rosa. I am asking you to do this for the good of our family, especially the children,” said Francesco, showing a depth of emotion that Rosa had never seen in him before. “We are in debt, living in an abandoned house in a strange country, with

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little to show for our lives except our children. I will work as hard as I can to make enough money in the mines to pay our debts, keep food on our table, and make sure we have a home to return to in Sigillo when the time comes. But we need more money if we are going to get out of here anytime soon. Selling vegetables won't make us rich, but it will make the difference from us being poor."

Rosa could not disagree with her husband. His arguments were persuasive without being overly forceful; his voice was soft and soothing even though the words he was uttering were hard and worrisome.

When they began to harvest the tomatoes, potatoes, Swiss chard, spinach, squash, carrots, beans, peas, onions, garlic, corn and other vegetables, Rosa would carefully pack them into wooden crates and bushels and load them into the wagon each morning. She would hitch the horse to the wagon, lift the children onto the wagon where she had arranged a place for them to sit, safe and comfortable, and then climb into the driver's seat. She would start down the road toward the village, stopping at her regular customers. On some days she would turn left on North Main Street towards Plains, on other days she would turn right on South Main Street toward Inkerman, and on still other days, when the weather was warm, she would drive down to Plainsville and along River Street, and look out over the wide Susquehanna River. Celeste would help her by taking the vegetables she asked for out of the crates and handing them to her. Rosa was quick with numbers, and she made change like the best shopkeeper.

When they returned in the late afternoon, the vegetables always all sold, Francesco would be weeding and pruning and picking in the garden. He was a good miner. No, he was a very good miner, seasoned from the age of fourteen. He had a sixth sense for coal, they told him. But he had an even better sense for making things grow that could be eaten. He had made a dust patch, wedged between a crumbling house and hole leading to hell, into a bountiful oasis. He was a manure magician!



Finally, a letter arrived from Sigillo early in 1918, more than two years after Rosa and the children landed in America. It was addressed to Rosa Notari care of Enrico Notari, The Orchard, Old Forge, Pennsylvania, United States of America. Rosa knew it was not good news.

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Giuseppe Rosati and Umberto Notari were the best of friends. Peppe and Tino. They had grown up together, first playing in the hills surrounding Sigillo, then working in the fields around Masseggio. They had taken the sacraments of First Holy Communion and Confirmation at the same time in their families' church, Sant'Anna. They had been at each other's initiation in the depths of Monte Cucco. Now they were talking about making one of the most important decisions a man can make in life, whether to go to war.

The two friends had met at the café in the piazza. It was Saturday evening, a few months after Italia had entered *Il Grande Guerra*, a few months after each of their sisters, Filomena and Rosa, had left for America. In one corner of the piazza, a small office had recently been opened by the army to register men who wanted to enlist, and to process those who were being drafted. The office was closed at this late hour, but the young soldiers who worked in the office were sitting at a table on the other side of the café, their uniforms neatly pressed, their boots newly shined. They looked splendid. The war had just begun.

Tino could not understand why his friend wanted to enlist in the army. His own family wanted him to leave for America, to join his brothers before he was called to fight. Angela and Domenico had already lost one of their sons when his life was still far ahead of him. They did not want to lose another. The Church did not like the idea of fighting against a country of Catholics, Angela had told him. Even though their little village was at the edge of the former Papal States, the older inhabitants continued to be more loyal to the Pope than to the King, and had no use whatsoever for the politicians. Tino said he didn't like any of them, and that one yoke was like any other.

"Only if you're an ox, Tino. Only if you're an ox," cried Peppe. "It's not only our duty to fight; it's our right!"

"Babbo says it is a war made by the northerners to win back land from Austria, but none of their sons will die. What is the glory in dying for someone else's dreams?" asked Tino, troubled by Peppe's insistence on giving himself to this unworthy cause.

"Italia is a country, Tino, but we have no respect from the rest of the world. Italia's children will remain peasants ruled by pretenders to

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nobility and a few rich families, all steered by the Church. We have to take our places as citizens. This is a chance to support a stand taken by an elected government against a position taken by those who would continue to rule over us by decree.”

Tino wondered where these words came from that were being spoken by Peppe. How did he know these things?

“I am enlisting tomorrow,” declared Peppe.

“I will not go willingly,” affirmed Tino.

Peppe enlisted as he said he would. Tino received his papers a few weeks later. He could not read them, but he knew what they were. He took them to the office on the piazza where the young soldiers sat behind a desk with their neatly pressed uniforms and newly shined boots. The young soldiers registered him on their list and gave him more papers. They instructed him to report to a camp that was set up outside Roma. He should be there in one week. The papers he carried would give him a place on the train.

Tommaso Rosati and Domenico Notari took their sons in Tommaso’s wagon to the train station in Fossato di Vico. Their departure from Sigillo had not been easy for them or for their families, especially Angela and Anna Maria. One year later, in early July 1916, they returned to Sigillo on leave for two weeks before being sent to the front. They wore their uniforms proudly. Peppe, the enlistee, had remained one rank higher than his best friend Tino, the draftee. Italia had declared war on Germany a week before, and everyone understood that the war would not end soon.

There was no question of them working in the fields during these last two weeks of freedom before they truly joined the fighting. They sat in the piazza and talked with the other soldiers who were home on leave, and with the soldiers who were still manning the enlistment office. When their leave was over, they traveled back to their camp near Roma. Shortly after, they were put on a train that took them to another camp outside of Padova. Within a few weeks they had marched to the front, which was northeast of Venezia, near Udine.

Morale was high among the Italian soldiers. Early in August, under the leadership of Pietro Badoglio, the Italians had captured the Austrian stronghold of Monte Sabotino, near the town of Gorizia. The main

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battles were being fought along the Isonzo River. The first Battle of the Isonzo began on June 29, 1915, shortly after Italia entered the war. When Peppe and Tino arrived at the front in October, 1916, the Eighth Battle of the Isonzo was about to commence. It lasted only two days, and ended as most of the battles, with the Austrians retreating as the Italian soldiers advanced, but the Austrians inflicting as many casualties as they could on the enemy.

One month later, another engagement took place, and then the front was quiet until June of the following year, 1917. The Americans had entered The War in April of 1917, declaring war on Germany on April 6th. Surely now the Germans would see that it was hopeless. The Germans and Austro-Hungarians were ready to accept Pope Benedict XV's proposal for peace earlier in the spring, but the Americans and the English would not hear of it. They wanted to punish Germany and Austria for their acts of aggression. The French and Italian could not take a stand against the Pope, but they, too, wanted to fight to the finish.

Peppe and Tino had managed to avoid the areas of heaviest fighting, and had positions at the rear. Many of their fellow soldiers were also farmers, and most of them came from the southern regions of Italia. They spoke dialects that were difficult to understand. These soldiers could not understand the orders of their commanders, and often did the opposite of what they had been told. Peppe was sure that Italia would have already won the war if everyone on the Italian side spoke the same language.

The Eleventh Battle of the Isonzo lasted for three weeks, from August 19th until September 12th. The Austrian-Hungarian forces were backed up to their stronghold at Mt. Hermada. Losing this position would mean the loss of the city of Trieste and most probably also the loss of Lubiana. Holding Mt. Hermada was therefore imperative. The Austrian General August Von Cramon informed the German High Command before the Eleventh Battle of the Isonzo that they desperately needed help. German troops arrived just after the Eleventh Battle was finished on September 12, 1917.

German and Austrian forces attacked the Italian army at Caporetto beginning on October 24th. This, the Twelfth Battle of the Isonzo, was a total victory for the German and Austrian-Hungarian armies. They were able to break through the Italian front line and rout the Italian army.

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Heavy casualties were suffered, more than in any other single battle of The War. There were 40,000 dead and 20,000 wounded, over 280,000 prisoners taken, the number of Italian army infantry divisions was reduced by one half, from 65 to 33, and the army was forced to retreat one hundred kilometers, over the Fiume del Tagliamento all the way back to the Fiume del Piave. There, with the help of French, British and American troops, they were able to stop the enemy advance and establish a new front.

Angela and Domenico and Anna Maria and Tommaso received their letters from the Italian government within a few weeks of each other in December, 1917. Don Antonio went to each of their homes to read them, but there really was no need. Other parents in the village had received the same letter. All the letters said the same thing:

You will be proud to know that your son fought bravely for his country, and made the ultimate sacrifice with his life. He died with valor during this or that battle. The Government of Italia extends to you its deepest sympathy for your loss. He will be buried in a military cemetery with his comrades who fell by his side.

There was little solace to take from such a cold form letter. Hundreds of thousands of these had already been sent. Why hadn't they listened to the Pope, Benedict XV, when he asked them all to lay down their weapons and make peace, asked Anna Maria and Angela? Their sons and many other mothers' sons would be alive if they had.



Rosa opened the letter. It was dated 7 January 1918 and signed *Don Antonio*. It was addressed to Rosa, Enrico and Francesco.

Your brothers, Giuseppe and Umberto, died fighting in The War, sometime in November of this past year, when the Germans and Austrians killed so many of our sons. I am very sorry for your loss. We have prayed that The Lord will grant them eternal peace. Your mothers and fathers are overcome with grief. The village is mourning with them and with the other families who have also lost their sons to this senseless war.

Their only comfort has been the letters that you have written, Rosa. Only some of them have arrived. You have numbered them, one for each month since you arrived in America. We have the news of the birth of

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your daughter, Maria Anna. We know that Francesco has sold his baking business and is now working in the mines, and that you are living in a house close to where Francesco is working. You have given your parents news of your brother, Enrico and Teresa and their children, and of Filomena, her husband Antonio. They are very grateful for your letters. God bless you, Rosa, for being such a devoted daughter.

Life in the village has been difficult since the war began. There have been too few young, strong men to work on the farms because they are soldiers, but the army demands that most of the crops go to feed them as soldiers. The army pays very low prices because all of their money is being spent on building guns and other things related to the war, so the poor farmers suffer. This war must end before all of Italia's sons are dead.

The only person in the village who seems to be prospering from the war is Il signore Lucca. The army has made him responsible for the delivery of the grains to their storehouses. So in addition to collecting the rents from all the farmers and the payments for their harvests, he is becoming rich by transporting the grains. This does not seem fair. I do not understand why the land owner, whoever he is, does not do something about this man who has been a plague on the village since the day he arrived. God forgive me for saying these things about another person. He must have His reasons for allowing this to happen, and I must not question Him.

God bless you all.

Yours in Christ,

Don Antonio

Lucca gains strength through the weakness of others, thought Francesco. His one weakness has become his major strength as he is given leave to do what others would never do.



Francesco and Rosa both followed The War in their own way. Rosa read the news reported in *Il Progresso Italo Americano* once a week. It was Rosa's only luxury. She loved to read. The few books she had carried with her over the Atlantic had been read and re-read dozens of times. Although she was careful with every turn of the pages, they were

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beginning to show their wear. *Il Progresso* was a precious gift. She could not judge whether the words she was reading were true, or the fabrication of the journalist or the editor. It seemed that no matter what the actual outcome of a battle or events, Italia was always winning and the Americans were Italia's best friends. She suspected that this was not always the case.

There was another view of The War expressed in the depth of the mines. Russia had been wise to sign a treaty with Germany and stop the blood-letting, in spite of urgings, threats and then invasion by the Allies. The new socialist leaders of Russia cared about the workers and the peasants, the other miners said. It was not the workers' or the peasants' war. It was never their war. America had entered so that they could be there when the spoils of Germany and Austria were divided. Italia will lose no matter what, they said. Italia had already lost.

Francesco tried very hard to understand what was happening. He knew that he and his family were affected by what the politicians and generals and kings and the Church did. Someone with power decides to move an army a few hundred kilometers and overnight his entire life changes. But is one method of governing any better than another, he wondered. Will these socialists do anything more for the common people than the governments they are replacing? His grandfather had often said that when their province became part of Italia, the *contadini* just exchanged one shackle for another.

The Italians had one major victory before the end of the war, at the Battle of Vittorio Veneto. On the 3rd of November, they seized Trieste. First Austria and then Germany surrendered to the Allies. On November 11, 1918 an armistice was signed with Germany that officially ended The War. Italia lost 615,000 men. A further 950,000 had been wounded, and 250,000 of them were crippled for life.

"Now we can start to plan for returning home," sighed Rosa when Francesco came home with the news he had gotten from his fellow workers.

"We still have very many debts, Rosa," relied Francesco. "We have to pay everyone back before we can start saving money for the return."

"If the harvest in the garden is good next summer, and if you bring home your salary each week as you have been doing, we should have

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enough money to pay back everyone and pay for the passage by Christmas of next year,” said Rosa jubilantly. “I made the calculation.”

“I’m happy I married a smart woman who can add numbers that don’t exist yet, and spend them before they are earned. Where would we return to, Sigillo or Esch?”

“Luxembourg does not exist for me anymore, Checco. Does it for you? It has been almost five years. Who knows what has happened to our things and our friends. If Charlotte Lecroix has not sold the business, she and her family have surely closed it. What is there to go back to?”

“I still think about going into the store in the morning, before I opened it to customers. I remember how it looked. I can still smell the olives and cheese. I can feel the handle of the knife I used to cut slices of *prosciutto crudo*. I see the faces of my customers when they looked at the vegetables we grew ourselves, how happy they looked to find such good quality in the middle of a grey city. It wasn’t the same with the bakery. I wasn’t a baker or a peddler of bread. I’m happy that Agostini took it over. He is made for the business. He will make it a success. I don’t know if I will ever be a farmer, like my father and the other Rosatis. I can make vegetables grow, but a field of wheat or corn is something different. I don’t know, Rosa. I don’t know.”

“But now you are working in the mines. I worry every morning when you leave that you will not come home.”

“Don’t worry, Rosa. My archangel is with me. He has promised me that he will not let anything happen to me. We have had enough trouble.”

“You make jokes, by husband. I am happy to see that you have gotten your good humor back as our sugar jar has gotten fuller. You laugh more often these days. I’ll keep counting up the pennies. We will decide what to do when we have enough of them.”

The vegetable garden produced abundantly in that summer of 1918, and in the following summer. Filomena and Antonio had moved to a house across the river in Exeter. Francesco had joined his two brothers-in-law in the Pennsylvania Coal Company Number 14 mine in Inkerman. The mine was deeper and the pay was better. He went into the mines every day except Sunday. From the end of March until the end of

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October, when he came home from work, he was in the garden, planting, sowing, weeding, cultivating, watering, fertilizing, pruning, harvesting. When cold froze the ground and snow covered their fertile patch of earth, Rosa canned everything that they did not eat or sell during the season. She sewed and darned and knitted the clothes they wore, she made the sheets, pillowcases, tablecloths and towels they used, and tied the rag rugs that covered their floors. Francesco cured the hams for his friends who were lucky enough to be able to afford to have a pig, and he made his famous *salsiccia* using the recipe that had been given to him at Masseggio as a family treasure.

Celeste had started school. Rosa walked with him to the school each morning during his first year. She carried her two-year old Maria, and Elena walked with her brother, holding his hand as Rosa instructed. In the second year, Celeste asked if he could walk to school with his friends. Rosa said no at first. Francesco did not like to question his wife on matters regarding the children. She knew best. But, he said, his son had lived in three countries in his still very short life, he had crossed the ocean in the middle of a war, and the school was less than half an hour away. Maybe it would be alright for him to make that journey with some friends. Still, Rosa hesitated. She had been with her son on all of those journeys. Now he would be traveling on his own. She cried the first day he left for school without her.



Chapter Five

In Between Homes

A New Life

WITH THE BIRTH OF THEIR FOURTH CHILD only a month away, Francesco decided that it was time to move his family back to The Orchard. He would stay on in the house through August and into September, until the birth. There was a garden full of vegetables, and he had no intention of wasting anything. He would pick and save what they could use themselves, give away as much as he could to his sister and other family members, and try to sell as much of what was left. He loaded the last of their possessions onto the new wagon he had bought in the spring. The horse was new as well. The horse that had helped him deliver bread and led Rosa on the rounds of the neighborhood selling their vegetables was old when he bought her, and she had a peaceful death from old age. There were more things to put on the wagon than what he had taken off four years earlier. Rosa and the three children were already with Enrico and Teresa. He had taken them there the day before. This was his third and final load.

They were moving into a house across the street from Enrico and Teresa. It was temporary, a year or two at most would be all that they would need, they thought. Francesco had promised Rosa that they would return to Sigillo as soon as they had built up their capital again. Everything they had earned from Francesco working in the mines and Rosa selling their vegetables had gone to pay off their debts, and, of course, to make the regular payments to Lucca. Sending money to Italia during the war years was not possible, but Francesco was instructed by one of Lucca's men who was in America, to pay the money to him. There was enough money left over to buy the new wagon and horse, and to pay the first two month's rent on the house.

Their daughter was born in Enrico and Teresa's house on September 27, 1920, the third princess. She was named Jolanda, after the oldest daughter in the Italian royal family, Jolanda Margherita Milena Elisabetta Romana Maria. Rosa was not going to take any chances this time by waiting to baptize her daughter. She brought her new baby

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daughter to the church two weeks after she was born. Jolanda's Godparents were her older cousins, Orlando and Dusala Notari, son and daughter to Enrico and Teresa. Filomena and Antonio Volpi might have been the Godparents, but after several miscarriages, Filomena just had their first child. They named her Maria.

Enrico gave his son Lando a dollar coin to give the priest after the baptism. Lando was sure that a baptism of such a small person could not be worth more than fifty cents, so he took one of the two fifty-cent pieces he had saved from his winter snow shoveling jobs the previous winters, and he slipped it to the priest instead of the dollar. The priest gave him the look of someone who had been short-changed, and Lando returned the look with a satisfied smile.

Maria was now four, Elena seven and Celeste nine. The two oldest were already in school, where they were learning English. They even spoke English to each other when they were sure their mother was not listening. Francesco knew that his son was called Charles to his English and Irish teachers, and Elena was Helen. These teachers changed all the names of the immigrant children to names that suited their tongues and their alphabet. Joseph instead of Giuseppe; Thomas instead of Tommaso; Lawrence instead of Lorenzo. Learning the language was good, thought Francesco, because it made it easier for them to get along with all the other children if they could speak one language. But why did they have to change their names? He liked his children's names. Rosa had chosen them for a reason. She did not choose Charles or Helen or Mary. Her name was Rosa, not Rose or Rosie; his name was Francesco, or Checco, not Frank or Frankie. He was certain that when the time came for them to change his youngest daughter's name, they would have to leave it exactly the way it was. Jolanda.

In order to hasten their return home, Francesco decided to try to obtain his miner's papers. As a miner, he would be paid for the work he and his laborers did, and then he would pay them. Salvio Lombardini encouraged him and explained to him what he would have to do. It was important for him to learn enough English to be able to talk to the bosses, who were still mostly Welsh and Irish. Learning English for Francesco was not going to be as easy as it was for him to learn French, German and Luxembourgish in Esch-sur-Alzette. Almost all of Francesco's co-workers were Italian. They were from different regions of Italia, so it

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was not always possible to understand everything that was said because the dialects were so different. Nevertheless, he was able to make himself understood, and he got the general meaning when the Italians spoke to him. Francesco lived in an area of Old Forge where his neighbors were not only Italian, but many came from Umbria and even the villages around Monte Cucco. They all spoke the same dialect. In Esch-sur-Alzette, he was immersed in a foreign culture, and he was forced to learn the major languages of that culture as quickly as he could so that he get on with his daily affairs. When he took over the Pierre Lecroix's store, he talked constantly to his customers and suppliers, so he quickly became fluent in their languages.

Francesco and Salvio agreed that he needed to be teamed up with an English speaker if he was ever going to have a chance to learn the language. That was how Brian McGlintey became Francesco's partner. Salvio assigned the two of them to work a particularly difficult part of the seam. Salvio explained to McGlintey that they would get a bonus if they were able to unlock the coal that was sure to be lurking behind a thick curtain of shale. How did he know it was there, asked McGlintey with not a small amount of skepticism in his voice. Salvio knew because Francesco had told him it was there, but he was not about to tell McGlintey that.

"The boss says it's there," said Salvio, "and that's all you need to know."

So Francesco and Brian McGlintey began to work, side by side, their coal-black skin making their pedigrees indistinguishable.

"I'm frun County Cork in Ireland," declared McGlintey.

"Sono Italiano, Perugino," responded Francesco.

"Me ol' gramma used ta say 'All crows're black.' I guess that fits us to a tee, eh Rosati? Don't matter a hoot where we cum frun. We're all da same, 'specially dun here."

"Si. Si. Io non so," replied Francesco, not understanding at all what he said or what he meant.

"I seen ya before ya got all black. Ya look like'n Irishm'n wid yer red skin, blue eyes, red hair, an' all. Ya sure ya ain't got sum Irish blud in ya, Rosati?"

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“Non capisco, Maghiny. I dun’t undastan,” tried Francesco.

“Lord’s ‘n b’Jesus. I do buleeve we got da furst En’lish out’a dis here ginney!” declared McGlintey.

And so it went. Before long, McGlintey’s constant chattering had the desired effect. Francesco was putting a few words together so that McGlintey actually felt like he was carrying on a conversation. In between the talk, both men were digging. McGlintey knew how to dig, thought Francesco. He had always believed that these Irishmen only knew how to talk. The coal came out of the hidden seam like the English words came out of Francesco’s mouth: slowly at first, and then, steadily, more quickly. By the time the seam was mined, Francesco had earned the everlasting friendship of his Irish partner, who went home with more money in his envelope than he had ever earned in all of his mining years, and Francesco was ready to take his miners test. When he passed, the entire Orchard celebrated for a whole weekend.



Each morning at quarter to five, the men on The Orchard who worked in the mines gathered on Main Street to take the trolley south to their places of work. Francesco, Enrico and several others got off in Inkerman to walk into the Pennsylvania Coal Company No. 14 Colliery, where Francesco began working shortly after they moved to Hilldale, leaving the hole in the hill behind the house that was home to Francesco and his family for four hard years. Another unfortunate family was now squatting in the dwelling. Other men disembarked before Inkerman, in Pittston, and others continued down the line. The trolley car was usually empty when it reached Wilkes-Barre.

The men were careful about what they said on the trolleys, Francesco had learned. There were always spies standing somewhere close by, spies paid by the mine owners, by the *cosa nostra* or by the men in Italia who protected their investments in America. The mine owners wanted to spot trouble-makers before they could affect the other men. They were looking for union organizers or men who had a particular axe to grind.

The *cosa nostra* wanted to find men who were in debt, and who had only the smallest chance of getting out of it. Men will do things to save themselves and their families from total poverty that they would not think of doing if they were not living under a cloud of debt. After giving

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them easy money, the *cosa nostra* would become the number one debtor and demand payment in the form of acts of crime. Once they had committed their first crimes, there was often no way to return.

The spies from the Old Country were there to collect what was owed to their masters and to make sure that the men understood that they would suffer the same consequences in America as in their homeland if they missed a payment. Francesco had been approached by Lucca's lieutenant only a few months after Rosa had arrived. He was coming out of a grocery store in the center of Old Forge after having made a bread delivery. He recognized him immediately, although it had been a half-dozen years since he had seen him. It was the blacksmith's brother from Gubbio. At first he thought it was a coincidence that he landed in Old Forge, but as they shook hands, the man held Francesco's hand firmly and explained it was into this hand that Francesco would place the money owed to Lucca, now that the war stopped safe delivery of the mails. There would be no excuses about ships being sunk with his payments on board. The man said he would see him here, at this spot, at six o'clock on the first Monday of every month. He knew how much was owed, and he would not accept one penny less.

As Francesco and Enrico walked to the trolley stop, waited and then rode the trolley to Hilldale, they did not discuss what they had talked about the evening before when Enrico came to his sister's and brother-in-law's house after dinner. He told them he was planning to go to Sigillo. He wanted to see his mother and father before they died. Tommaso's recent letter saying that he would be coming back to Old Forge soon also said that their father was no longer able to work, and their mother was in a constant state of mourning for her dead sons, and she fretted over the failing health of her husband. Tommaso warned his brother in the letter that it was getting more difficult to travel back and forth without proper papers. Some men who had left the village before the last war and who did not fight, were detained by the new government when they came back. He had been questioned several times. There were many changes in the village and in the country, and not all of them were good. He should get an American passport before making the journey, said Tommaso in his letter.

So Enrico was going to ride the trolley that afternoon up to the center of Old Forge where the borough hall was located, and he would ask for

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citizenship papers. He thought that Francesco should ride with him and collect papers for himself. Why should he need to be a citizen if we are going back home soon, asked Rosa. Tommaso had said in his letter that all men were eligible for military service until they passed their fortieth year. Enrico had passed his forty-second year. He was not worried about being called into the military, but he was concerned about being able to leave the country once he got in. He could not answer his sister's question. Francesco did not have to show his American passport unless he truly needed it, he offered.

Francesco went with Enrico that afternoon. After dinner, Celeste read the papers to his father and mother. He first read the instructions, then the questions. Francesco was very proud of his son, that he could read and speak and write English. One day, he would be a successful banker. When people needed money, they would be able to go to him and he would give it to the honest and hard working ones.

"Do you swear allegiance to the United States of America, and agree to abide by its Constitution?" read Celeste.

"What does 'allegiance' mean?" asked Francesco.

"I don't know," answered Celeste, a bit disappointed that he was missing an important piece of knowledge.

"It must mean something like 'loyalty'," offered Rosa. "Will you promise to be loyal to America?"

"That depends on what they want me to do," answered Francesco firmly.

"I don't think you can answer 'It depends', babbo," suggested Celeste. "Our teacher says we have to be ready to fight for America if there is a another war. She says that everyone living in America should be a citizen if they are allowed to become one, and that we should be willing to die to protect the country."

Francesco's face turned red with anger.

"What kind of person tells children they should want to die! Two of your uncles, my brother and your mother's brother, died fighting in the last war. What did Italia get in return for their lives? A place where many of the people don't want to be part of Italia. We make trouble and we get trouble."

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Francesco had only heard this from his friends. It was so that the town of Bolzano and the 300,000 German-speakers living in the South Tirol that was annexed by Italia following The War did not want to be governed by Italia. However, the two million Italian speakers in Friuli, Venezia Giulia and Trentino, were enthusiastic new citizens of the conquering country.

“My teacher says you should get your citizenship before they pass more laws saying that Italians can’t be citizens.”

Rosa had read in *Il Progresso* about the new immigration law that was just passed. It was described in the newspaper by the Italian government as anti-Italian. The young politician, Benito Mussolini, said that America was adding further insults after its humiliating treatment of Italia following the War. The law, called the First Quota Law, was passed on May 19, 1921, just a few days after an Italian election that brought victory to Blocco Nazionale and the fascists. The law meant that the number of immigrants coming to America from any country could not be more than three percent of the number of people from that country living in America in 1910. It was meant to favor the early immigrants from Great Britain and the northern countries of the European continent, and to discriminate against everyone else. *Il Progresso* said that the reason 1910 was used was because it was after that year and up to the War when many more Italians came to America.

“You and your sisters learn to speak good English,” Francesco warned Celeste. Speaking English was becoming more and more important as hostility to immigrants grew. “But if America asks you to fight in a war, you tell them you don’t fight in wars. Do you understand me, Celeste?”

“Si, babbo. Si. Capisco.”

Celeste filled in the forms for his father. Rosa said she would not apply. She did not have to worry about being called into the army, she said. Celeste and Elena would become citizens if Francesco was accepted. Maria and Jolanda were already citizens because they were born on American soil.

Weeks and months passed without any word from the authorities. Francesco was certain that they had either misplaced his application or they were talking with the Italian authorities about deporting him and his

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family. His brother-in-law already had his interview, and now he had his passport. Finally, the letter came telling Francesco that he should report to the Federal Court House building in Scranton for an interview.

“Good morning, Mr. Rosati. My name is George Hempelman. I will be going through your application for citizenship with you.”

“Gudda morning, mista Hemmaplan. Pleesad ta meechu,” said Francesco, repeating the words that he had practiced for weeks with Celeste and Elena.

“Let’s see now,” started Mr. Hempelman, “you came to America in 1914. Your wife and two children, Celeste and Elena, came one year later. You say here that you were living in Luxembourg. Why did you leave Luxembourg?”

“I no wanna fighta forra da Germania,” responded Francesco.

“You did not want to fight for the Germans. Why didn’t you go back to Italia and fight for your home country?” asked Hempelman.

“I comma America ta work, ta make da money,” said Francesco, not directly answering the question, but not lying either.

“So you do not intend to go back to Italia, is that correct?”

“I go backa ta see mia mamma anda babbo, fadder,” responded Francesco.

“If there was a war between America and Italia, which side would you fight for?” asked Hempelman.

“Is America gonna make da war widda Italia?” asked Francesco, trying to gain time to think of what he would say in response to this question that he knew would come.

“We don’t know who will make war with us, Mr. Rosati. Just answer the question, please,” replied Mr. Hempelman.

“I no like ta fight inna da war. Peepula die forra no gudda, uh, forra nudting.”

This was not the answer Mr. Hempelman wanted to hear.

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“You will have another chance in six months to apply for citizenship, Mr. Rosati, and I suggest that you not waste it as you have this opportunity. You may not get another one. Return here in six months.”

He stamped his application *Incomplete*, and filled in the date provided for a return interview six months from this day. He got up and pointed to the door.

Francesco related what had happened during his interview as the family sat at the dinner table.

“Checco, you knew they would ask that question,” said Rosa with a smile. She could not help thinking how comical the situation must have been. “We practiced what you would say: ‘I fight for America.’ is what you should have answered if you wanted to get your papers.”

“I don’t like to lie,” replied Francesco, embarrassed at his apparent lack of worldliness after all of his worldly experience.

“Well then you might as well not go back in six months because they will ask you the same question,” Rosa shot back, now more serious. “This was your idea. We should just go back home and forget all this business with citizenship. They won’t call you into the army. There are plenty of younger men to fight their wars.”

“Like our son? I want him to be able to come back here if Italia decides to get involved in another crazy war.”

Rosa had nothing to say to this.

“Then get your citizenship the next time you go there.”

Six months later, the same time of day as the first meeting, the same room and the same Mr. George Hempelman greeting him, Francesco was back. Hempelman dispensed with the introductions and lead-up questions and came straight to the point.

“Mr. Rosati, if there was a war between America and Italia, which side would you fight for?”

“America,” answered Francesco, clearly but not firmly.

“Congratulations!” bellowed Hempelman. “You are now an American citizen, and your son Celeste and daughter Elena are also

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citizens. If you had passed the first time, I was prepared to add your wife to the list, but she will have to apply separately. Good day, Mr. Rosati.”

“Gudda bye, mista Hemmaplan. Danka yu.”

Francesco knew how he would celebrate his victory. He had seen it on his previous visit to Scranton six months ago, as he walked to the New Jersey Central train station from the federal building. There were six of them lined up in an empty lot with only a small shack in one corner. Above the shack was a large sign that read *Ford Motor Sales*. On the side of the shack was another sign, *Model-T Ford, \$295, Payment Terms Available*. He had three hundred fifty dollars in his pocket, money saved from his bonuses for finding new coal seams. Rosa was keeping the money they were saving for their return home. In another year, they would have enough for the journey.

After a quick lesson in the controls and a few drives around the block, Francesco pointed his new car toward Old Forge. He took the route that he knew best, the one he used to drive with his horse and wagon delivering his bread. He passed by Pizzo’s and Catalano’s. He drove past all the churches in Hyde Park that were strung along Main Street. He drove through Taylor with its huge Moffat Coal Company breaker and growing culm dumps. He entered Old Forge and drove past the stores in the center of the town. There were a few other cars sharing the road with him, and several trucks. He drove slowly, partly because he was still getting used to the feeling of a wagon without a horse in front of it, and partly because he wanted to make sure that people recognized him.

He turned the Model-T into The Orchard. It was late afternoon, and the men were just getting home from work. Here he was, the failed baker, piloting the neighborhood’s first car up the dirt path made by horses and wagons. He drove it off the path and onto the patch of frozen grass in front of the house they were renting. A crowd gathered. Rosa appeared at the door and immediately clasped her two hands to her cheeks.

“O Dio mio! What have you done? Has the devil has taken hold of your head?” she cried.

Celeste, Elena and Maria shot out of the door behind their mother and jumped up into the car. Francesco beamed as he gave everyone a guided

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tour around the black beauty. After a few short rides with his children and their cousins and his brother-in-law, he finally came into the house where Rosa was waiting with dinner.

“You passed the test? You are now a citizen, and this is your reward?” said Rosa with a heavy dose of sarcasm in her voice.

“Yes, along with Celeste and Elena,” boasted Francesco. “The little ones were already born with American flags in their hands.” He winked at Maria who smiled back at her proud father.

“And where did you get the money to buy that contraption? Here I am, saving every penny for our return home, and you are out spending money on something that nobody needs—just to show off.”

It was no use trying to start an argument, and she knew it. He was too pleased with himself to be in an arguing frame of mind. But she could not resist trying. He had made a major decision without even discussing it with her, and she was going to make him pay.

“It’s an investment,” he said, trying to sound like he really did have the family’s best interests at heart. “I save money on the trolley fare every day, and my riders pay me instead of the trolley driver. When we leave, I sell it. The money came from my bonuses, and I did not spend it all (*‘Just most of it,’* he said to himself, trying not to lie completely). You worry too much, my wife.”

“You dream too much, my husband.”

“Men are meant to dream.”

“That is why women worry.”

The last word was always Rosa’s, thought Francesco, and he had learned to judge when it was spoken.



Tommaso Notari returned to The Orchard late in 1921. He had been in Italia since 1914. After the War, he tried to convince his wife, Rosa, to leave Sigillo, to take their son and daughter, and travel to America with him. There was always a reason why the time was not right. Their son Guelfo died in October, 1918 of pneumonia. Tommaso lost what little faith he had left in a God that would take their first-born child from them. Rosa was despondent, but devoted herself to her daughter and to

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consoling her husband. Then, a second son, whom they named Giuliano, was born in 1920. Now, a third child was on the way. That was why he left to return to America. All of the births had been difficult for his Rosa, but the last one was especially so. Tommaso wanted his wife to be in a hospital when their next child was born. *Contadini* did not go to hospitals to have their children because they could not pay for it. Children were born in the houses of their parents or other relatives. If there were complications, a doctor might be sent for if there was one who would take food or a promise of future service instead of money. Tommaso did not want to take any chances. He knew he could pay for the hospital with his labor in America.

He arrived on The Orchard with fresh news from home. The evening he arrived, Francesco and Rosa and the children gathered at Enrico and Teresa's for dinner. Francesco brought with him a gallon of his new wine. As he came up the stairs, Tommaso said, "I came back for your wine, Checco. Just for your wine." This was the wine that Francesco had made one year earlier, after they returned to The Orchard. While they lived in Hilldale he had not been able to afford to make his wine. He bought a half-gallon now and then when he had a few extra dollars, and his brothers-in-law gave him a gift on occasion. The wine that was in the jar he was carrying was made with grapes he had bought himself, and with a press that he owned. He had crushed and pressed the crates of red grapes himself last year, and he had made one barrel of red wine. Recently, he had finished making his next year's wine, one barrel of red and one barrel of white wine. This could age and gather flavor for another six months while he finished the wine from the previous season. He was happy now to be sharing it with his family.

After dinner, as they sat with wine glasses still half full, Rosa asked her brother, "Why do you keep coming back? It's not just for a glass or two of my husband's new wine."

"There are no mines in Sigillo, Rosa. I earn in one day digging coal in these hills what it takes a month of digging potatoes in Sigillo. It's not much better in the north. I went there to try to find work after The War. It was a miserable life, living in Torino and working in a factory. I came home after a few months with empty pockets once I paid for a rat-infested room and my meals in a boarding house. Everyone would leave

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Sigillo if they could, if they had the money, if other countries allowed them to come in. Even America is closing its doors.

“The socialists are trying to change things, to take the money from the Church and the nobility and start businesses that employ people and pay decent wages. They won’t succeed. Italia will always be a poor country as long as the Church controls so much land, and while the old families and the nobles keep all the power. The government is weak, and The War made it even weaker.”

“What about Mussolini?” asked Rosa, who had been reading his name more often in *Il Progresso*.

“He is the opposite of the socialists. When I was in the north, the workers were afraid to say anything bad about him for fear of losing their jobs. He has his supporters in those places where the Church is strong and where the people are poor, like Sigillo. The leader of his party in the village is the barber’s son, but the person behind him with the money is Lucca.”

Tommaso did not know for certain that there was something between Lucca and the Rosati family, but he had always sensed it. Teresa was there that Christmas when her younger cousin was sacrificed for the rest of the family. She did not know whether her sister-in-law was party to the secret, but she had never mentioned a word of it to her husband, not even when he wondered out loud why Francesco had left his sister and their children in Luxembourg just before The War.

“Mussolini is pressing the government to build up the army,” said Tommaso. “Everyone up to the age of forty-one has to serve, especially those who did not fight in The War. If you want to stay out of the army, Checco, you will have to stay out of Italia until you reach that age.”

Francesco knew this. Lucca’s spy had told him already that if he tried to go back he would be arrested as soon as he got off the boat, and he would be no use to his family or to Lucca. Stay where you are, he had been told, and everyone will be happy. He had not told Rosa about this encounter. He was waiting for someone else to break the news. Now Tommaso had done it.

“Five more years!” Rosa cried.

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“It will pass quickly,” consoled Francesco. “Look at how fast these years have gone. And when we go back we will have enough money to buy the whole village, not just Masseggio.”

“Five more years of living in other people’s houses, trying to cook and bake without a proper stove and oven, it’s no good. We can’t grow our own chickens or pig. This is not living,” complained Rosa.

“We will build our own house!” declared Francesco, catching everyone by surprise.

“Now you really have gone crazy!” said Rosa.

“No I have not. The land is for sale further up on The Orchard, along with the small house. We have to wait until September before the owner moves out, but then we can take as much time as we need to build our own house. We have saved enough to put a roof over our heads to keep the rain and snow out. Everyone will help. You’ll see,” said Francesco confidently.

Francesco had planned it all. He even had a design: a double house, one side for his family and the other side for a tenant; two floors, with three rooms on the first floor and four on the second; indoor running water and an indoor bathroom on the second floor; a full basement on both sides of the house with a wine press and drying room for the meats. He would buy the house and the land next to it, and they would live in the small house while they finished the house. When their house was ready to move into, he would sell the small house and get enough money from it to pay for his house. The lot was big enough for the two-family house he had planned, and there was plenty of room for a big vegetable garden, and chicken coop and a pig sty, as well as fruit trees.

He had shaken hands with the seller, an Englishman who had grown weary of a life among immigrants who spoke a language he would not attempt to understand nor speak. When the time came to exchange papers, the seller informed Francesco that he had sold the house separately for a better price than he had been offered from him with the land. The empty lot was still for sale if he wanted it. Who is the buyer of the house, Francesco asked, masking his extreme anger with the seller and his disregard for the honor of his word. Tony Cossantini, the seller replied. Francesco knew him. He would not cause trouble for his future neighbor, only explain his situation. They had no place to live in a

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week's time. The house they were renting had new tenants. Cossantini went along with the idea of the six Rosatis living in his house with his family. Three months is what he offered. After that they needed the room for his wife's family who were coming to America.

Three months to build a house that was livable. Was it possible? It had to be, Francesco resolved.

Twenty men came with their picks and shovels and wheel barrows on that first Sunday in September, 1922. Francesco had marked the ground with stakes where the house would sit. The men set to digging. Rosa had spent the week making tagliatelli and sauce to feed the crew of friends. They would finish his season's wine. This was their payment, along with a promise from Francesco to help them when it was their turn to build. In two Saturdays the hole was finished. Francesco worked for two more weeks every day after work and late into the evening, mostly on his own, to pour the concrete foundation up to ground level. Zio Cichinno was by his side now as they laid the concrete blocks two-and-a-half feet up to the level of the first floor. His uncle was an expert at making brick ovens, he would be an expert at laying a stone foundation.

"Zio," said Francesco to his uncle while they moved the level line for the next course of blocks, "you never went back home after you came to America. Why not?"

"Like you, Checco, I thought I would come over and make the money fast, then go home. I thought it would be easy. But it wasn't easy. It was hard. Every day I cursed my decision to leave Sigillo. I tried the mines, but I couldn't do it. I was afraid every minute, just like I was afraid when they put me into the grotto. There wasn't much else for an ignorant immigrant to do, except the railroads, and I didn't have the strength for that work. I talked my way into the wholesale business and lived from hand to mouth for another couple of years, until I put enough money aside to begin buying and selling. Then things loosened up. But almost ten years had passed and there was no chance during that time to even pay the fare back to Italia—if I wanted to go."

"Didn't you want to go? Didn't you miss seeing your mamma and babbo, and the rest of your family?" asked Francesco in disbelief.

"I remember that first Christmas when I was here, on my own. All I wished for was to have them around me. I closed my eyes and wished

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very hard, and soon they were all there with me. The table was set, the glasses filled, and we ate the Christmas dinner just like we always had. When we had eaten all we could, we sang the songs of the holiday. When the fire had burned down to the last ember, we all slept very, very well. When I woke up, I was alone again, but I was never lonely after that.

“The years I was at home, I didn’t wake up every morning and go to bed every evening thinking of babbo and mamma or any of the other important people in my life. Mamma cooked and cleaned and looked after us. Babbo worked hard to keep a roof over our head and food on the table, but I never thought about those things. I thought about eating my next meal, having warm socks and a jacket to wear during the cold winter months. Then I moved away. I’ve never been closer to my family or loved them more than I have since I left them. I’m sure they know that.”

“But you can still go back anytime. You have the money now.”

“I had only one trip over the ocean in my bones. On that trip, the ship went up and down with the waves, and my stomach always went in the other direction. I’d be dead on arrival if I tried to go over again. Besides, my family—the ones who are left—keep coming over here to me. And so far, they’ve all stayed. You’re the first to build a house. I see you’re not building a fireplace. I hope you are planning to buy a good, strong stove for Rosa.”

“First I need to finish the house,” said Francesco as they got back to laying the blocks.

The first storey walls and second storey floor boards went up the weekend after the foundation was finished. The next weekend they completed the second storey walls and made a start on the roof trusses. On the following weekend, the roof was ready for shingles, and they had started putting on the siding. Zio Cichinno supervised the building of the chimneys, one on each side of the house. While the men ate their lunch in the empty lot on the opposite side to Cossantini, Francesco had an idea. He had been unsure how he would make the stairs leading up to the front doors to each side of his new house. Should he build a small roof over a landing, one for each door? He wanted his house to be one, big home, not two separate ones. Two little entries did not satisfy his dream. He decided that he would make one large, covered porch, deep enough for giving shelter in the heaviest mid-summer rain. It would be big

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enough to hold many chairs where he and his friends could sit late into the night and talk about important things. He would build two, wide stairs leading up to the porch, one each in front of the doors. After lunch, he started digging the foundation for his new porch.

The house was not finished when the family moved in, but their side was livable. The new stove provided enough heat for the downstairs part of the house on most days, although it was a cold first winter. In February, there was a heavy snowfall with strong gusts of wind. Snow blew in through the holes in the basement walls where eventually there would be windows. Francesco continued to work every evening, hanging doors, painting and putting up the moldings. The only part of the house that was bought on credit was the steam boiler and radiators, one thousand dollars, and he started paying back the loan as soon as he received it. No more debts, Francesco had decided.



The house Francesco Rosati built for his family on The Orchard



Back in Italia, there was both good and bad news in the family, and a national tragedy in the making. In February of 1921, Francesco's second youngest sister, Rosa, had married Claudio Attilio Bastianelli in Sant'Andrea Church in Sigillo. They lived in Costacciaro, just three miles north of Sigillo on the via Flaminia. They were expecting their first child. Alfio Bastianelli was born on the 25th of October, 1922. Claudio

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was an American citizen, born in Iron Mountain, Michigan in 1902. Claudio would be able to bring his family to America in spite of the new immigration regulations. They were not immigrants. Claudio was making his final preparations to return to America to prepare the way for his family. He was going to work in the mines alongside his new brothers-in-law, Francesco and Antonio.

In the spring of 1922, Tommaso Notari's wife Rosa gave birth to a boy, Rosolino, but she died after the delivery. She had not been taken to a hospital, even though Tommaso had sent the money to pay for it, and even though he had begged her parents to respect his demand that they do so. Tommaso was both heartbroken and angry. He could not help but blame himself for not being there to take her to the hospital himself, but if he had stayed, he could not have earned the money to pay for a proper doctor and a trained midwife. His Rosa died because she came from a poor family, like his own, but not because she was poor. He sent a telegram to his in-laws telling them that he was not coming to the funeral, and that they would now have to watch over his and Rosa's children until he could afford to return and take them all back to America with him.

In the autumn of the same year, while Francesco and his family and friends were building a new, temporary Rosati homestead, Benito Mussolini became Italia's new prime minister. His rise to power began after The War, but he had already been part of the pre-War political scene, although in another skin. Mussolini was a reformed socialist. In 1909 he was the editor of the socialist newspaper in Forli. In 1910, he became secretary of the Forli Socialist Party. Like other socialists, he opposed Italia's entrance into The War. He changed his stance at the same time as he left the socialist party. On March 23, 1919, he and other young veterans of The War founded *Fasci di Combattimento*. This was the beginning of the Fascist movement. Fascist comes from the Latin word *fascis*, bound sticks, that was a totem of power in ancient Roma.

The *Fasci di Combattimento* were called Black Shirts, or *camicie nere*. They were mostly discontented ex-soldiers who claimed to be ultranationalists. They posed as champions of law and order, but they were a militia that broke strikes, violently attacked communists, socialists and other radical and progressive groups, and drove their elected representatives from office.

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In November of 1919, the Socialist and Popular party won the political election. In 1920, the country was crippled by nation-wide strikes. In May, 1921, there are new elections in Italia, and Blocco Nazionale and the fascist movement were the winners. Mussolini entered parliament under the fascist banner. In November of that year, the fascist movement became a political party, but it continued its violent campaign of terror against all opposition. From May through July of 1922, the fascist Black Shirts increased their violent activities, and all protest strikes were brutally repressed.

On October 28, 1922, the *camicie nere* began to take up positions around Roma. The fascist party leaders, led by Mussolini, had decided four days earlier that an insurrection would take place starting on that day. Their plan was that the Black Shirts would march on Roma and, at the same time, capture other strategic places all over Italia. They would take control of the parliament, and they would have the support of the Church and the King, who were fearful of a socialist revolution, and most of the Italian people, who were weary of constant changes in government, and dissatisfied with their country's post-War treatment by their allies, especially the Americans.

When the fascists began to mobilize after the October 22nd meeting, the government, led by Luigi Facta, had petitioned the King, who controlled the country's military force, to ban the march. The King refused. Luigi Facta resigned and the government fell. As the Black Shirts gathered around Roma, Facta, although he had resigned, ordered a state of siege for Roma. He presented the order for the King's signature, but Vittorio Emanuele III once again refused to side with the elected government. Instead, on October 29th, the King sent a message to Mussolini, who was in Milan waiting for the events he had set in motion to unfold. The King asked Mussolini to become prime minister and to form a cabinet as soon as practicable.

What began as a forceful takeover ended with a transition of government in accordance with the *Statuto Albertino*, the Italian Constitution. Mussolini arrived in Roma by train from Milano on October 30th. On October 31st, twenty-five thousand Black Shirts marched ceremoniously and triumphantly through the streets of Roma. The era of Italian fascism had begun. Mussolini had used social unrest, which his supporters to a large degree helped to foment through their

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brutal attacks on all those who opposed their leader, as a pretext for his seizing of power. He had played the King, the Church and the political elite, the three main actors in the country's still brief history, all vying for the hearts, souls and minds of the people, brilliantly against one another. The royal family feared dethronement; the Church feared further loss of status; and the political elite feared that their special privileges would be stripped away by an egalitarian regime. The King became an accomplice, the Church was silent, and the political leaders abandoned their standard bearer.



There were many differences between where he and his family were living now and where he had lived before, thought Francesco. The weather was one of these differences. His memories of Esch-sur-Alzette were of six months of rain or wet snow and damp cold, and another six months of half rainy and half sunny days with suffocating humidity. Sigillo was hot, dry and dusty from May until September. There was usually enough rain to keep the crops from drying out, but there were many prayers whispered and candles lit in the churches to make sure that the skies opened up on occasion. The rains that replenished the wells and gave life to the vegetation fell in the late autumn and the early spring. He remembered a few winters in Sigillo when there was heavy snow and bitter cold, but most of the winters were a mix of clear blue and dark grey skies. Winter melted into summer, and summer fell into winter.

In Old Forge, where the Susquehanna and Lackawanna river valleys met, there were four distinct seasons, like a *panettone* cut into four equal pieces, each with a different topping. Spring began when the snow melted in early March and lasted until the trees had grown their new leaves, still pale green with a touch of yellow. During the summer the sun stayed high above the small and scattered, but ever-present clouds. Sometimes the clouds were shaped like the fluffy sheep he had tended as a boy. At other times they were like long white goose feathers. On the warmest summer days the clouds would gather together late in the afternoon for a performance of thunder and lightning. The heavy rains would overwhelm his flowering zucchini and tomato plants, but they would always manage to close up just in time to survive. Autumn came with the first frost in September, and the mountain that was visible from

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the back of the house would be set ablaze with colors he had never before seen. The fuel for the flames was the maple tree. There were no maple trees in Sigillo. Except for the fruit trees, there were few trees of any kind. They were either cut for burning or building, or they were eaten in their formative stages by sheep and goats. The start of winter was signaled by a snowfall just before *natale*. The temperatures were well below freezing by new year's day, and it stayed cold into February. Then it started all over again. *Quattro stagioni*.

As soon as the ground thawed that first spring that the Rosati family were in their new house, Francesco, with Celeste's help, dug the vegetable garden. They dug in sections six feet wide, three feet deep. They put back the dirt in layers alternated with horse manure and sand, each six inches thick. When they had finished one six-foot-wide section, they started another. There were five sections, and the width of the garden was fifteen feet. They were preparing a vegetable garden bed that would allow deep roots and provide nourishment for the plants that would grow there for many years to come. When it came to making a vegetable garden, Francesco knew only one way, the right way.

When the vegetable bed was finished, they spread the dirt that was left over evenly around the house. They built a pig sty and then a chicken coop at the far end of the property that backed up to a large, open field. Francesco came home from work one day with two crates of chickens stuffed into the trunk of his Model-T. These were not pets, he lectured the children. They were meant to lay eggs, and when they didn't lay anymore eggs, they were meant to be put into the pot and cooked. Jolanda, just two years old, was overjoyed to have these new playmates. It wasn't until the first pig appeared in the pigpen that Maria, Elena and Celeste began to take an interest in the animal section of the garden. Another lecture followed their introduction to *il maiale*. He would be fed for a year. In the autumn, he would be killed and butchered. They would all watch and they would all help. And then they would enjoy him in the different dishes that their mother would make in the months ahead. This was the way it was.

Francesco was constantly occupied with projects, the most important one being the finishing of the house. It was important to get the other side of the house ready for renting, said Francesco, but Rosa insisted that he finish their own side first. He put up the trim, hung the doors, laid the

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wood floors, painted walls, ceilings and trim. Gradually, Rosa bought the furniture they needed downstairs and upstairs. The kitchen table and chairs came with them when they moved. A new sofa was added to the second-hand arm chairs they bought from the former owner of the house next door. The dining room would wait. Beds, wardrobes and dressers were more important.



Elena, Maria and Jolanda ca.1925 Mamma Rosa and Celeste

When both sides of the house were livable, Francesco started work on the one project that he had been thinking about since he started, his wine press. For years he had been making wine using a press he had constructed while they were living in Hilldale. Even though he could not afford to buy his own grapes at the time, building the wine press gave him hope for the future. Once it was done, he could make wine for his friends and relatives who did have the money. He would take a few gallons in return for his labors. It was a small and crude construction that could be moved. When the wine press came to The Orchard, it seemed to grow legs. He was never sure where it was, who had borrowed it, and when—or if—it was coming back home. He decided it was time he built a proper, permanent press, with sturdy lumber and a concrete base.

He had divided the basement into two parts, one under each side of the house, but he never considered that the people living on the other side

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from theirs would be anyone other than family. He had used up most of the space on his side with drying rooms for the hams and sausages, and for the coal bin and boiler, so the wine press and would have to be on the other side. He built up the concrete base high enough off the basement floor so that a large bucket could be placed beneath the wide spout that he formed on the front side. The sturdy oak slats and brace for the large, steel screw and turn hardware he bought at Pittston Lumber, where he had become a steady customer and well-known for paying cash. He ordered the hardware through an ironmonger in Pittston. It was the same hardware that was used for a cider press.

Through all of the moves and construction, Rosa maintained the household routine. On Monday she did the washing; on Tuesday she did the ironing; on Wednesday she baked the bread; on Thursday she cleaned one-half of the house; on Friday, she cleaned the other half of the house; on Saturday she made the macaroni for Sunday dinner; and on Sunday she made the dinner and went to church. Everything else had to fit into this weekly routine.

Now that they had their own chickens and a pig, Rosa could once again make Francesco's favorite Sunday macaroni dish, meat-and-spinach-filled ravioli. She cooked, strained and diced enough blades of spinach to fill a large cup. There should not be too much spinach because it will make the filling too loose, and all the juice should be squeezed out of it. She ground a few pounds of pork and chicken in her meat grinder, and added veal if she had it. She heated up some oil in her large cast iron skillet, stirred in the meat until it was brown, then added in a bowlful of breadcrumbs, salt and pepper. While the meat and breadcrumbs browned a little more, she beat two eggs in a bowl, added parmigiano cheese and nutmeg, the secret ingredient. She poured this over the meat and breadcrumbs, added the spinach, gave it a final heating, then removed it and let it cool.

Now it was time to make the ravioli. She rolled out her pasta dough until it was thin and flat. She cut the pasta dough into four-inch strips. She placed a half-teaspoonful of the filling mixture in the middle of two-inch areas along one side of the strip. Rosa always tried to make the ravioli with dough that she had just made so that when she folded the dough over to make the little packets, the dough would stick together. If the dough had dried out, she would wet the open edge on the filling side

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of the strip and the middle of the long strip, as well as the spaces in between the drops of filling, with plain water applied with a brush that she saved just for this job. The moisture is what made the dough layers stick to each other, she explained to her girls, who were always fascinated by how she made these little envelopes that tasted so good when they ate them. She pressed down the long edges of the dough with her finger tips, and then pressed down on the spaces between the little hills of filling with her outstretched finger. Then, she cut the packets apart, and finished the edges with a quick press with a fork. Francesco told Rosa that her special sauce and a glass of his own red wine were the perfect combination with her ravioli. It was a meal in itself.



Claudio Bastianelli had returned to Exeter after Alfio was born, and he was back working in the mines before his wife and three-year-old child made the journey. The summer after Rosa arrived in 1925, her sister Filomena gave birth to twin girls on June 30, 1926. She named them Alda and Anna. Filomena's and Antonio's oldest daughter, Maria, was six years old when the twins arrived, and Lillian was four. Each of the births had been difficult, but this one took all of Filomena's strength.

"We have to help her, Rosa," said Francesco as they drove back home to The Orchard from their visit with his sister and their family. "My sister Rosa is only a few months away from having her second child, otherwise she would do it."

"Why can't both of your sisters move to The Orchard? Your sisters are stubborn. We could help each other. Why do they have to live so far away?" complained Rosa.

"Their husbands planted roots in Exeter. We live where we live because your brother planted roots on The Orchard. Filomena and Antonio have a home. Rosa and Claudio have a home. We have a home. We have to help them," said Francesco with determination in his voice.

"We can send Elena," offered Rosa.

"Elena is almost old enough to work, and she is more help to you. She will be old enough to marry soon. Maria will go to live with them."

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“No, Checco! She is only ten, still a little girl. How can she take care of your sister and the four children? No. I will not allow it,” replied Rosa, with even greater determination.

“My wife, you know that your daughter Maria is beyond her years when it comes to caring for others. It’s her second nature. Her aunt will pave the way to heaven with gold for her niece after she has done her this favor, and her cousins will be grateful for the rest of their long lives. We will secure our little daughter’s place in heaven by this generous act.”

Once again, Rosa was disarmed and overcome by her husband’s skill at meeting her objections to whatever he had already decided to do, but making her feel that they had reached an obvious conclusion together.

Maria sat in the front of her father’s car as they drove to Exeter. She understood that she would be living with her aunt and uncle for some undetermined time, and helping to take care of the new babies that they had just received from God. She had been given instructions by her mother before leaving home. She would go to a new school, help her aunt with the cleaning and washing and feeding before and after school, and when her aunt felt better, she would come home. There was nothing more that her father could or chose to add to these instructions. They rode in silence.



It took almost six years for Rosa’s brother, Tommaso, to overcome his emotional distress and anger over his wife’s death. When he did, he returned to Sigillo to see his three children. He would wait until he saw them before he decided whether to bring them back with him to America. The youngest, Rosolino, had never met his father. His oldest son, Giuliano, was not quite two years old when Tommaso returned to America, so he could hardly have remembered him. Livia had spent her first six years with a father and the next six without, and she informed all who would listen to her that she definitely preferred to have a father.

The children were being raised by Tommaso’s mother-in-law, Domenica Galassi Costanzi, with as much help from her husband Giuseppe as he could offer. Livia, who was growing up quickly, was placed in a convent school where the nuns could keep a close watch over her, more so than her aging grandmother. The boys were spoiled by their

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grandfather and their Zio Fernando, who indulged them in return for some peace in the house.

Tommaso had not been sure what would happen when he saw his children. Would they still recognize him as their father? He had provided well for them and had sent them many letters written mostly by his sister with money for each of them. Occasionally, he would receive a letter from Livia and she would include something from the boys. Would he visit with them for a short while and then take his leave, or would he take them home with him, back to America?

He made his mind up as soon as he had the three of them sitting at his mother's table. They had no discipline whatsoever. He separated the two boys, sitting himself between them to stop them from punching and pinching and kicking one another. They continued their behavior behind his back and over his knees until he finally raised them both up by their shirt collars, took them into what had been his old room, locked the door, and spanked them until their behinds were scarlet. Their sister shouted oaths that her father rarely heard even in the depths of the mines. Where had she learned this? What else had she learned while her grandmother and the nuns were not watching? He was shocked!

Angela was able to calm down her granddaughter and Domenico came to console his two grandsons. Tommaso left to talk with his in-laws. He explained that he would take the children back with him as soon as he could arrange for passage and fix a place where they would live on The Orchard. They were relieved. The burden of both guilt and responsibility had been too much for them.

Tommaso went to the church rectory, found Don Antonio and asked him to write a letter to his sister. He could have found a letter writer in the piazza. As more children in the village attended school, there were more choices than the priests to use for communicating across the ocean. Tommaso did not trust anyone else with this sensitive errand. He was not sure that the priests kept their confidence and did not divulge their parishioners' problems and failings, as expressed in the letters they wrote for them, when they met their brothers in the priesthood. It did not matter to him if they had a good laugh inside their own walls, as long as it did not come outside the walls. As far as he knew, it never did.

The letter Don Antonio wrote for Tommaso to his sister and her husband was both rational and emotional. He explained that he

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understood that Rosa and her family were planning to return to Sigillo as soon as Francesco was beyond the limit for the army. This would be within the coming year. He and his children only needed a few months to get settled, find a place of their own where they could set up a household. His daughter would soon be old enough to start working, and the boys would be put into school directly. Could they stay with them for a short while, he asked.

Three weeks later, Rosa carefully opened the letter from her brother. She had been expecting to read the words that Don Antonio had written. When Francesco came home from work she told him the letter had arrived.

“When is he coming?” asked Francesco.

“He says as soon as he can get tickets for the ship. He asks if they can stay with us for awhile, until they can find their own place,” said Rosa, hesitantly. They had talked about this, but she was still not sure what her husband was really thinking.

“Will he bring all of them or leave the girl with the nuns?”

“He wants them all to stay together. Livia is growing too fast, and the nuns don’t seem to have done much good. Her mother had a mind of her own, God rest her soul. That’s where she got it,” replied Rosa.

“We can ask the tenants to let them use one or two rooms. They only need the one bedroom for themselves,” said Francesco.

“Tommaso can pay them,” offered Rosa.

“You will have four more mouths to feed, Rosa. And you will now be the mother to three more children. Are you sure you want to do this?”

“Yes,” said Rosa firmly, “but I do not want to give up our plan to return home as soon as we can. Your sister is feeling better and she has her own sister close by now. They can take care of each other. Celeste can take his last years of school in Italia, then he will find a good job. I still dream of seeing our daughters married in Sant’Andrea. Will that dream come true, Checco?”

Francesco nodded his head slowly up and down, moving it only slightly. This was not a convincing ‘yes’, and he knew it. He wanted this to be his dream as well, but as the months and years passed he had

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doubts. He knew that it would be difficult for all of them to move back, even Rosa. They had been in their own house for six years now. That was longer than they had lived in Esch-zur-Alzette. Rosa never talked about that time anymore. There was The Orchard and there was Sigillo. Nothing else mattered. There was nothing in between.

“We’ll go up to the village now and send a telegram. I’ll talk to the tenants tonight,” said Francesco with finality.

A month later, Tommaso Notari was on the front porch with his Livia, Giuliano and Rosolino. After tears were wiped away and the endless hugs and kisses stopped, after plates of Rosa’s *tagliatelli* and glasses of Francesco’s wine, after the pieces of Rosa’s prized table lamp were cleaned up when the boys could no longer resist running through their new home and sliding down the banister leading up to the second floor, everyone retired to their sleeping quarters. Only Francesco and Rosa were sleeping in the same bed, in the same room and with the same partners they had the night before. Tommaso, Rosolino, Giuliano and Celeste occupied one room in two beds on the tenant’s side of the second floor. They reached their room through the door that had always been there at the top of the stairs. Livia and Elena had the back room and Maria and Jolanda the middle room on their own side of the house.



Rosolino, Livia and Giuliano Notari

There would not be much sleep on this night. Francesco lay awake long after the whispers and muffled laughter subsided and were replaced with the sounds of sleep. There were ten of his and Rosa’s family now under his roof. They all slept in beds in rooms with doors that could be

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shut and windows that could be opened. There was running water inside this house. He owned the house and the land it sat on. They grew their vegetables, picked the fruit from their own trees that they had planted, tended to their pig and their poultry. He worked and made the money. They had no debts. Every month he sent some of his money home to the rest of his family so that they could live in a house that they did not own that sat on land that was not theirs in. And it was to that place that his wife had her heart set on returning.



Francesco and Rosa continued to look for signs that showed it would be safe for them to return with their children to Sigillo. After Mussolini declared himself the sole leader of government and brutally murdered his opposition, it looked like there was no hope. Those who arrived from Italia, including Francesco's brother-in-law Claudio Bastianelli, his sister Rosa and most recently Rosa's brother Tommaso, all told stories of neighbors spying on one another, police arresting anyone who criticized the government or its local supporters, and of a general state of fear that hung heavily over the country like an autumn mist that would not dissipate. Most people became members of the National Fascist Party in the years following the murder in 1924 of Giacomo Matteotti, a leading socialist and Fascist critic, and Mussolini declaring himself the sole leader of the government. In 1926, he banned all parties other than his own, as well as all unions. In March of 1929, the Fascists won the election with 99% of the vote, but no one was allowed to vote for another party. There was not much encouraging news coming from their homeland.

Then, in July of 1929 something happened to give at least Rosa hope that conditions in her home country would favor their return. It involved the status of The Church and its seat of power, The Vatican. On a Sunday, late in July, the priest at St. Mary's put aside his sermon and told his parishioners that His Holiness, the Pope, and all of the holy men and women who surrounded him in The Vatican, were no longer prisoners. Il Duce, representing both the government of Italia and the king, Victorio Emanuele III, had signed an historic accord, called the Lateran Treaty, recognizing the sovereignty of The Vatican as a separate state within the borders of Italia.

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This treaty, the priest explained, resolved what was called the *Roman Question* that had existed since 1871 when Italia was unified. At that time, papal sovereignty was restricted to a few buildings. The Pope and his successors had been granted an annual payment as reparation for the loss of the Papal States. The Church never accepted the payment nor recognized the arrangement.

The priest then read the terms of the Lateran Treaty. *That Roman Catholicism is the only state religion of Italia, and that Italia recognizes the new state called Vatican City as fully sovereign and independent. Vatican City is guaranteed public services and protection, and the Italian government will punish crimes committed within Vatican City, when requested, and the Holy See will extradite to Italia persons accused of acts recognized by both parties as crimes. Matrimony was recognized by the government as a sacrament, with banns published; marriages can only be nullified by The Church, while the state can determine whether couples can separate. The Roman Catholic religion is to be taught in primary and secondary schools. The Holy See guarantees that Roman Catholic organizations will abstain from politics, that the Holy See will not take part in international congresses for peace, and will only use its moral and spiritual power to prevent warfare when it sees fit.*

“There are many big words in this text that you may not all understand,” said the priest, “but the result is that The Church declares that with this treaty it now has its proper liberty, and that the *Roman Question* is now closed. The Church also recognizes the Kingdom of Italia under the *Casa Savoia*.”

During their Sunday supper, Rosa told her family about what the priest had said. Her brother offered the opinion that The Church had enough power without having its own country. And what good was it to them if the only people who could live in this new country were the Pope and other Church people. Tommaso had never been a friend of The Church, and he had become less so after listening to all the talk from the union organizers. Francesco said he thought it just made Mussolini stronger because now he had The Church on his side. If the priests made trouble, he could always take back the treaty.

The Rosati children listened to this talk about their parents' home country. It was difficult for them to understand what it meant to them. For the Notari children, especially Livia, it was more real. They

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remembered seeing the Black Shirts. Celeste was old enough to have an opinion, but what he remembered of Sigillo and about his time there was what his mother and father and other relatives told him. They were talking about a place that was their home; he was an American. This was his home. He had grown up being told that one day they would return to Sigillo. He wanted to become an artist and live in New York City. Elena giggled.

“What’s funny?” demanded Rosa.

“Livia made a joke,” replied Elena, knowing that the back of her mother’s hand could fly in her direction quicker than the flick of a horse’s tail if she gave the wrong answer: Nothing.

“What did you say?” Rosa said, turning to her niece.

“Only that everyone will have to call Mussolini *San Duce* after the Pope makes him a saint.”

“Don’t make jokes about the Holy Father. It’s a sacrilege. You should know better, being taught by the nuns,” scolded Livia’s aunt. Then, turning to her brother, she said, “It’s a good thing you got her out of there when you did.”

Tommaso and Francesco could not help having a silent laugh. This would be a good story for the ride down the shaft tomorrow morning, they thought. Mussolini was not a favorite among the workers. Francesco’s thoughts drifted from the conversation. He did not understand politics, why one way of thinking was better or worse than another. His old friend Guillermo had tried to explain these things to him. Where was Guillermo now? Francesco knew that when the men went on strike, the company police came in to break through the picket lines and called the strikers *communists* as they beat them with their clubs. The leaders of the strikes called the mine owners *filthy capitalists*. He did his work and the mine owners paid him a wage. What else should he expect?

“Where do you think they will have the first church named San Benito, Checco? Checco!” asked Tommaso, stirring him from his ruminations.



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For being from Sigillo, this was an unusually large envelope that Rosa took from the mailbox. She felt it. There was more than a letter in it. She did not want to be alone when she opened it in case there was bad news. All of the children were in school, and Francesco had not yet come home from work. Should she wait for him? She decided to go next door to Maria Piccotti. They stared at the unopened envelope for what seemed like hours. Rosa was convinced that it contained something that she did not want to see. Finally, she opened it. There was a letter written by Don Antonio from her parents, and then there was another envelope that was addressed to Celeste Rosati, Predio Masseggio, Commune di Sigillo, Provincia di Perugia.

Celeste had turned eighteen a few months earlier. What could he possibly be receiving in the mail from Italia? He had never before received a letter from home. Neither had any of the girls. She opened the letter carefully. Should she be opening her son's letter, she asked Maria. As long as he lives under your roof, answered her friend, what is his is yours. She unfolded the paper, one sheet, with the seal of the Italian government on the top and Department of the National Military in the letterhead. Her son was informed that he was being called to serve his country, and that he should report to the army offices in the city hall immediately. Failure to report would be punished severely. Rosa burst into tears.

When Francesco came home, Rosa was waiting for him outside, sitting on the back stairs leading into the house. Normally, she had filled a hot tub of water in the cellar where she helped him scrub off the coal dust that had stuck with the sweat to his skin after a day in the mine.

"What's wrong?" asked Francesco.

"Celeste has been called into the Italian army. His papers came today," replied Rosa, and burst into tears again.

Francesco knew that there could be only one explanation for this. It was Lucca. His son was not registered in the church in Sigillo. He was registered on the ship that sailed from Naples to New York as "female" according to his instructions to his wife. Lucca had made sure that Francesco's son was on the list of boys to be drafted, to keep him in America, working, so that he could continue to pay him his tribute.

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“Rosa, my wife, you know what this means, don’t you?” said Francesco softly. “It means that we will not be going back to Sigillo as a family.”

“I have always hoped, Checco. I have always thought that we could make it happen if we worked hard enough and prayed hard enough,” sobbed Rosa, no longer able to control her tears. “Why has God been so cruel to us?”

“I am sure that God has more important things to think about than our family. And if he does have his finger in our lives, maybe he has seen that we do more good where we are than where we want to be.”

“I long to see the mountain, to hear the bells from the churches ringing through the village all at the same time. We said that we would go home when you were beyond the age of a soldier. That was two years ago. Now, they want to put our son into one of their uniforms. Why can’t we live in peace?”

“We will talk to the children tonight after supper,” declared Francesco. “Celeste will go to school where he will learn how to be a banker. I do not want to hear another word about him becoming an artist. Maria can stay in school as long as we can afford to it, but then she will have to go to work. It is time that we begin to find a husband for Elena.”

Celeste had already chosen a college where he could study accounting. It was a small school in Trenton, New Jersey called Ryder College. He could live with family friends and pay a small sum for his lodging and meals. He knew that his father would never allow him to attend art school in New York City. He should count himself lucky that he was given the privilege of finishing high school. Many of the boys his age had been in the mines for three years. His mother had been the one encouraging him, but he knew that if his father did not want it to be so, it would not have been so. He never questioned why; he gladly accepted it as a fact.

A few months after Celeste began his studies at Ryder, people on the street and in the mines talked about the New York Stock Market crashing. Neither Francesco nor Rosa knew what a stock market was, and they were not sure whether they should care. But gradually, they began to realize that something was affecting all businesses, and people started to be put out of work. Francesco said that houses and shops and

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offices still needed to be heated, and electricity still needed to be generated, but he understood that people were buying less coal. Work in the mines slowed. Everyone felt it. Francesco always had work because he had his miner's papers, but it was less steady than it had been before the economic troubles. When the owners decided to stop production, he would go down with a few other miners to shore up the bracing.

He looked for other ways to make money, and other ways to save money. He started to hunt and fish to keep food on the table. The Lackawanna River that flowed just over the hill on the other side of the tracks was no longer fishable. It had become an open sewer with the upstream towns and cities, including Scranton, dumping all of their waste into its waters. There were small tributaries to both the Lackawanna and Susquehanna, as well as ponds up in the hills that still had fish, and he learned how to catch them. Hunting was not something that he took to naturally. His aversion to guns made it difficult to convince his finger to squeeze the trigger of his new rifle when his eye caught site of game, and when his mind told him it was time to shoot. He kept trying, practicing on shooting birds out of the young cherry tree he had planted in the middle of the back yard, a delicacy when dropped into the macaroni sauce. Eventually, he shot his first deer. He preferred fishing, but his gun put more food on the family's plates.

In spite of the depression that settled over the nation during the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s, Francesco managed to keep his son in college, food on the table, and Lucca's greed satisfied.



Maria was fifteen when she had to leave school. That was in the spring of 1931. Francesco drove her to school, and they went together to the principal's office. Francesco explained that Maria would not be coming back. She had to work to help support the family. Once things got better, when the depression was over and work was more steady, she would return, promised Francesco.

"They never return, Mr. Rosati," said the principal. "Once they leave and get the taste of money, they never come back. Let her stay. She is a good student."

"She ken read and'a write and'a count good enough. What wil'a she do wid'a more ejukayshun? I mean'a no disarespect, sir, but haven't you

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thot'a my daughter how to learn? If she wants'a more she can'a ged it on'a her own."

"Can I talk to you in private, Mr. Rosati?" asked the principal.

"Maria, (wait for me outside the room with the lady behind the desk).

"Si, babbo," answered Maria, hoping that the principal would work a miracle, but knowing in her heart that his pleas on her account were fruitless since her father had made up his mind.

Francesco knew that his daughter wanted to stay in school more than anything else. She wanted to learn everything that was in the books and that was in the heads of the teachers. He wanted to grant her that wish, but he knew that he could not.

When they were alone, the principal said, "If it's the money, Mr. Rosati, maybe there is another solution. My wife and I never had a son or a daughter of our own. Would you consider letting us adopt Maria. We will pay you handsomely for the privilege."

Francesco looked at the principal with a deep gaze. Did he just ask him if he could buy his daughter? Maybe he misunderstood. Maybe this was an American custom he had not yet heard about.

"I don't want to offend you, Mr. Rosati," said the principal, realizing that his offer had touched a sensitive nerve. "That is not my intention. It is just that Maria seems to be so interested in school and learning, and we could help her to stay in school, maybe even go to college."

"Dank'a yu, sir. No, I'm'a nodda mad. Maria is a gooda girl, and'a 'er mamma and'a me we lov'a 'er very much. We wanna keep 'er as our own'a dotter."

And with that he turned and left the principal's office.

"Why did he want to talk to you alone? Am I still leaving school?" pleaded Maria.

"Si. You are still leaving school. He did not want you to hear all the good things that he wanted to tell me about you."

After Maria left school, she joined her sister Elena working at a dress factory in a section of Scranton between Hyde Park and North Scranton, called Tripp Park. The dress factory was next to the Parodi Cigar factory

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that made the stinky cigars that their father and all the other men in the neighborhood smoked. Each morning, starting very early, they walked from The Orchard to the village, a distance of close to a mile. They rode the trolley for five miles from Old Forge to Eynon Street, and then walked the last mile-and-a-half in order to save a fare. They retraced their journey after they finished their day's work. These were long days. When Elena married the following spring, Maria began working at The Duchess in Old Forge, a women's lingerie factory. She and her friend Anita Bartolomei walked through the field behind The Orchard and up the hill to the factory each day. When she entered the factory on the first day, she recognized many of the faces sitting behind the sewing machines. They had been her classmates in school. They had been the cause of empty seats during the previous terms. Now, her seat at school sat empty. Maria took up her new seat and began to sew. The floor lady was the new teacher; the factory manager the new principal.



Lucca recalled what was written in the Doctrine of Fascism that was being prepared for publishing for all the world to read. *Fascism is anti-individualistic. The individual is unimportant; the State is supreme. The individual is accepted only to the extent that his interests coincide with those of the State. A fascist Nation is not the collective will of a majority of its people, but the purest expression of the people as the conscience and will of the few, indeed, of one. Fascism does not believe in the possibility or even the utility of perpetual peace. War concentrates human energies and rewards those peoples who have the courage to face struggles. Fascism believes that men are not born equal, do not become equal over time, and cannot be made equal by universal suffrage. Fascism denies the right of numbers to govern by means of periodical consultations.*

This doctrine, written for Il Duce by Giovanni Gentile, expressed his views totally. It fit him like a suit that he had sewn himself when his nimble fingers created the clothes of the most important men in the land, the priests. The priests had now been superseded in their importance by a new group of men. The religious doctrines that had controlled his life, his ambitions, his possibilities, were now replaced by a state doctrine that neither prescribed nor circumscribed his existence. He was a member of the State, and everything he did was for the State. He was not important,

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but what he did for the State was. How he performed his duties were not important, but that they increased the well-being of the State were. The only way he could be put outside the State was to choose that course himself, and he was not interested in doing so. He had been outside all his life.

He remembered the last time he visited the abbey to deliver the proceeds from the harvest. The Abbot had died unexpectedly a few months before. The Abbot's secretary sat at the Abbot's old desk when Lucca entered the room. He told Lucca that he thought it was acceptable for Lucca to continue in his position and carry on doing what he had done for the past thirty years. He, the secretary, would take over the responsibilities of the Abbot, he explained. No, he still saw no reason to inform the legal heir to the lands of his inheritance since he was sure that he, the heir, would approve of how the funds were being managed. The Church was distributing these funds in a way that saw to the greater good. The well-being of the Church and those it served was more important than an individual having a voice in such issues, the secretary explained. Didn't Signore Lucca agree? Yes, Lucca had said, he agreed completely

Acceptable for him to continue is what the secretary had said. For over thirty years he had served at the discretion of a man, the Abbot, whom he never met after agreeing to his terms. Never had he been given the courtesy of a *thank you* for increasing the yields of the farmers. The secretary barely acknowledged his arrivals each year when he had delivered the bounty. He accepted the money from Lucca and perfunctorily bid him adieu.

"With respect, signore, I believe it is time for a new relationship between us," said Lucca. The secretary looked up abruptly. Lucca continued. "I will not be coming here again. Each visit to this abbey has caused me great pain, and I shall not miss them. You will send a messenger once per year beginning next year, on the last day of October. This messenger will receive a sum of money from me that I judge each year to be an appropriate amount. I shall not report you and the deceased Abbot to the authorities for your years of deceit, and you shall be satisfied with whatever you receive as a token of my gratitude for the Abbot's original kindness." Having said this, he left.

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Lucca had returned to Gubbio many times since that last visit to the abbey, driving his car at top speeds up and over the mountain and down to the city, and then even faster on the return journey. He went to Gubbio to take part in Party meetings, to offer his counsel to the Party members on how to keep the people, the Church and those who would oppose the country's leaders in a constant state of paralysis. His advice was highly regarded by the Party members, and he was offered their deepest respect. He was a valued member of the Party, although some Party members were starting to worry that he was growing too cautious about Il Duce's discussions with the leader of the so-called Nazi Party in Germany, Adolf Hitler, who was modeling his shadow government on that of his Italian neighbors.



It was late autumn of 1931 as Francesco drove home alone from visiting his sisters in Exeter. Elena's wedding would take place in June of the next year. Celeste had just graduated from college in August. His sister Filomena now had a son, Orlando, who was born the year before. His sister Rosa had a daughter, Edith Theresa, who was born just after Filomena's twins. Most of Enrico and Teresa's children were married and already having children. Angelina had recently married Nanno Albanesi and did not have any children yet. Orlando married Margareta and they had a daughter, Rosemary. Dusala married Nunzato Lilli, and they now had two sons, Giuseppe and Dario.

More of his and Rosa's cousins had arrived. Giovanni Sabatini, who was Rosa's cousin, her mother's sister's son, was a baker living in Exeter. There was another Francesco Rosati, Zio Luigi's son, living close to the old homestead on Main Street. Luigi Rosati, Zio Domenico's and Zia Domenica's son, was in California, but Luigi's sister, Amelia, had married Davide Ciufferi from Cantiano in Marche, just north of Schéggia, and they were living on The Orchard with their daughters Vittoria and Susanna, and their son Alfio. Vittoria had recently married Primo Mori, a handsome man who came from Gubbio, and they lived very close by. Primo Mori was a declared atheist, an honest non-believer among a group of non-declared agnostic men.

Tommaso and his three children had moved to the other side of the house. Livia, at sixteen, was now taking care of her father and two brothers. She was too young for such a heavy responsibility, thought

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Francesco. Their neighbors on the opposite side from the Cossantinis, Valentino and Maria Piccotti, had built their house shortly after Francesco finished his, and the families had become good friends. Maria Piccotti became the sister Rosa never had. They helped each other with everything, and when they weren't working, they were talking, always talking. Pietro, the oldest of the Piccotti children, was the same age as their own Maria. Elia was younger than Jolanda, and Giovanni was the youngest. Valentino's brothers, Alfonso and Umberto, lived nearby.

Many new houses had been built up and down The Orchard. The families came mostly from Provincia di Perugia in Umbria, but there were families from other parts of Italia as well. The Perone family was from Sicilia; the Pio family came from Roma in Lazio. The houses were built in the same way as the Rosati house, with the help of all the friends, relatives and neighbors whose houses they had helped build, or who had received a favor of some kind when it was needed. People built the houses they could afford. They built quickly because they usually did not have the luxury of living for very long in one place while they spent their entire savings in their new homes. The street took on the character of a village. Families worked, worshiped, celebrated and mourned together. It began to feel like it had felt back home.

Francesco's porch had become the principal gathering place for the men in the neighborhood, just as he had hoped it would be when he decided to build it as an open room facing the street. When the men congregated on his porch on Sunday afternoons and weekday evenings, they talked about politics, economics, history, geography, geology, art, science, medicine. Oftentimes, the young boys would sit quietly on the stairs to hear what the men were thinking. They talked about everything. For men who had never seen the inside of a school classroom, who had never learned to read or write, they were knowledgeable and well-informed. Someone had talked to someone who knew something, or who had learned something. Everyone had their specialty. One of them knew why the sun rose and set. One of them knew what made wine wine. One of them knew what made coal coal. One of them knew who started the depression.

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*Standing: Tommaso Notari, Antonio Baldrice, and Francesco Rosati
Seated: Giuliano and Rosolino Notari*

“Who do they think they’re kidding,” sniffed Antonio Chiavarini. “Money doesn’t just disappear. It’s the Rockefellers and the other filthy rich who are hoarding it all. They want to squeeze us all so we will work for peanuts again, just like we did when we first came over here.”

Men were out of work. Someone had to be responsible. It wasn’t natural. Men were willing to work. They had crossed an ocean at the peril of their lives. They had left their families and friends, sacrificed their traditions. They would not be at their mother’s or father’s bedside when they died, and they would not be buried next to their relatives as generations when it was their turn to pass away. They did all this in order to work. And now they were told there was no work because there was no money.

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“The politicians know what’s going on, but most of them are paid off by the big shots to keep out of it,” continued Cavarinni, starting to build up a head of steam.

“What about this Roosevelt, who says he’s going to put everybody back to work?” asked Alfonso.

“He’s one of the rich guys too, but at least he’s a Democrat,” answered Cavarinni. “At least he’s not a Republican, like Hoover. The Republicans don’t care about the workers. They’re the party for the businesses, and every two-bit farmer is a businessman. Well, one day there will be more wage earners than farmers, and we’ll have someone running this country who does what’s right by them. I’m going to take all of you with me when it’s time to vote next year, and you’re all going to pull the lever for the Democrats.”

Herbert Hoover had been President for almost three years when this discussion was taking place on Francesco’s front porch. He was President when the stock market collapsed, and he had presided over the worst depression in America’s relatively short history. Tens of thousands of businesses had failed, including many farms. Not only did the monetary system fail, but the weather in the country’s heartland created impossible conditions for the crops. Hoover was a Quaker, the son of a blacksmith, and he was a humanitarian. When he was campaigning for the presidency, he said: “We in America today are nearer to the final triumph over poverty than ever before in the history of any land.” What President Hoover did not believe in was a federal government that saved its citizens from starvation. That, he said, was the responsibility of local government and of voluntary organizations. He was a Republican.

Francesco listened, as usual. What his friend said about hoarding the money made sense, he thought. But he remembered from the days that he ran his business in Esch-sur-Alzette, and his bakery during the first two years he was in America, that businesses are built on credit; credit is built on what people who have money believe your business is worth; what they believe is built on trust. When trust vanishes, so does your credit, and that’s the end of your business. He didn’t know why people stopped believing, and he certainly didn’t know anything about stock markets, he just knew that earning the money was much harder now than it had been before things turned bad a few years before.

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Rosa had letters from Sigillo, and she read *Il Progresso*. If times were bad here, she said, they weren't much better on the other side of the Atlantic. The difference there was that everyone blamed The War. Countries—their labor, their land and their capital—were in ruins when the fighting finally stopped. The countries became dependent on money and products from the United States, and they grew heavily in debt.

Everyone was waiting for things to get better, for people to start going back to work. Things weren't getting better. If anything, they were getting worse. Francesco felt that if he was ever going to go back and see his mother and father alive, he would have to go soon. He had no trouble getting work because he had his miner's papers. If he took some time off, he would be able to make it up when he returned. He had saved enough money to buy Masseggio. He was sure of it this time. Lucca could not refuse him. At forty-five, he was now far too old to be of any interest to the army. Rosa still talked about returning. She said that they could go back with Maria and Jolanda. They were still young enough at fifteen and eleven. Maybe they would live at Masseggio, or maybe they would live in the village. He could see when he got there, she said. Rosa agreed that he should first go there alone, to make plans and get things ready. She would see things at home while he was away.

Francesco told Rosa not to get her hopes up too high. He did not know what he would find. Didn't they have a good life where they were, he would often ask. "I want to sleep in the grave with the rest of our families," she would always say. He would not remind her that her brother Celestino was here, buried somewhere in the cemetery on the hill. His grave was unmarked for reasons she would never understand. She would walk through the graveyard searching for signs of him, try to feel his presence. She would lay flowers in an open place among the gravestones, talk to him and hope that he was close enough to listen.

When word spread that he was planning to make the trip, many of the men on The Orchard talked with him about perhaps coming along. When it came time to buy the ticket, only one of them showed that they were serious, Pietro Alimenti. Pietro was one of Francesco's best friends. He had come to America in 1901 from Gualdo Tadino, a village fifteen kilometers south of Sigillo along the via Flaminia. He married Francesco's cousin, his mother's sister's daughter, and they lived on The Orchard. Francesco always had a special place in his heart for this

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cousin, maybe because she was so much like his mother: calm, quiet, strong, determined. He transferred his respect for her to her husband, and the men treated each other as family, not just countrymen.

Francesco and Pietro would sail from New York to Napoli on the fifteenth of February, 1932, and return along the same route one month after they had landed. Francesco wanted to sail home from Le Havre, and travel to Luxembourg along the way. It turned out that this was difficult and much more expensive than he thought, so he gave up that plan. Both men bought new clothes, new shoes and a new hat for the trip. They wanted to give a good impression to their families when they arrived, to show that they had been successful in America. Rosa wrote a letter addressed to her father- and mother-in-law telling them that their son was coming home for a visit in March.

One week before Francesco boarded the ship that would take him back home, a telegram arrived. It was from Francesco's father, Tommaso. The telegram read only: *Lucca è morto. Babbo.*



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Closing a Door to Open Another

ON BOARD THE SHIP, FRANCESCO TOOK out from his pocket the envelope that held the photograph of his mother and a letter written by Don Antonio in his father's voice. Rosa had read the letter to him many times before he left. He had memorized every word.

Masseggio, Sigillo
21 November 1931

Our Dear Francesco,

Your mother and I are well, considering our age. Everyone here at Masseggio sends their regards to you, Rosa and the children. We hope that you are all in good health. We received the money you sent with your last letter. God bless you for your generosity during all of these years. You have surely been the most faithful son that your mother and I could have ever hoped for. There are no changes that I can report to you.

It was a very warm summer, and the crops suffered. We prayed each day that the Good Lord would grant us the favor of rain. Thank God, the rains came just at the right time. You know how important it is to have a good harvest. Your brothers are doing their best, and I help them as much as I can. My advice has become a substitute for my hands and back, but it seems to be appreciated. (Your father thinks that he is not appreciated, but of course he is. DA)

When Don Antonio read us Rosa's letter that said that you were coming to visit us, we were overtaken with joy. We have longed to see you one more time before God takes us to him. We can die in peace once we have seen you. We wish you a safe and speedy journey home. We will wait for your telegram telling us of your arrival. May God be with you and bless you, Rosa, Celeste, Elena, Maria and Jolanda.

Your loving Father and Mother.

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It was almost twenty years since he had seen his mother and father and brothers and uncles and aunts and cousins and friends in Sigillo. The last time was when he and Rosa and their one-year-old Celeste had been back to Masseggio in the autumn of 1912, a year before their second child, Elena, was born. He had intended to make the journey with the family, including Elena, during the autumn of 1914, but the war changed those plans. He had photographs of his family, like the one he held in his hand, but how would he feel when he saw his father and mother twenty years older? How would they feel when they saw him twenty years older? Would they still feel that he was their son?



Anna Maria Sabatini Rosati

“There are no changes that I can report to you.” This was his father’s way of saying that Lucca was still alive and pressing them for money as he always had since he first appeared at Masseggio. If his father could have written the letter himself, he would have cursed Lucca. But his name was never mentioned in the letters written by Don Antonio. Not even their priest, their confessor, should know their secret. The letter was written before the telegram. *Lucca è morto.*

That morning, he and Pietro Alimenti had each driven their cars loaded with their families and their suitcases to Scranton, to Lackawanna Station, where they would take the train to Hoboken. Rosa and Jolanda sat in the front seat, while Celeste, Maria and Elena shared the back.

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They had been able to fit Tommaso and his three children in the Model-T when the children had first arrived, but now they were all too big, and the car struggled to pull the load. Otherwise, they would have been along on this trip as well. They took the usual route down Main Street until they came to Scranton Street. They turned right, drove past the new church that had been built on the crest of the hill, Saint Lucy's, and then down the steep decline to Seventh Street. Francesco always chose to drive along Seventh Street up to Lackawanna Avenue instead of taking the short-cut over the river past the gas house. He didn't like taking the back road into the city, he said. At Lackawanna Avenue, they turned right and drove the length of the main street of the city right up to the front of the station, and then they parked their cars directly outside the front entrance.

"Kin I help you with yo bags, sir," asked the porter. This wasn't the same man with the green coat with yellow braiding and green hat with a black brim who had not helped Francesco upon his arrival in Scranton eighteen years earlier. Francesco wasn't the same person either.

"Yes, tank you. Helpa my friend too."

The porter took the bags to the platform while Francesco and Pietro bought their tickets, round trip. Their families followed them, and they moved together like a swarm of bees through the great waiting hall and then out onto the platform. The Phoebe Snow pulled into the station, steam billowing from the engine. Francesco and Pietro climbed on board, led by the porter, who carefully placed their bags in the luggage racks above their seats. Francesco tipped him, more than the normal amount, and the porter smiled, knowing he had helped a working man. The two men settled into their seats across from one another next to the window, and, as the train pulled out of the station, they waved to their families who were huddled together, as if to gain strength from the temporary loss of their fathers and husbands, and waved back with mighty stokes into the air.

"Come home soon!" they cried in unison. Smoke from the engine engulfed the platform and all of its transient inhabitants as it began its journey from Scranton to Hoboken. "Here we go," said Pietro to Francesco with a big smile.

Francesco had made this journey a few times before, once to meet Rosa when she came over with their children and his sister Filomena, and

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again, together with his brother-in-law Claudio, to meet his sister Rosa and their son Alfio. Those trips seemed so long ago, he thought. He didn't remember the long climb out of the city and the rushing brook that was running at high speed in the opposite direction as the one in which they were headed. *There must be fish in that brook*, he mused. He would try it when they returned. Mt. Pocono, Stroudsburg, across the Delaware River through the Delaware Water Gap. "There's the Indian head!" one of the children cried, and everyone had to strain their necks toward the windows to see him. Past Netcong and Dover and finally into Hoboken, the Phoebe Snow knew the way.

They took the ferry across to the piers on the West Side of Manhattan. They already had their tickets and so went directly on board. A steward directed them to their room. It wasn't first or second class, but it was not steerage. *Two weeks*, Francesco thought. *I have never been on a ship for that long.*



Francesco had not become a better sea passenger since he made his last voyage. Storms had caused this crossing to be more unsettling than the one eighteen years before. His friend Pietro had better sea legs and enjoyed the two-week crossing, walking the decks, talking to everyone who showed the slightest interest in engaging in conversation, and eating as well as was possible. Francesco gladly walked ashore as the ship docked in Napoli early in the morning. Their plan was to take a train to Roma, buy a car there and then drive to Sigillo. After showing their papers and being questioned by the authorities along with all the arriving passengers, they walked through the narrow and winding streets of Napoli's old town.

The central train station was just a few blocks from where their ship docked. Pietro suggested that they take a detour into the old town. "We're tourists!" he said. Francesco had never been to Napoli. He had never been south of Roma on the mainland. Rosa had told him that her time there, just before leaving for America, was brief and, as she had described it, uncomfortable. She said that it was very hot and the smell in the air was a foul mixture of shellfish and sewer gas. On this day, the

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high buildings flanking the streets made it impossible for the sun to reach down to the pavement. It was a cold and damp late winter day, and the darkness at the bottom of the street caverns made it even more bleak. There was a faint smell in the air, similar to the one Rosa had described. Francesco was happy it was not summer.

They stopped at a small café for something to eat and drink. They sat down, and a short, round man in a large apron took their order and then disappeared through a curtained opening in the wall. The first thing that Francesco noticed was that there was an Italian flag hanging on one wall. Next to it, on one side, were three framed portraits, one of the king, a second of the Pope, and a third of Mussolini. There was a thin man smoking a pipe sitting at the table next to them. The only other table inside the tiny café was unoccupied. Outside there were a few more chairs and tables, but they were empty.

“Buongiorno signori. You men look like you have just gotten off the boat from America,” said the thin man.

“Buongiorno, signore. That’s right,” answered Pietro, pleased that it was so obvious to the casual observer. *“How did you guess?”*

“Your shoes. Everyone buys new shoes when they return from America. We don’t come back rich, but we want everyone to think that we are.”

“Did you live in America?” Pietro asked. Francesco, as usual, preferred to listen and let his friend do the talking.

“Oh yes. I went there right after The War. I planned to make my fortune and then take over my wife and two small children. I wasn’t there long enough to get my citizenship before they passed the immigration law. I tried everything I could to get my family over. I didn’t have enough money for bribes. Five years I was over there before I gave up and came home.”

“It must have been hard to come back,” Pietro leaned over and spoke in almost a whisper, *“and now I hear you can’t vote.”*

“You’re right not to say that too loud. Be careful while you are here. You are just in your old country for a visit, aren’t you, seeing your relatives?”

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“*Si, Si.* We’re going back in a month after we’ve visited with our families.”

“It is not the same country that you left. Watch what you say,” offered the thin man. “I’m happy to be back here. That voting business, I never understood it. All the politicians in New York where I lived were crooks, and they only did something if you gave them a bribe. The people who make all the decisions about what is a law and what isn’t aren’t the politicians. They’re the rich people who own the land and the businesses. They run the cities and the country.”

“What’s different in Italia,” said Francesco suddenly, looking over his shoulder to the portraits hanging on the wall behind him.

“Nothing,” answered the thin man quietly. “We just don’t pretend that most people don’t have anything to say.”

The waiter appeared with a tray of sandwiches and two coffees. As he placed them down on the table where Francesco and Pietro sat, he said, “While you are back in Italia you would be well advised to stay away from talk about the government, the Church and the king. Otherwise, you may find yourselves staying longer than you expected. My friend here gave you good advice.”

They finished their sandwiches, drank their coffees, and then found the central train station. They bought tickets for Roma, boarded the train and settled in for the two hundred twenty kilometer, six-hour journey. Francesco took out his new watch from his vest pocket. The dry goods store owner in Pittston where he had bought it showed him how to wind it and how to tell the time. He had wound it each day during the sea voyage. As they left the station, he saw a large clock on the platform. The time was not the same as on his watch. His watch had the short dial just after the two and the long dial just after the six. The clock had the short dial just after the eight and the long dial after the six. He remembered an argument that two of the mine workers were having several years earlier when one said that it wasn’t the same time in Italia as it was in Pennsylvania. “How can that be?!” one of two men shouted. He didn’t understand any of it. But the times were different now. He clearly saw that.

“Pietro,” Francesco called, “What time do you think it is?”

“There’s a clock right out there. What does it say?”

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“It’s not the same time as on my watch.”

“You should buy yourself a good watch, Checco, one that tells the proper time.” laughed Pietro. “Turn your watch to match the one out there and you can’t go wrong.”

Francesco knew that his friend was no wiser than he about the time of day in different parts of the world. He said to himself that he would bring up the question at the next meeting on his porch. Someone there was bound to have an opinion. Someone always had an opinion about everything.

The train left exactly on the minute that it was supposed to leave. *He made the trains run on time*, Francesco remembered someone saying about Il Duce. They moved slowly out of the city, first to the east and then north. The first stop would be Aversa, the conductor said. More passengers came on board in Aversa and the train headed west, toward the coast before turning north again, just past *San Cipriano d’Aversa*. When they reached Fórmia they saw the sea, Mar Tirreno, one of their fellow passengers told them. They were half-way to Roma. They passed through several long tunnels. It turned pitch black outside the windows, and the dim lights in the cars gave everyone a sickly yellow color. Francesco thought of the mines, the days spent in near darkness, with the only light available attached to the men’s foreheads. He was not in a mine now. They would emerge soon into the bright sun and they would all be miraculously cured.

It was late afternoon when they arrived in Roma at Il Station Central Roma Termini. Francesco remembered what his friend Guillermo had told him once when he was giving him an imaginary tour of the capital city as they worked in the blacksmith shop. “It was given the name *termini* because it was close to the Diocletian Baths, not because it was at the end of a train line. Baths in Latin are *thermae*,” Guillermo had said. *How did he know these things*, Francesco wondered. *And how do I still remember what he told me so long ago?*

Pietro commented first on the station as the train pulled under its glass and iron canopy.

“This is not what I expected,” he said.

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“I was here when I came back from Sardegna in 1902. It looks the same as it did back then,” said Francesco. “I thought they would have replaced it long ago.”

“Our stations back home are palaces compared to this,” added Pietro with enthusiasm. “Penn Station and Grand Central Station in New York. Union Station in Washington. That’s a beauty, Checco. You have to see it.”

From the seat behind came a deep voice. “Everything is bigger and better over there in America, even the train stations.”

Pietro rose out of his seat to connect the voice to a face. Francesco tried to hold him back down, but Pietro had already moved out into the aisle. He looked at the man who was close to their age, well-dressed in a dark suit and dark grey overcoat. He was holding his black felt bowler hat and black calf gloves in his hands. He continued to sit as he spoke.

“Perhaps you never learned about your country’s history when you lived here, or you have forgotten it. This part of our country was never the industrial center. It was governed, body and soul, by The Church. Investments in roads, railroads and public buildings were not high on the list of priorities for the men of The Church. This building was one of the few exceptions. It was built while Roma was still part of the Papal States. The Church, and specifically His Holiness Pope Pius IX, gave his blessing to begin construction. Salvatore Bianchi, the building’s architect, did his best, knowing what little he did—from what little there was to know at the time—about railroads and rail travel. A few years after it was built, Roma was the capital of a new country, but wars, both internal and external, have not given us the time or the money to build a station worthy of this great city’s position.”

Pietro broke in, gently. The train was coming to a stop.

“I meant no offence,” Pietro said. “It’s just that I expected more.”

“Some day there will be more,” said the stranger. “Milano now has its new station. We have to be next, once we are out of this economic crisis that is plaguing the world. Where are you two men going? I presume you are not just here in Roma as tourists, are you?”

“We are traveling to our home villages in Provincia di Perugia. Sigillo for my friend, and Gualdo Tadino for me,” answered Pietro,

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trying to show in his tone that he was repentant for his sin of criticism. “We are planning to buy a car here tomorrow and then drive home.”

“Cars will be the ruination of our cities and mankind. Trains are faster, safer and more comfortable, and a horse or horse-drawn wagon is all a person needs for moving about his city, town or village,” responded the stranger, obviously irritated with the idea of another car being added to the already growing number.

“I agree,” said Pietro, “but it’s for my brother.”

“You are welcome to come home with me to spend the night in my home.” The stranger looked around to make sure no one was listening. “It might be safer than if I let you wander around the city on their own. This can be a dangerous place if you don’t watch what you do or say. I can take you tomorrow morning to a place where you can buy your car.”

“We have not even introduced ourselves. *Mi chiamo Pietro Alimenti.*”

“*Mi chiamo Francesco Rosati,*” said Francesco, speaking his first words in present company.

“*Sono Saverio Nicoletti. Piacere, Signori Alimenti e Rosati.*”

The name *Nicoletti* meant nothing to the two visitors from America, but Signore Nicoletti was a well-known railway design engineer. He was part of a circle of architects and engineers who were trying to modernize the capital and the country.

The three men left the station together, Signore Nicoletti leading the way. He walked past the line of black Fiat taxis and headed straight for a stylish red, black and gold Landau with two black horses. Nicoletti instructed the driver in the placement of their bags on the rack at the back of the carriage. He was a perfectionist, and it would not do for one of his colleagues to see him riding with a haphazard construction created from his luggage. He placed Pietro and Francesco in the seat facing forward, and he took the seat across from them. That way, they would be able to clearly see the sights he was about to describe to them.

“Shall we have a short tour of the city?” suggested Signore Nicoletti. Although it was a question, there was no doubt that he was going to give the men a tour whether they wanted one or not.

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“Yes, Signore Nicoletti,” replied Pietro, “if you have the time and it is not any trouble.”

“Yes, if you are sure it is no trouble, Signore Nicoletti,” added Francesco.

“It will be my pleasure,” said Signore Nicoletti, and with a large smile added, “Please call me Saverio.”

The horses stepped forward and the wagon, with the three men and the driver, moved along the pavement. The tour had begun.

“People come to Roma to see the ruins of the structures that are still left from this city’s earliest centuries. They come to visit the churches, sit on the steps in the Piazza di Spagna, throw money into Fontana di Trevi and the many other fountains that are sprinkled throughout the city. They come to wander through the museums, eat and drink in the thousands of restaurants and cafes, and to catch a glimpse of the Pope. People come to Roma, but most of them never actually see the city, the city that has evolved over time to become one of the world’s most beautiful. Roma is not just a city of Michelangelo or Bernini or even its master designer, Pope Sixtus V, who, in the late sixteenth century, gave the architects a vision which they have been carrying out ever since then. Roma is first a city started by nature, molded by man and finished by divine inspiration. We cannot see all of Roma riding for an hour in this carriage, but what I will show you during this next hour is the heart of this wonderful city, its seven hills, *Septimontium*.

“The train station we have just left ends at the foot of *Viminalis*, our first hill. It is not the most logical place for the city’s rail terminus, but it is situated here out of necessity. Running it any further would have meant too much excavation.”

They drove down Via Cavour toward the second hill, *Esquilinus*. They came to the *Piazza dell’Esquilino* with its obelisk placed by Sixtus V directly in front of Santa Maria Maggiore. “The hill, the obelisk and piazza with the same name, Esquilino, and the church commemorate this ancient location. This church is my favorite among the seven votive churches, *Le Sette Chiese di Roma*,” said Saverio.

“I remember this place,” said Francesco. “I sat here with my cousin Lando the very first time I was away from home. We were on our way to

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Sardegna and we sat here and ate the lunch I had taken with me from home.”

“You picked a very good spot,” responded Saverio.

“We learned only one thing about Roma from our priest,” said Pietro, “that we should one day visit all seven churches on *Giovedì Santo*. That would give us many indulgences. He taught us the names, and I have always remembered them: San Pietro in Vaticano; San Paolo; San Sebastiano; Santa Croce in Gerusalemme; San Lorenzo; San Giovanni; and, Santa Maria Maggiore.”

“Bravo!” cried Saverio. “Recited like a true Roman.”

Pietro beamed.

They continued along the Via Cavour to the third hill, *Capitolinus*.

“Michelangelo performed his most magnificent magic on Monte Capitoline, what we call *Campidoglio*. He took two mediocre medieval palaces, Palazzo del Conservatori and Palazzo del Senatore, and redesigned their facades so that they complemented one another. The statue of Marcus Aurelius placed in the space between these buildings was the idea of Sixtus V, not Michelangelo. The architect protested at first, but then created a piazza worthy of both the Pope and the emperor. The palazzo on the third side was completed after Michelangelo’s death, but it was done according to his design. Out of the hill has grown one of the world’s most perfect architectural masterpieces.

They drove up the Via del Corso past the Palazzo Venezia.

“You can see here some remains of the old Servian Wall, named after the sixth king, Servius Tullius,” explained Saverio. “These walls were built between 378 and 352 Ante Christum. The original via Flaminia began here, where we are now riding.”

They turned to the right and soon were in front of a large palazzo.

“This is the Palazzo del Quirinale, and we are now at the fourth hill, *Quirinalis*. Construction on this palazzo was started by Pope Gregorio XIII in 1583, and was completed in 1585, the year he died. Sixtus V succeeded him and was the first Pope to live in the palazzo during his entire reign. All Popes thereafter lived here, that is, up until 1870—and, oh yes, with the exceptions of when Napoleon’s armies were in control

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of the country just before and after the start of the 19th century—and, yes, again when the first Roman Republic was declared in 1849 by Italian patriots, and the Pope was forced to flee.”

“What happened then?” asked Francesco.

“The French sent troops to fight against Garibaldi and his men. The French forces took back the city for the Pope. But the Italians were determined to live in a single country, not one divided by any other ruler, even the Pope. By 1860 Italia was a united country, except for Roma and its surroundings, and that situation continued for ten more years. In 1870, when France was forced to withdraw its armies to protect its own lands from the Prussians, the Italians declared war on the Papal States. That was September 10, 1870. Ten days later, the Italian forces reached Roma. Pope Pius IX ordered his small army to fight. He wanted to make the point that he was being conquered. He told his small army not to give up, and for three hours they were pounded by the Italian canons. After three hours they were finally allowed to capitulate. The Pope was forced to leave the palazzo. He retreated to the Vatican, where he lived as a self-proclaimed prisoner until just a few years ago, in 1929, when a treaty between the Italian state and the Pope was finally signed, creating the Vatican State.”

“Who lives here now?” asked Pietro.

“The King and his family, which poured more salt in the Pope’s wounds and added even further to the insult he felt,” responded Saverio. “Now, finally, The Church seems to have resigned itself to being a ruler of souls rather than the ruler of countries. It’s state is more of a symbol than a country, and not much bigger than a postage stamp.”

Through the Piazza di Quirinale they drove, south toward the Torre di Milizie, Foro Traiano, Foro di Augusto, Foro di Cesare and then Foro Romano on the fifth hill, *Palatinus*. They could see the Colosseo at the end of Via dei Fori Imperiali.

“This, the *Palatinus*, was the original settlement, where Romulus founded the city in the seventh century Ante Christum. This was Roma, and the other hills were inhabited by other tribes. It was only when these separate groups began to cooperate and work together to bring their settlements together, to drain the swamps at the bases of their hills to

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create farms and pastures, only then did the beginnings of ancient Roma take shape. This was the period called Kings, from 753 to 510 A.C.

Their wagon passed under Arco di Constantino and down the Via di San Gregorio, with the ruins of ancient Roma on their right. They came to Circus Maximus, or *Circo Massimo* in Italian.

“Tarquinius Priscus, an Etruscan king of Roma, built this racing track in the beginning of the fifth century Ante Christum, in the open space between Palatinus and the sixth hill, *Aventinus*. *Circo Massimo* was the place where the Romans gathered, not in churches or basilicas,” explained Saverio. “They worshipped war, and were always uncomfortable when they were at peace. They recreated war in this huge open temple, and honored both the victors and the vanquished.”

They turned into Via Del Circo Massimo, then left to climb the *Aventinus* to see the Tempio di Diana.

“This was the first temple to honor the Roman goddess, Diana. She was the fertility goddess, revered by women as their protector. The temple was built in the early years of the Kings, and served as the model for other temples throughout the lands under the dominion of Roma. It was in these temples, and particularly in this one, that the more important religious acts were performed. This is where the sacrifices were made.”

They descended from the *Aventinus* arrived at the Piazza San Paolo and the Piramide di Caio Cestio. From here they drove along the Republican Wall on the Viale Giotto to the seventh and final hill, *Coelius*, where the massive stone and concrete remains of the Terme di Caracalla.

“As an engineer, I am most fond of these ruins. The Romans built better buildings, like these baths from the second century A.D, than most modern-day structures. The baths are named for the emperor, Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, who was known as *Caracalla*. The water to feed the hot and cold baths came on an aqueduct from springs in the hills near Subiaco, which are almost one hundred kilometers from here.”

“We have a bridge back home I think you would like,” said Francesco. “It’s called the Nicholson Bridge. Some people call it the Tunkhannock Viaduct.”

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“I know it!” exclaimed Saverio. “It was built by the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad just over fifteen years ago. Remember, I am a railroad engineer. So this is the part of the world where you live. I have seen pictures of the structure. It is magnificent.”

Francesco and Pietro nodded to each other. *He knows where we live, and it is a special place*, was what they were saying with their nods.

“Shall I turn here, Signore Nicoletti?” asked the driver.

“No, Alberto, continue to the two churches,” replied Saverio. “There is still some light left in the sky.”

They drove along Via Amba Aradam to Piazza di San Giovanni in Laterano with another of Pope Sixtus V’s obelisks. They continued down Viale Carlo Felice to Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, then turned down Via Nola, Via Monza and Via Aosta to Piazza dei Re di Roma right along the Via Cerveteri and Via Soana to Piazza Tuscolo, where Saverio lived on the eastern side of the piazza. The driver removed their luggage, and with warm smiles and some extra coins in his hand, bid his riders *arrivederci!*

“That was a magnificent tour!” exclaimed Pietro.

“*Grazie. Molto grazie,*” added Francesco.

“It was my pleasure, gentlemen,” replied Saverio. “There is no better way to enjoy something you love than by sharing it with others.”

Saverio asked the men to come inside the apartment and wait for a few moments while he prepared his wife for having guests. The maid took their coats and hats, and placed their bags in one corner of the large, octangular-shaped foyer. Signore Nicoletti returned after a short while and led them into the apartment. As they passed from the foyer into the main room, the first thing that Francesco noticed was that every wall was covered either with a painting or drawing or by bookshelves.

“Have you read all of these books, Signore Nicoletti?” Francesco asked.

“Not all of them. Many of them belong to my wife,” he answered.

“My wife can read,” said Francesco thoughtfully. “My children can read as well. But I can’t. We don’t have any books in our house.”

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“Maybe your family thinks you would be upset at the sight of books if you cannot read them. Surprise them when you go home and take a book with you as a present for your wife. She will appreciate it. Anyone who can read appreciates a book as a present.”

Signora Nicoletti appeared. She was a handsome woman, as tall as her husband, who was a head taller than both Francesco and Pietro. She wore a long, dark grey skirt and a simple white blouse. Her black hair was wrapped in a bun at the back of her head. Her blue eyes and light skin matched those of one of her husband’s guests, and her accent was decidedly northern. Signore Nicoletti introduced her. Giuliana was her name. He explained that they had met when they were both students in Bologna. She was studying medicine and she eventually became a doctor. Their sons, Nicolo and Giulio, were now studying at Bologna, engineering and medicine.

Francesco and Pietro were unsure how they should act in the presence of an educated woman. She sensed their nervousness and tried to put them at ease.

“Please come in and sit down. My husband has told me that you are visiting your home country to see your family and friends, and that he has offered you our hospitality for this night before you continue your journey tomorrow. You are very welcome.”

Francesco and Pietro sat on the large couch covered in a thick, blue velvet-like material with gold piping. The furniture seemed to have been made for people who were at least twice their size. They sank into the cushions and felt like they disappeared from view. A maid appeared with aperitifs, red vermouth. She had to lean over in order for them to take the glasses from her tray. Giuliana asked them about their families, where they were born, where they now lived, how they traveled to America, what they did for work, how many children they had, what the churches were like, whether there were hospitals where they could go if they were sick, whether their children were in school. She asked many questions, but she asked them in such a pleasant way that both Francesco and Pietro wanted to give her answers that would truly please her. Neither man had ever met a woman like this before. What was it that made her different, they wondered to themselves.

Their glasses had been refilled at least once, maybe twice. The velvet cushions were too comfortable, thought Francesco, especially after the

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long train journey and two weeks on board a ship where nothing felt comfortable. He would fall asleep if he was not afraid of offending his host and hostess. Gratefully, the maid announced that dinner was served.

The dining room, like all other rooms in the spacious apartment, was furnished with book shelves and paintings, oriental rugs and ornate lamps with porcelain china bases. Giuliana told them with great humor that their dining room table and chairs were actually from the main library in Roma where her husband had spent many evenings and weekends before leaving for university. The head librarian was a family friend, and he sent her husband a letter while they were still studying telling him that the trustees had decided to replace the old furniture with new, and did Saverio and his new bride wish to have one of the tables and chair sets as a wedding gift? As newlyweds with little money, they accepted the offer. It has cost them a small fortune to move the set each time they changed apartments, but it has been in this apartment for over ten years and it does not look like it will be moving to another anytime soon, she said, laughing.

Dinner was served by a maid different from the woman they met when they arrived, and different from the young girl who served them their drink in the main room. They began with *spaghetti alla prestinara*, “baker’s style”. The spaghetti is boiled, drained and stirred into a pan with garlic and oil, and then served with parsley and pecorino cheese sprinkled on top. The portions were smaller than Francesco and Pietro were used to, but they politely said nothing, just ate slowly, thinking they were going to go to bed very hungry this evening. Then the second course arrived. It was *abbacchio brodetto*, small chunks of lamb cooked in a sauce of egg yolks flavored with lemon juice. With this was served *carciofi all giudia*, “artichokes Jewish style”. Tender young artichokes are deep fried in olive oil and flattened out while they cook so that they are shaped like roses on the plates. A large plate of *pomodori con riso* was carried to each of the guests by the maid. Now, Pietro and Francesco were careful not to take too much because they did not know when the meal would end. Finocchio with a *pinzimonio* dressing was served as a salad after the lamb and vegetables, and they finished the evening meal with *zuppa inglese*, “English soup”, a cake layered with custard cream and drenched in rum, probably named after the English trifle.

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They left the table and walked to an adjoining room, which was a smaller version of the main room where they first had sat when they arrived. Giuliana excused herself. She would retire early since she had to see patients the next morning at the hospital. She would see them before they left, she promised, and left.

“A man can have a partner, a lover, or, if very lucky, both in a wife. I am a very lucky man,” said Saverio Nicoletti, as he opened a large wooden cabinet that occupied the only section of the walls in this room he called his study that was not covered with books. He opened a box and took out three long, thick cigars that Francesco and Pietro had seen their bosses smoking, but had never experienced themselves. He handed one to each man. They knew these cigars were expensive. He poured three glasses of cognac and handed one to each of the men before he sat down, placing his glass on the table beside his leather-covered chair. Francesco and Pietro had never before seen such glasses, nor experienced its contents. As they raised the glasses up to drink, they had the same reaction when the openings came close to their noses. They moved the glasses away. The aroma from the cognac was strong.

“It doesn’t look or smell like wine, but it is also made from grapes,” explained Saverio. “It comes from a region to the north of Bordeaux in France, called *Charentes* or *Cognac*. The sailors needed something to quench their thirst as they sailed around the world conquering new lands and defending the ones they had already conquered for their kings in the seventeenth century. Plain water did not last very long before it began to grow moldy. The ingenious Dutch found that they could mix water with brandy, and this kept the water from spoiling. The longer this “brandywine” stayed in the casks, the better it tasted, and so was born this fine tasting, aromatic drink called cognac. A little goes a long way.”

Pietro and Francesco were no strangers to alcohol. They often stopped in Pittston at a beer garden along the way back to the Orchard after work and had one or two shots-and-a-beer. Then they would pour a few glasses of wine from their barrels as they washed the coal dust from their skins. It helped to wash out the lungs, they would say. It wasn’t unusual that on a warm summer day, when Francesco would emerge from the cellar to work in the garden, his steps were not quite as steady as they should be and a head of lettuce found itself in the way of his foot. So he and Pietro knew what it felt like to be on the other side of sober.

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But with the before dinner drinks and wine with dinner and now this strange smelling, hard tasting and very strong after dinner chaser, they both knew that waking up the next morning was not going to be easy, and that it would take some time before their heads were clear of the evening's spirits.

"You will soon have an Italian mayor of your largest city," said Saverio, starting a new direction for their conversation.

"You mean The Little Flower, Fiorello LaGuardia," pitched in Pietro, laughing. "He's only half Italian, and that half is Sicilian, but we still claim him for our own. He doesn't mind getting the Italian votes from his father's side and the Jewish votes from his mother's."

"Do you vote in the elections?" asked Saverio.

"Not up until now," answered Francesco. "None of the people who run the government can speak our language, and they don't help us unless we give them a bribe. But Chiavarini has convinced us that we have to vote in the next election to get Roosevelt into the White House. He is going to make sure that they count our votes, he says."

"Fascists don't believe in voting or democratic processes," said Saverio, "so we don't vote any longer in Italia."

"We got a lecture on that subject at a café in Napoli this morning," responded Pietro.

"Without any checks on his authority, Mussolini will have us at war again. The fascists believe that a country at peace is a country in decline. But the *fascisti* will gratify themselves with starting wars that they cannot lose, mostly in Africa and maybe with Albania. The "Bohemian Corporal", Adolf Hitler, will not be satisfied with second-class conflicts. He and his henchmen want to rule the continent. He may let *Il Duce* continue to hold on to his title of Prime Minister, but our country will be a puppet, controlled from Berlin. Hitler is not yet in power, but within a year he will be chancellor of Germany. The only countries that can stop him are your America, and perhaps England. I fear that the man who will be your next president, Mr. Roosevelt, will have too many problems on his side of the Atlantic to care what happens over here, and the English will continue to elect weak men as their leaders."

"Why do we have to have wars?" asked Francesco.

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“They make people rich,” answered Pietro.

“Some men get rich and many more get killed,” replied Francesco.

“Enough men get rich to make it worthwhile for governments to allow wars to happen,” interjected Saverio. “The people who support the governments leave their leaders alone until the wars are lost. Then they hang them in the middle of the capital’s piazza and spit on their dangling corpses. My two sons will be fighting in Africa soon along with all the Italian boys. Then they will be dragged into wars that Germany will start. If they try to resist, they will be shot. Your sons will be safe as long as they stay where they are. You don’t have any ideas about coming back here to Italia, do you?”

Pietro looked over at Francesco, who gave a half-smile and shook his head. “My wife, Rosa, has talked of nothing else since the first day she set her feet in America. She thinks that I am here only to make arrangements for our return. I do not understand her. Our son has already gotten his draft letter from the Italian government and he has no intention of answering it.”

“When you go back home,” said Saverio, “start saving your money so that you can send your wife over here for a visit. Don’t wait too long. Let her see for herself. You said that she can read. She is an intelligent woman. She will understand that you should stay where you are.”

“May I be so bold to ask you, Signore Nicoletti, why you and your family do not leave,” asked Pietro. “You are all educated. Surely, you would quickly come into your professions in America.”

“Education and professional credentials do not travel as well as the ability to build an arch of stone or brick, or to farm a field, or to carve coal out of rock. I made a trip to America a few years ago. I convinced my employers that we should learn how you were able to build your railroad system so quickly and to see whether there were any tricks we could learn. My real reason was to find out if we could make a life in America.”

“And what did you find?” asked Pietro.

“We would have to start over. We are not rich. We earn our salaries and with them we can live well here in Roma. The price of emigrating to America would be too great—even if the Italian government would allow

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us to leave, especially the boys, and even if the American government would let us come in. Mussolini is making it very difficult to emigrate, and America is making equally difficult to immigrate.”

“It looks like we are lucky to have gotten to America when we did,” said Pietro, taking a long drink from his glass as if to toast his satisfaction with having made such an intelligent decision.

During the sailing from New York to Napoli, during the second week they were at sea, Francesco had told Pietro about Lucca and about the effect this man had on his and his family’s life. He also told him about how he and Rosa and left Esch-sur-Alzette. He made him swear not to tell these secrets to anyone. He told him because he wanted to be certain that if he had to lie to the authorities, his friend would not, unknowingly, try to correct him. His story, how a single event, a single man, had set events in motion that would send him farther and farther away from home, would have made for good conversation with Saverio Nicoletti, thought Francesco. He seemed willing to share so much with them, strangers both of them. He probably could be trusted not to run to the authorities and expose Francesco as a person who did not fight for his country in the last war, still a crime severely punished. No, decided Francesco, his story would be known only by the older members of his family and trusted friends, like Alimenti. Not even his children knew any more than that their parents and the two oldest children had once lived in another country than America and Italia.

“Enough of this talk of war and politicians,” said Saverio, with his cheeks now bright red and his eyes lids starting to feel the weight of the evening’s festivities. “Let’s talk about what you two men are going to do tomorrow. You’re going to buy a car. I told you what I think of cars. My boys tell me I am old fashioned because I won’t ride in a motorcar. Why does your brother want one, Pietro?”

“We both have cars back home,” said Pietro. “Francesco was the first one on The Orchard to buy a car. I still remember the day ten years ago when he drove up the street with his black Model T Ford.”

“It still runs good,” said Francesco, “but I need to buy something bigger. I will trade it in for a truck when I get home.”

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“My brother has gotten it into his head that he will be a traveling salesman. He will use the car to travel to places where he can buy things and take them to villages where he will sell them.”

“Why doesn’t he want to buy a truck instead?” asked Saverio. “That would be more practical.”

“He wants to sell small, expensive items, like watches and jewelry. They don’t take up too much space, and he would not want to leave them in the car in any case. Not all the small villages have shops where people can buy these things, but they usually have a few people with enough money to buy an extra watch or ring or a pair of earrings. The car should also be a more exclusive one, not just a Fiat. He wants a Lancia.”

“It sounds like he has planned all this very carefully,” commented Saverio.

“Oh yes. My brother measures twice and cuts once,” said Pietro laughing. “I do things the other way around. He got the brains and I got the strong back. Maybe it’s good that we live on different sides of the world.”

Pietro’s brother had asked him to purchase a Lancia. Fiats were too common, his brother had told him. The car was named after the man who built the first model and the company, Vincenzo Lancia. It started in 1906, a few years after Fiat. Lancia cars were regarded as engineering marvels and superb pieces of craftsmanship. The Lambda was the company’s masterpiece. It was first with a transmission tunnel, which lowered the body closer to the road and improved road-handling.

“We will visit my friend, Abele Dardelli,” said Saverio. “I know he sells Lancias because he tried to sell one to me. There is a red one sitting on his property right now, and it’s just around the corner. You’ll be on the road well before noon. Maybe it’s time to turn in. The maids will want to sleep a little this night as well.”

It was just after midnight. A maid appeared, the one who had greeted them when they arrived. She led them to a large bedroom with two beds. Their suitcases had been brought in. She brought a bed pan and a pitcher of water. The men had understood that there was no indoor plumbing in this large and well-furnished apartment. Their houses on The Orchard had modern toilets and sinks and bathtubs. Francesco’s house had two toilet rooms, one on each side. Francesco hadn’t thought about it before

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this moment, but he remembered the place at Masseggio where all the members of the family relieved themselves. The structure itself was movable because the pit filled up eventually and a new pit had to be dug. A little sawdust was sprinkled over the deposit to keep the smells down and the flies to a minimum. It worked until someone got sick and had to sit there for hours. Francesco shivered and shook himself out of his thoughts. He would be home soon.

Francesco awoke in the morning when he heard the first stirrings outside the bedroom door. Pietro was fast asleep, still snoring heavily as he had during the entire night. Francesco had slept like a cat, waking often, turning to find the right spot on the bed where he could settle, dozing off, then waking again. He got out of bed, walked over to Pietro and shook him lightly awake.

“Is it already morning? I felt like I just fell asleep,” complained Pietro.

“You have been asleep all night, I can vouch for that,” laughed Francesco. “Sawing the wood the whole time.”

The two men were met by a maid as they opened their door. She took them down to the latrines in the building’s courtyard. Most of the building’s inhabitants had been up for some time, so they were quite alone. Finished with that business, they were led back up to the apartment and into the dining room, where Saverio sat with his breakfast.

“My wife, Giuliana, asked me to convey her best wishes for your safe journey and her apologies for not being able to keep her promise from last evening. She was called to an early morning emergency at the surgery. A good breakfast will fortify you for your expedition today, following the route of the Roman legions. But first you need to purchase your means of transportation.”

Breakfast in the Nicoletti household was little different from breakfast in households all over Italia. There was the addition of a few different preserves, and the bread was roasted in a special machine that made the bread brown on two sides at one time, explained Saverio. The salami was already sliced, and there was a dish with soft cheese. Francesco avoided the extras, preferring his normal hot coffee and milk with plain roasted bread. Pietro tried the salami, which was a specialty of Roma.

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Soon they were carrying their suitcases out the door, with all the household help waving them off. Down the stairs and out on to the street. As promised, Abele Dardelli's Car Sales was only a short distance away. There it was, the red Lancia Lambda, separated from the walkway by a rope that could be removed quickly to let the car out for a test drive. Signore Dardelli was standing in the middle of his small grouping of cars, like the proud owner of a stable of fine Arabian horses.

"Buongiorno, Signore Dardelli," greeted Saverio.

"Buongiorno, mio amice, Signore Nicoletti," replied Abele, opening his arms and greeting them all.

"I have brought with me two men who wish to purchase a fine automobile at a fair price. I told them I knew just the person who could meet both of those requirements," said Saverio.



Lancia Lambda

The business was settled in less than an hour. They drove the car out of the lot with the ownership papers, registration and a special permit for driving in Italia all neatly wrapped in a black leather pouch. Saverio rode with them until he had guided them to Porta del Popolo, the opening in the Aurelian Wall. They had not gotten that far on their tour the day before. Saverio explained that the wall was named after the Roman emperor at the time, and had been built by his orders a year after the invasions by the Barbarians in 271 A.D.

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“This is where it starts now, via Flaminia, if you are leaving, and where it ends if you are coming,” said Saverio pointing through the arch. “You follow the road that is paved, and if you think you have gotten off the track, just stop and ask anyone. They will put you straight. Look for the names I have circled on the map. Keep the sun at your back. Have a good journey, my friends. I will leave you here.”

Pietro and Francesco tried to convince him to let them drive him back to his home or to his office, but he would not hear any more of it. He had his fill of riding in a car, he said. He waved as they drove off through the arch and across the Fluvio Tévere over the Ponte Milvio, Pietro at the wheel and Francesco holding the map. Saverio had shown them on a map which towns they would be passing through, circling each one, from Roma to Gualdo Tadino and then Sigillo. Although the two men had never used a road map before like the one Saverio had given them, they used maps constantly in their work, maps of the coal seams. Compared to navigating underground, where there was no sun or wind for orientation, only the miners’ sixth sense, finding their way on the ground had never been a problem for either of them, they agreed. Match the big names on the map with the signs on the road and you can’t go wrong, Saverio had said.

“He would be a good man to have on The Orchard,” said Pietro smiling.

“This was one time that your talking did us a big favor,” laughed Francesco.

“It all happened so quickly. One minute we were poor miners and the next we were being given a guided tour of Roma, then we were tycoons drinking a rich man’s liquor and smoking his expensive cigars. That is one evening I will never forget,” said Pietro, shaking his head in continued disbelief.

“I hope we have taught our children well enough that when they can afford those things they will be as generous as Signore Nicoletti,” said Francesco. “He is a good rich man. I didn’t think rich people could be good.”

“How could one person know so much?” said Pietro. “I think I learned more about the history of our country in twenty-four hours than most people learn in a lifetime.”

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“He even new about the Nicholson Bridge,” added Francesco, still in state of disbelief.

“Let’s find our way home,” sang Pietro.

Pietro had been home before The War to marry and take back his wife to America. His mother and father had died since then. He was going back to see his brother and sisters and their children and to confirm to them that he was still part of their family. There were many sons of Italia who never returned, who cut the bonds to family and home when they boarded the ships to America, and then never looked back. Pietro and Francesco knew such men. They worked beside them each day in the mines, sharing the same air. They were men adrift, no anchor on board to set fast in their new harbor. They wanted to be Americans. They wanted to forget their past, but that was not possible. They continued to smell of the only foods they knew how to eat, and they never lost their mixture of Italian into their English when they spoke.

Francesco and Pietro were among the men who thought differently. They didn’t blame their families or even their country for having to leave home. There were circumstances, and these circumstances were different for each man and woman. They left because they felt a responsibility to help those who could not or would not leave themselves. They always left open the possibility that one day they might return.

Through Flaminia in the northern outskirts of Roma they drove, through Castelnuovo, Rignano and Civita Castellana. They crossed the Fluvio Tévere again just south of Magliano, and then passed into Umbria from Lazio in Castel del Formiche. They continued through Ortricoli and Testaccio to Narni, where they stopped for food and drink. Narni is a well-preserved medieval hill town overlooking the Fluvio Nera. The men agreed that it reminded them of Gubbio. They drove into the center of the town and parked at the end of the Piazza Garibaldi. There were plenty of small cafés and restaurants to choose among. They picked one called *Il Pincio* and had the local pasta, called *manfricoli*, which they washed down with a glass or two of red wine.

Fortified, they walked back to the car and Francesco took his turn at the wheel. He was a more careful but slower driver than Pietro. They headed toward Terni and then Spoleto and Foligno.

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“I had an uncle, Zio Adriano,” mused Pietro, now free of the task of driving. “He was in the army. He joined when he was sixteen. We called him Zio Ano. My father called him Bonaparté because he wanted to be a general. When he came home for visits he would tell us stories. Our favorite was about the via Flaminia. He would take us out and show us pieces of the old Roman road, then tell us how the roads were built. ‘This was built by the Romans. It’s almost as old as the earth. The Romans built things that would last forever. The *gromatici* surveyed the ground and laid out the plan of the road. Then, the *libratores* excavated the *fossa*, or ditch, down to the firm ground or bedrock. The *fossa* was filled in layers, starting with gravel and larger stones, then sand. The third layer of gravel was laid in and tamped down, a process called *pavimentare*. The final flat surface was the *pavimentum*. It was a mixture of stones and concrete, coarse stones on the bottom and finer stones on top. The final surface was crowned from top to sides for drainage.’

“ ‘What happened to the Romans?’ we would ask. ‘They forgot,’ he would say. ‘They forgot what they had taught the rest of the world, and they were conquered. We are now a big mixture of the French, Germans, Longobardi and who knows what. But there is still a trickle of Roman blood running in your veins, and if you can find it, you too will build things that will last forever.’”

Francesco felt that he knew nothing about history, who the Romans were, where they came from and why they disappeared. His and Rosa’s children, the children of his brothers and sisters, Rosa’s brothers’ children, they would all learn these things. They would teach what they learned to their children. Their children would teach what their parents had taught them to their children. All of them would find the Roman blood in their veins, and they would build things that would last forever.

“Your uncle was a wise man,” said Francesco.

“He was a kind man. Maybe too kind. He was shot and killed in The War. He made it to the rank of corporal. My father stopped making fun of him after that out of respect for my mother.”

At Foligno, the via Flaminia meets and runs along the Fluvio Topino to the east of Assisi and north to Nocera Umbra. Francesco remembered that Rosa always reminded the children that Dante Alighieri’s book, *Divina Commedia*, was printed in Nocera Umbra. It was Italia’s first

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printed book. From Nocera Umbra it was less than fifteen kilometers to Gualdo Tadino.

“There is Monte Penna,” said Pietro. “It’s almost as high as your Monte Cucco, I think. In the distance I can see its cousins, Monte Serra Santa and Monte Mággio. You remember our farm, don’t you, Checco? It sits between those two mountains like a small child in a hanging cradle strung between two trees.”

They drove through the square and past Chiesa di San Francesco. As Francesco was about to make the right turn up the hill toward the Alimenti farm, Pietro said, “Let’s get you home first. If we stop here first you may never get home tonight. I’ll drive from here.” Francesco pulled over and they switched places. In a short while they were in Fossato di Vico. It looked like it always looked, as Francesco remembered it from the many times he boarded and stepped off the train. They drove past Purello, to the west of the center, and then to Sigillo. Just before the road begins to bend up toward the village, and before it crosses over the Fluvio del Sodo at the town’s southern edge, via Flaminia and the main road through the village divide, with the antique road continuing straight along the southern edge, eventually connecting back to the main road close to the road that leads to Masseggio. Pietro kept to the main road.

It was late in the afternoon when they arrived in Sigillo. They drove through the village and past the piazza. Lucca’s table and chair were gone. Could he have moved his office during these past twenty years, thought Francesco. Did he grow tired of sitting in the cold and damp of the winter and the sweltering heat of the summer? Or did those he had persecuted for decades hack his office furniture to pieces when they heard of his death? They turned left, down to Chiesa di Sant’Anna. They passed the cemetery where centuries of Rosatis lay buried. He would have the answer soon to Lucca’s fate.

“*Aspetta*, Pietro,” said Francesco suddenly. “I want to get out and look at the valley before going up to Masseggio.”

Francesco stepped out of the Lancia and walked to the front of the car so he could have a clear and unobstructed view over the fields. It was late in the afternoon and the sun balanced between a string of orange and grey tinged Sirius clouds and the tops of the rolling hills on the opposite side of the valley from Monte Cucco. Above, a hawk hung stationary, head pointed downward, watching his prey. The long shadow that the

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small animal the hawk had in his sites cast on the winter matted grass gave away his position like a waving semaphore, while the hawk's shadow frightened its next victim in the field, further to the east. The first buds were appearing on the tree branches. Tufts of grass grew in the fields where the sheep had not yet been allowed to graze. The face of Monte Cucco was bespeckled with black and white dots that moved up and down and sideways on the slope, foraging for anything that was green. Francesco thought of his days as a shepherd.

"Paradiso, Checco! Questo è paradiso!" exclaimed Alimenti, loud enough for all the residents of the cemetery to hear. "Why did we ever move?"

"You know why we left, Pietro," replied Francesco. "It wasn't a paradise when we were here. The ground gave up nothing without a battle. The clouds would not release their water when it was needed, and they would not turn themselves off when we were trying to plow and harvest. So our fields burned in the summer and were drowned in the spring and autumn. If we managed to bake an extra loaf of bread, there was always The Church that wanted one half, and the land owner who wanted the other half."

"My Nonna would always say that God made Hell so there could be a Heaven," said Pietro. "We could never enjoy a full belly if we had never gone to bed with an empty one."

"Si, Si, Pietro. It is beautiful," agreed Francesco. "I am not arguing with you. But a paradise one day can be an inferno the next. The small rabbit that is the hawk's dinner over there in the field probably wishes now that he had not gone out this afternoon, like he did every other day in his life, to eat the scenery."

They got back into car and drove to the road leading up to Masseggio. Pietro once again declined to come in with him. "You have not seen your family in twenty years. You don't need a stranger stealing attention. I will come back on Monday morning. Then we can make plans for what we will do. Maybe we can look for some answers to the mysterious Signore Lucca."



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Giuliana saw her uncle first. She turned and ran up the stairs to tell everyone that Zio Checco had come home. His family poured out of the house. His few remaining aunts and uncles, and his three brothers with their wives and their children, formed a half-circle between where he stood and the bottom of the stairs. At the other end were Tommaso and Anna Maria. The circle closed as the son approached his parents. While Anna Maria held on to her son's neck with both arms, and Tommaso wrapped his arms around his wife and his son, the others pressed themselves together toward these three central figures, forming a clump of Rosati flesh in the middle of their antique homestead. They laughed and cried and sang all at the same time. Eventually, the mass moved up the stairs and into the house where the table had been set for a simple dinner. They did not know when their son would be home. From the cupboards appeared the dishes that they had prepared for when he did arrive. He saw his favorite, *maccharoni dolce*, made with fresh pasta mixed with a paste made from honey, sugar, nuts, fine breadcrumbs and a sprinkling of cacao. This was very special because normally this dish was only eaten on *Vigilia di Natale*.

They sat around the same table that was there when Francesco was last home. The same fire was burning. It had the same fragrance he remembered from the juniper twigs used to start the flame. It crackled and sent sparks up the chimney in the same way it had always done, as long as he could remember. There seemed to be fewer of them sitting around the table. There were as many chairs along the walls as those occupied by an adult or a child. His brother Giuseppe was not there. A picture of him hung on the wall behind the table. He was in the uniform he was wearing when he was killed by an Austrian or German bullet. His Nonno and Nonna were gone. Enrico and Maria and their four children, Giuliana, Giuseppe, Tommasina and Lida sat at one end of the table. Luigi and Anna and their son Roberto were there, on one side of Francesco, next to Tommaso. Their second son, Vittorio, was in Roma. Umberto and Nicolina and their four children sat together at the other end of the table. His sister Consiglia and Quinto and their son Ottavio arrived shortly after Francesco, fetched by Giuseppe. They sat next to Anna Maria, who sat on the other side of her son.

When Consiglia, Quinto and their son were seated, Tommaso rose up and proposed a toast to his son. He was not a man of speeches. He wished his son welcome and wished Rosa and the children good health.

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Francesco could not speak. His blue eyes were filled with tears. He forced back the sobs that would come from his throat if he tried to say a word. He looked from one brother to the next, to his sister, to his father and mother. He smiled. They smiled and nodded. *You are home now, Francesco* the nods said.

“You heard about Lucca,” said Enrico suddenly.

“Let us wait with that talk until another day,” pleaded Anna Maria, “until Francesco has told us about his life in America and we have told him about what has happened at Masseggio since he left.”

They were quiet for a long while again. They ate and drank. Then, slowly, laughter began to spread around the table. It became infectious, finally catching Tommaso and Anna Maria. The evening was long. There was more food coming out of the oven and the fire, and the supply of wine was endless. Francesco told them about his two daughters born in America. He had pictures, he said. “Here is Maria and Jolanda. Here is one of Celeste graduating from college. Here is Elena the day she and Ernesto were engaged. Here is Rosa. Yes, Rosa has grown heavier.” She looked very healthy, they all agreed. It will be wonderful when you are all back here with us, they said. They laughed and sang late into the night, then gradually, one by one, they began to disappear behind the curtains to their beds. Anna Maria led her son to his place, the room where he slept when he was first born, at the end of the great room closest to the fire. She kissed him and held him close.

“God has answered our prayers. You have come home to us.”



The next day was Saturday. The men had decided to hunt the big rabbits that inhabit the mountain. They left early in the morning, before Francesco awoke. The sun had long ago peeked over the top of Monte Cucco, so it was late for him to be eating his breakfast. His mother and father sat with him, taking a second cup of coffee in the morning, an unusual event in the life of a working farmer. Francesco was steadying with his left hand the same bowl he used before he left home at fourteen. It was filled half way to the top with coffee, and the other half with

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warmed milk. Two fresh eggs were stirred in, one more than normal. “It is a special day,” his mother had said. In his right hand he held a piece of roasted bread above the bowl, then dipped it in quickly and moved it directly to his mouth. Half of the slice of bread disappeared. Another dip and the other half was finished. He carved a slice of the dried sausage and ate it off the knife, the way he had learned to do it from his grandfather when he was old enough to have a knife on his belt, the way he did it every day of his life since then.

Tommaso and Francesco left Masseggio after breakfast and walked toward the village. They walked slowly, not because Tommaso’s age affected his legs; he could move at a fast pace if he had to, and he could still follow his dogs after the hare on the mountain. No, they walked slowly because they were not in a hurry. They had all day. Tommaso led his son into the cemetery and to the graves of his grandparents. He touched each of their gravestones and remembered the special gifts they had given to him. His Nonno Rosati gave him his name and his back, the name to honor and pass on, and the back to give him the strength to carry on the work of the family. From his Nonna Rosati he got the color of his eyes. They were bright to light his way and they were sharp so that he could see beyond the present day. From his Nonna Sabatini he had gotten his nose. It would help him to tell the good from the bad, and it would always lead him in the right direction. From his Nonno Sabatini he got his hands. They would help him to make things that only his mind could see.

He had learned how to remember the members of his family from his mother. She told him about the gifts he received from his grandparents when he was just a little boy. “They are your special gifts, Francesco,” she had told him. “Your brothers and sisters have gotten their special gifts too. Always remember them.”

They walked along the old via Flaminia to the edge of the village, then turned on to the new main road back toward the center. They reached the piazza as the café was opening. Inside was a better choice than outside today as a heavy cloud cover had followed what promised to be a sunny day at its start. Now, the sun refused to break through the light, grey mist that shrouded the town. “It could be a wet day up on the mountain,” commented Tommaso as they stepped inside. They were the first guests of the day. Nico had aged well, thought Francesco.

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“Is that you, Piccolo Ciccio?” cried Nico. He was the only one who called him by his grandfather’s nickname when they first met, and then moved to *Checco* in later conversations. It was his little joke with Francesco. He had these little jokes with almost all of his customers, the ones he liked. “I heard you would be here soon. You look like a successful ‘big shot’ from America.” With that said, he gave Francesco a big hug. Nico was twice the size of Francesco and most of the other men in the village, and a hug from him meant sore ribs for a few days, but it was worth it to be acknowledged by one of the most important men in the community.

“You heard about Lucca, didn’t you?” asked Nico abruptly.

Francesco looked at his father.

“We told him that Lucca was dead, but we have had other things to talk about since he came home yesterday,” answered Tommaso.

“He got the end he deserved. There were always stories about him driving around like a mad man. For years it was in his wagons, beating his horses to pull him faster and faster. Then it was in his cars. No one knows how many wagons he ruined, how many horses he killed. This was his third car crash. He was unlucky this time, flying down the hill toward Scheggia. The *carabinieri* found him two days after he disappeared. The wolves and vultures had gotten most of him by then. They took what was left of him to Gubbio and his people saw to it that he was buried with the rest of his family.

“God rest his soul,” said Tommaso.

“*Come vivi more*. After how he treated you and all of the farmers in the village, God won’t be having much to do with his soul. But you’re a good man to say it,” replied Nico.

Did Nico know the whole truth of what he said, thought Francesco.

“We haven’t heard a word from the owner,” said Tommaso. “It’s been three months and he hasn’t sent anyone to collect the rents.”

“What if there is no other owner,” offered Nico.

“What do you mean, Nico?” asked Francesco.

“What if it was Lucca all the while who owned the lands,” suggested Nico. “He acted like he owned the whole village.”

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“He was a poor tailor before he came to Sigillo. That is as much as we know. We don’t know for sure whether he or anyone else was the real owner,” said Tommaso.

“I’m going to find out,” declared Francesco.

“Be careful, Checco,” warned Nico. “Lucca was a powerful man and he has many dangerous friends. They found a fortune in his house and the *carabinieri* won’t be happy if someone comes to claim it back. They have probably already spent it, or sent it to Party headquarters.

Francesco and his father finished their coffees. Nico would not let them pay. “Your money is no good here, Checco. I want to see you back here every day you are in the village. Your old friends want to see you, too,” Nico called after them.

They walked across the piazza toward the Notari home. Francesco knocked on the door, and his mother-in-law opened it. She nearly fainted when she saw him. Domenico came when he heard her shriek, and greeted him warmly. Domenico and Angela had grown old, thought Francesco. They were both smaller than Francesco remembered. Domenico’s good nature and warm smile had not abandoned him. Angela never forgave him for taking her only daughter away from her, and the years did not soften those feelings. He took out the photographs of Rosa and the children. Angela’s eyes were failing. Domenico brought out the large magnifying glass he had bought for her, and she cried as she touched the images as if by feeling them she could make her daughter and her grandchildren real.

“I want to see my Rosa before I die. You see to that, Francesco. Tell me you will do this. Promise me!” cried Angela, weeping.

“Si, mamma,” replied Francesco, who was unable to hold back his own tears. “I promise.”

“One day I would like to tell them the truth, Francesco,” said Tommaso as they walked up the narrow street back toward the piazza after leaving their in-laws. “She has suffered all these years in ignorance.”

“I will tell them if I learn the whole truth before it is time for me to leave,” replied Francesco. “I know who can help. If these lands were

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once owned by The Church, a priest should know where to start looking to see who owned Masseggio. Let's visit Don Antonio."

Don Antonio was in his small office in the apartment where he lived next to Sant'Andrea. He was preparing his sermon for the next day's masses. He looked up at the man standing next to Tommaso and for a second tried to connect his face with one of his parishioners or a villager. In the same second, Francesco looked for the details in the face of the priest that would show him the eighteen year trail that led to its present form.

"Is that you, Francesco? Of course it is!" exclaimed Don Antonio. "How good it is to see you after all these years. I knew you were coming, from the letters, but still I am so surprised and happy to see you."

"He arrived home last evening, Don Antonio," added Tommaso. "We have an urgent matter to discuss. We hope you can help."

"I am always at your service, my good friend. I will do what I can. Please come in. Sit down. It's a small room, but we will all fit. Tell me, what is it?"

Tommaso started at the beginning, Christmas 1899. When he finished the story, Don Antonio just sat and stared at them in bewilderment. He shook his head.

"All these years, you and probably all of the other farmers in the village have suffered in silence. No one has said anything about this to me," moaned Don Antonio *Not even in the confessional, he thought.* "Why didn't you or someone say something sooner? We could have tried to get someone to listen, to do something. I should have seen it. It was all happening under my nose. I suspected something, but there was nothing specific."

"Lucca told us that if he heard that we had mentioned it to anyone, we would be thrown out immediately," responded Tommaso. "When it started, we thought it would end quickly, after Francesco had spent a year or two working outside Sigillo. Then, the more time that passed, the stronger Lucca became. We did not know if it was just us or if others were also threatened. We could not trust anyone."

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“We want to find out who Lucca was working for,” said Francesco, “and we need to know if the Rosatis still have he right to live at Masseggio. Will you help?”

“Of course,” declared Don Antonio. “We must go to Perugia, to the diocesan’s records office. They may have records here in Sigillo, at the town hall, but the Party controls everything, and Lucca was an important person in the Party. If they know anything, they probably would not tell us.”

“I came here in a car, with one of my friends from Old Forge, Pietro Alimenti,” said Francesco. “His family is in Gualdo Tadino. He will come to Sigillo on Monday. We can drive together with him to Perugia.”

“Agreed. I will see you on Monday, then, but I will see you in church tomorrow, won’t I?” said Don Antonio, not so much as a question as a request.

“Si, Don Antonio. We will all be there in our usual place,” replied Tommaso.

“Yes,” said Francesco. “We will all be there.” He had not been inside a church since his youngest daughter, Jolanda, had been baptized. He was sure he could remember when to stand, when to kneel and when to sit. It was a small price to pay for the priest’s help. He was sure his family would enjoy it as well.

It was late afternoon when they arrived back at Masseggio. The men came home shortly after Francesco and Tommaso arrived home, most of them carrying a brace of hare, and the younger boys balancing a pole with a few dozen forest doves hanging by their feet that had been bound together with twine. The women had started the polenta earlier in the day. Tommaso and Francesco were preparing the fire in the grilling hole. Tonight they would have a feast worthy of the homecoming of their son, brother, brother-in-law, nephew, uncle, cousin and friend.



Monday morning, Don Antonio walked up the path to Masseggio at nine o’clock, directly after he said his daily mass. Francesco was helping his brothers mend a wheel for their wagon when he saw the priest walking toward the house. Don Antonio had grown heavier, thought

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Francesco. He had not noticed it on Saturday in the tight quarters of the priest's office, nor on Sunday when the flowing vestments made every priest look fat. But since Don Antonio was a very thin young man, almost fragile, he was not nearly as corpulent as most of the priests of his age. Still, he was breathing heavily when he stopped in front of the men to bid them all a good morning and to bless their work. Anna Maria came out to greet him and took his arm to lead him into the house.

"You must be hungry and thirsty after that long walk, and you will have a full day. Come in and have some coffee and warm milk, and a taste of our fresh biscotti," she said, and then disappeared with him up the stairs.

Pietro arrived an hour later, and Francesco explained to him what was in store for them on this day.

"What are we waiting for?" he bellowed. "*Andiamo*. Let's get a move on."

Don Antonio and Tommaso hurried down the stairs. Francesco quickly presented his friend to Don Antonio, and the four men piled into the Lancia, Pietro driving, Francesco in the front passenger seat, Tommaso and Don Antonio in the back. Off they went, south, down the via Flaminia. At Fossato di Vico they turned off the via Flaminia to take the direct route to Perugia. The road was unpaved, winding alongside the Fluvio Chiáscio to Schifanáia, Valfábrica and Pianello. When they crossed the Fluvio Tévere at Ponte Valleceppi, they could see the ancient city on the hill, the capital of both Umbria and Provincia di Perugia. They entered the city from the east, the Lancia struggling at times with its load and the steep incline that was made for donkeys, horses and men on or following these beasts, but not for automobiles. Once at the edge of the city, Don Antonio could guide Pietro through the maze of streets leading to *Cattedrale*, the 14th century Gothic structure flanked by the piazza dedicated to the region's favorite son, Dante.

Pietro parked the car at the side of the piazza, and the men stepped out. Don Antonio led them to the church offices in the Palazzo di Priori, next to the cathedral. He spoke to a guard who pointed down a hallway. They walked to an office where Don Antonio spoke to a priest sitting at a desk. He pointed out the door and further down the hall. They entered a records hall and an elderly priest was perched on a stool over a reading desk, his spectacles balanced on the end of his pudgy nose.

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Don Antonio coughed lightly a few times to try to get the old priest's attention. After the third try, the priest looked up.

"What do you want?" he asked in an irritated and surprisingly deep voice.

"We would like to look at the land records for the village of Sigillo. It's in the parish...." and the priest cut him off in mid sentence.

"I know where it is," growled the priest. "It's my job to know where every place is."

"May we see the records?" asked Don Antonio.

"No!" retorted the grumpy priest.

"No? Why not?" asked Don Antonio softly, but with a definite edge that showed he was beginning to lose his patience.

"Because you are not authorized to see the records. Now please leave me in peace." With that he returned to his reading, closing the conversation.

"Small men in high places are always fearful of falling," said Tommaso as the four men walked back down the hall in the direction from which they came.

"We will visit the Bishop," fumed Don Antonio. "We will show that ecclesiastical bureaucrat who can get authorization.

Up the stairs to the Bishop's office they strode, and into the antechamber they walked.

"May we see His Excellency, the Bishop?" asked Don Antonio in a polite but authoritative voice.

"His Excellency does not see visitors who arrive unannounced and without an appointment," sniffed the middle-aged secretary. "And since I am responsible for making all of His Excellency's appointments, I am sure that you do not have one. Besides, he is not in."

"When will he return?" demanded Don Antonio, now having exceeded his limits of patience with the petty bureaucracy that was rampant in these offices.

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“In one hour, but he has an appointment, and he is occupied all day,” replied the man, who, for Don Antonio had taken the shape of a grey mole.

“We will wait! We must see him.”

“Suit yourself, but you will be disappointed.”

They sat in a corner of the large office as men came and went, arriving with papers for the Bishop and leaving with instructions from the secretary. This man also wielded great power, thought Francesco, more power than he probably deserved. How did such men get to these positions, he wondered. It was a constant mystery to him.

The Bishop arrived with a small group of priests surrounding him as he headed toward the door to his office. Don Antonio rushed across the room and reached his door just before he was about to enter.

“Your Excellency, may I beg for a moment of your time?” pleaded Don Antonio.

“From the way you have put that question, I am sure that it is more than a moment you wish,” laughed the Bishop. “I am quite busy, as I am sure my secretary has told you,” he said, casting a glance over his shoulder at the grey priest who now stood at his right shoulder attempting to insert himself between the Bishop and the man who had not obeyed the rules of the office. “What is it that is so urgent that you cannot make an appointment? I seem to recognize you. Who are you?”

“I am Antonio Facondino, nephew to His Excellency Salvatore D’Invito,” replied Don Antonio.

“Is that really you, Don Antonio? The same priest I ordained with my own hand over three decades ago?” he exclaimed embracing him.

“Yes, your Excellency. It is I,” said Don Antonio, finally smiling for the first time since their arrival in Perugia.

“Don Mario,” declared the Bishop to the grey priest who had now shrunk to half the size he was just moments before, “please reschedule all of my appointments before lunch. I will be in my office with Don Antonio. And your friends?” he said turning back to Don Antonio.

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“Yes, please, your Excellency. They are why I have come to you.” He introduced Tommaso and Francesco and Pietro as they entered the Bishop’s office.

“And Don Mario, please send in coffee and cakes,” he called back to his secretary, who now had the look of someone who had been trampled by a herd of stampeding cattle.

When they were all settled, the coffee drunk and the cakes eaten, the Bishop finally asked Don Antonio to explain the reason for their visit.

“We would like to learn who owns the estates in Sigillo where I have my parish and where the Rosatis have lived for over three hundred years,” responded Don Antonio.

“My son, you more than anyone should know the answer to that question,” replied the Bishop.

“Why, your Excellency?” asked Don Antonio, obviously not understanding to what the Bishop was referring.

“Your family has owned those lands for at least one hundred years, if my memory serves me correctly. You didn’t know that?” he asked, and saw his answer in the blank stare of the priest. “I see. Your uncle may have had his reasons for keeping the fact from you. Shall we go down to the records hall and find out the whole truth.”

The Bishop rose from his seat, and they all rose with him. He moved quickly from behind his desk, surprisingly agile for a man who was in his mid-seventies. He flung open the door and whisked past his secretary who was kept at his place by a wave of the Bishop’s right arm with an outstretched hand. The four men stumbled after him, led by Don Antonio and followed in turn by Francesco, Tommaso and Pietro. Down the hall they went to the large office where they had been four hours earlier. With another wave of his arm the Bishop silenced the elderly guardian of the records gate, and they walked past him in single file, Pietro giving him a sly glance as he closed the door when they were all in the room where the records were kept. The look said: ‘Is this authorization enough for you?’

“Let us see,” said the Bishop. “I should be able to find the proper file. I was here working as an assistant when I was a novice. Yes, here it is.” He pulled out a large, leather-bound ledger from a drawer in one of the

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huge oak cases, then he placed it on top of the case, on the slanted top with a lip at the bottom that was specially designed for the purpose of reading the ledgers. He lit the lantern that was fixed to one corner of the cabinet. He turned the pages to Sigillo. The entries began in the late sixteenth century.

“Here is Masseggio. There is a letter referred to in the entry from early 1600. The letters are in a pocket at the back of the ledger. Shall I take it now?” he asked.

“No, let us wait until we find the owner of all the lands,” answered Tommaso.

“The lands were owned directly by the Papal estates and administered by the diocese of Perugia until 1816. This is when they passed to your family, Don Antonio,” said the Bishop. He continued reading. “It says that the lands were given in return for services rendered to The Holy See during the occupation by France during the Napoleonic Wars, and that they shall remain in the possession of your family, with the proceeds shared with The Church according to agreed principles, as long as at least one member of the family serves The Church directly, and as long as there is an heir to administer the lands in the best interests of the *contadini* and The Church.

Always a hook with a line attached, thought Francesco. Never an outright gift from them. How did they get the right to control these lands in the first place?

“There are entries for each of your family’s administrators, up to your uncle. He died in 1899, God rest his soul. He was a worthy servant of the Lord. The last entry is a reference to letter.”

The Bishop turned the pages over so that the inside of the back cover was exposed. There was a large pouch sewn into the cover with a flap closing the top. It was held in place by a leather clasp. He unfastened it and carefully took out the several dozen letters, each in its own envelope. He found the letter for Masseggio and the letter from Don Antonio’s uncle. He opened the letter from his predecessor’s predecessor and read it aloud.

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Perugia

Written in anticipation of my imminent death on this day, 15 March, 1899, I hereby leave to the son of my sister, my nephew, Antonio Facondino, the administration of the lands of Sigillo, bounded by Gualdo Tadino in the south, Costacciaro in the north, Gubbio in the west and the border of Marche in the east, these lands having been given to the family of D'Invito by Papal order to ensure that the land is bountiful and those who would work this land are fairly treated. Until the time that my nephew reaches a mature age, the lands shall be administered by my mother's sister's son, my cousin, Emilio Umbra, presently the Abbot of the Monastery of San Secondo in Gubbio. I further declare that since there will not be an heir following the death of my nephew, the time of which only the Supreme Power in His infinite mercy can decide, the ownership and full administration of the aforesaid lands shall revert to their original owner, The Church, whose representative shall be the Bishop of Perugia.

Signed: Salvatore D'Invito, Bishop of the Diocese of Perugia

Witnessed by: Giovanni Castore, Secretary to the Bishop

Don Antonio stood in a complete state of disbelief, unable to talk or move.

"It seems that your uncle put a great deal of trust in a man who did not deserve it, my son," said the Bishop. "I knew the Abbot before he died several years ago. He was very popular here with the former Bishop, my predecessor, but I never trusted him. He always avoided answering the question of from whom he received all the money that he delivered to The Church each year. Now we know."

"Don Antonio," said Tommaso, trying to waken him from his stupor. "Don Antonio. This is surely good news for everyone. You did not know this, but now you can help to put things right."

"What is in the other letter, your Excellency?" asked Francesco. "Could you please tell us what that letter says about our family and Masseggio?"

The Bishop carefully opened the envelope holding the centuries old letter. The parchment was crumbling at the edges.

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“It is dated 1622 and is signed Augusto P. Vitali. It states that *the lands and buildings known as Masseggio could be inhabited by the Rosati family as long as a male heir carrying the Rosati name lived on the land and delivered his proper share to The Church or a guardian of the lands appointed by The Church, and this right would cease if either requirement was not fulfilled, in which case the lands and all buildings, both permanent and temporary, would revert to The Church or the guardian appointed by The Church.*”

“As long as you fulfill these requirements,” continued the Bishop, “you and your family have the right to live at Masseggio.

“And it looks now like if we do not meet these requirements, the lands are returned to Don Antonio, who is the guardian for The Church,” finished Pietro.

“There are no males left in my family,” said Don Antonio, having apparently closed his ears to the full text of the will after the first few lines. “What happens after I am gone?”

“Everything goes back to The Church, as stated in your uncle’s will, and She can do with it what She wishes,” answered the Bishop.

“We need to talk to the present Abbey of San Secondo to find out how Lucca came into this, and how he was allowed to press you and perhaps others for money,” declared Don Antonio.

“Who is Lucca?” asked the Bishop.

“Your Excellency,” replied Don Antonio, “Signore Mauro Lucca was managing the estates for the last thirty-two years until he died in a car accident several months ago. He threatened to evict the Rosati family from Masseggio if they mentioned to anyone that he was extracting money from them, and the Abbot’s hiding of the landowner’s identity, namely my own, provided him with the most perfect cloak under which to conceal his treachery. This started immediately after the Abbot took control of the lands in Sigillo. These men, Tommaso Rosati and his son Francesco, have been living with this burden for over thirty-two years.”

“Please send me a report on what you find from your visit to Gubbio,” requested the Bishop. “It appears that a full enquiry will be necessary.”

They thanked the Bishop, each in turn, starting with Tommaso, kneeling and kissing his ring. Finally, the Bishop embraced the priest

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and bid him and all of them farewell. Don Antonio sat in the front seat now, guiding Pietro out of the city he knew well from his childhood and his days as a novice. They reached Gubbio in the early afternoon. On the eastern edge of the city, outside the old walls, the landscape is flat. It makes a strong contrast to the city itself that appears to grow out of the hillside and cling to the rocky ledge. Breaking the flatness is the ancient Teatro Romano, built between the first century Ante Christum and finished during the first years of the first century A.D. The Abbey is outside the walls, Don Antonio explained, a short distance to the north of the city.

The priest was first to the large, wooden door, and he pulled the knotted rope connected to a bell on the other side of the portal. Minutes passed. He pulled the rope again, harder this time, and finally the door was opened a crack by a withered monk who asked the nature of their business. Don Antonio asked to speak to the Abbot. The shriveled monk told him that the Abbot was not receiving guests on this day. Don Antonio said calmly, but firmly, that he would prefer to see the Abbot without the assistance of either the Bishop or the police, but, if necessary, he would avail himself of one, the other, or both. The monk said that he would speak to the Abbot. Whom should he say was seeking entry, he asked.

“Antonio Facondino, nephew to Bishop Salvatore D’Invito,” was his answer. “With that information, the Abbot will without doubt understand the nature of my visit.”

The monk returned, but not until the four men had stood waiting outside the entry gate for a better part of an hour. They suspected that the Abbot might have left by another exit and was simply giving himself enough time to get away. But the door finally opened and the monk ushered them in. The Abbot sat at his desk in the middle of a spacious room. He spoke before any introductions.

“I know why you are here, and before you make any accusations, please hear what I have to say,” pleaded the Abbot. “For more than thirty years I carried out my duties to my predecessor the former Abbot, receiving the proceeds from the harvests from Signore Lucca’s hands and delivering them to the Abbot. As the years passed, I realized that the Abbot was not going to fulfill the promise that had been requested of him, to inform yourself that you were the rightful owner of the estates in

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Sigillo. Once he said that keeping this secret from you was in the best interests of The Church since you would not be able to manage the lands as Signore Lucca was doing, and you most assuredly would not continue the man in your service. The lands were providing a large sum of money to The Church and to the coffers of the Abbey, and it mattered not that Signore Lucca might be profiting as well. As long as the Abbey controlled the lands, everyone benefited. And besides, at some time in the future, the lands would be back in the hands of The Church. He was simply preparing this transition.

“When the Abbot died and I was elected to succeed him, I tried to carry on with his work. There was obviously no way that I could reveal the truth without bringing shame to the Abbot, to the Abbey and to The Church. But Signore Lucca had grown so powerful by that time that he simply took control of the lands completely. His standing in the Fascist Party made it impossible to take back this control, and, I judged, that informing you would only put yourself in danger. I chose to say nothing.”

“What you and the Abbot did was wrong, but it is not I who shall be your judge,” said Don Antonio. “You shall have to live with this until you have done your penance. I will have a letter from you stating that the money found in Signore Lucca’s apartments belongs to the rightful owner of the properties, and that Lucca was an impostor in that role. I am obligated to the Bishop to report to him what I have learned here, and it will be up to him to decide what action will be taken.”

The Abbot penned a letter naming Don Antonio as the owner of the properties, and he also gave him the letter that Don Antonio’s uncle had sent to the Abbot with instructions about the lands in Sigillo. The Abbot’s letter was witnessed by his secretary and handed over to Don Antonio. With the letter in his hand, Don Antonio, Tommaso, Francesco and Pietro left the abbey. They climbed into the red Lancia as the sun set on the plain opposite to the city, turning the stones of the city’s buildings bright gold. They drove through the northwestern gate and the Porta Castello, up the Via Capitano del Popolo, and out through the Porta Metauro. They drove up and over the Monte Calvo and down to Scheggia, along the same route that Lucca had taken each time he delivered his blood money to the abbey, and the same route he took the night he died.

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For the second time in as many days, Don Antonio walked up the road leading to Masseggio. It was late afternoon. This time, Francesco and his brothers and Tommaso were pruning the fruit trees around the house. His pace was quicker than the day before, and he was carrying a large cloth bag over one shoulder which he held by the straps.

“Buongiorno, Don Antonio,” called Tommaso.

“Buongiorno,” replied the priest, trying hard to recover his breath.

“We are blessed by another visit from you in such a short time.”

“I have brought something which is yours.”

They all walked into the house. The women greeted Don Antonio warmly and led him to a seat at the head of their table and Francesco’s sister-in-law brought him a glass of water and a glass of wine, and set a plate of newly baked bread in front of him. He placed the bag he was carrying on the table.

“I have just come from the *carabinieri*,” said Don Antonio, taking a long drink from the water glass. “They were not happy about what I told them, but they gave me this bag with the money.”

“What will you do with it?” asked Tommaso.

“To begin with, I will give you back what you have paid since Francesco was fourteen,” replied Don Antonio. “Whatever is left over I will keep for any others who have been forced to pay bribes.”

“The money belongs to Francesco,” said Francesco’s brother Luigi. “He is the one who has sent the money that we paid to Lucca all these years.”

“Yes,” said Tommaso. “What we paid to Lucca was the money owed to the landowner.”

“Then the money is yours, Francesco,” affirmed Don Antonio.

“I will use it to buy a house in the village,” declared Francesco.

“Will you come home to live there?” asked Anna Maria.

“One day, perhaps Rosa and I will return. But you and Babbo can live there now,” asserted Francesco.

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“But we live here,” protested Tommaso. “We have always lived here. It is our home.”

“It is our home, my husband, but it is not ours,” said Anna Maria. “It does not even belong to this good man sitting with us, Don Antonio. We are guardians, caretakers. I would welcome the chance to have my own kitchen where I could cook for just the two of us, where our children could come to visit on a Sunday with their children. I would enjoy going for a short walk with my weary, old legs to the church to take communion every morning from the hands of this good priest.”

“If this is what you want, my friends, I know a house that you can buy,” offered Don Antonio. “It is along the old via Flaminia, just down from the piazza. It is owned by the Costanzi family. All of their children have left Sigillo, mostly gone to America. They have agreed with the one son who is left that they will sell the house.”

“Yes, I know that house. I saw it on our walk on Saturday morning, Babbo,” said Francesco. “It looks like it is in need of some repairs. It has a very big piece of land surrounded by a wall. It will be a good vegetable garden.”

The next day, the entire family went with Francesco, Tommaso and Anna Maria to the empty house. The brother responsible for selling the house lived in Roma, but he had left the key with Nico. Nico joined them and together they walked through the two floors of the house that had stood empty for almost a year, and around the overgrown garden. It would need work, but like all the houses Francesco knew in this part of the world, it had walls of stone and an oven of brick. Could Francesco do most of what was needed before he had to leave to return home to America? He believed so, and what was left his brothers Luigi, Umberto and Enrico would help their father with after he left. The payment sum was agreed. It took half of the money Francesco had received back from Don Antonio. The remainder would be used for repairs and for upkeep of the house while his parents lived there.

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Rosati House in the village of Sigillo

For the next three weeks, Francesco and Tommaso worked on repairing the chimney flue, replacing broken windows, removing bird nests, repriming the well in the back yard, and realigning the entry door so that it swung free on its hinges. His friend Pietro was with them most of the time. Anna Maria, with the help of her daughter Consiglia, scrubbed and cleaned and polished every surface inside the house. Anna Maria remarked that this was the first time in all the years she had been married that she did something different from the routine of work at Masseggio. She said this with a great deal of pleasure in her voice.

There was still some work left to do, especially in the garden, when it was time for Francesco and Pietro to leave their families in Sigillo and Gualdo Tadino. The ship that they were booked to travel on would not wait for them. Their families did not want to let them go. Would it be the last time they would ever see one another? Tommaso and Anna Maria were not so old that they could not dream that one day their son would come back to live in his house, and they would still be there keeping the fire warm for them. Francesco gave no promises. His parents and the rest of his family expected none. He had come home. They could expect no more.

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Pietro and his brother picked up Francesco in the red Lancia. Together they drove to the train station in Fossato di Vico, and Francesco and Pietro began the long journey back down to Napoli, across the Atlantic to New York, then to Scranton and finally home to Old Forge and The Orchard. Francesco walked on board the ship that would carry him back to his home and family. He thought about this as he climbed the ramp, and he said the words several times to himself. *La mia casa e la mia famiglia. My home and my family.* For thirty-two years he had carried Masseggio around inside his head and heart as his home. That was also where his family was. When he had been in Sardegna, then in Esch-sur-Alzette, and finally in Old Forge, he had been away from home and his family, he thought. Now, having just come from Masseggio, he was going home.

He experienced a happiness that he had not felt since childhood. It was a feeling of weightlessness. He no longer had to pay for two sets of lives, in two places. He could now live one life as a husband, a father, and soon as a grandfather, Nonno Checco. He longed to sit on the broad, wide porch he had built on his house on The Orchard, to sit and talk with his friends, to hear the talk of the two worlds, the one bounded by the corners of their neighborhood, and the second, the one without boundaries, everywhere else. He hoped that the crossing would be safe and swift because he knew he would not be coming back again. He wanted to stay at home.



When they stepped off the ferry in front of the Hoboken terminal and Francesco looked up at the clock above the entrance, he was once again disappointed when he compared the time with that on his watch. He had wound his watch faithfully each day all the while they were in Italia, and each morning on the return trip across the Atlantic. Now, once again, the time on the station clock was nowhere in the vicinity to that on his watch.

“It must have something to do with crossing over the water,” said Francesco, perplexed.

“What?” asked Pietro.

“My watch has either gained or lost six hours since we left Napoli, but I don’t understand how,” replied Francesco.

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“Checco, I told you to buy yourself a good watch, a railroad watch. Spend a few extra bucks and get one that works right, one that you won’t be ashamed to take out at one of your children’s’ weddings.”

As they walked down Lackawanna Avenue from Lackawanna Railroad Station to the Central Railroad of New Jersey Station, they passed close to a jewelry store on Wyoming Avenue. Pietro convinced Francesco to go in and have a look at their watches. His eye was caught by a large gold plated, brass Waltham watch. It had a creamy white face, twelve large black hour numerals, twelve red minute numerals above the hours at five minute intervals with the four intervening minutes marked with a short dash, and a small dial in the lower section of the face with a single hand counting the sixty seconds. He bought the watch when the store owner promised him that he would take it back and refund all of his money if the watch ever lost a minute of time.

The two friends parted at The Orchard. Pietro walked up Main Street to his house near St. Lawrence Church, and Francesco turned right, into The Orchard. It was supper time, so there were no neighbors or cousins or nephews or nieces or brothers-in-law out to greet him as he walked along the sidewalk. The apple blossom and mountain laurel flower scents mingled with the smoke from the fires that had cooked all of the meals on the street. He paused at the edge of his property and looked at his house. Ten years, he thought. That was how long he and his family had lived here. As he walked around the side of the house, his youngest daughter ran out of the house first, followed by the rest of his family in order of age. He held them all close to him.

“*Venuto a casa,*” was all he could say through his tears of happiness. “I have come home.”



Chapter Seven

The Orchard

A Calm Island in a Sea of Unrest

KEEPING THE PROMISE HE MADE TO ANGELA NOTARI, to send her daughter back home to visit, proved more difficult than Francesco had thought it would be. It wasn't the money that was the problem. It was his family. Their oldest daughter, Elena, married Ernesto Baldrica from Plains on July 10th, 1932, shortly after Francesco returned from his visit to Masseggio. Elena and Ernesto had met at a wedding, but that meeting was arranged. Francesco and Ernesto's father, Antonio, worked in the mines together. They were friends, members together of the Roma Society. A marriage between their families would strengthen that bond. There was much to do to prepare for the wedding and then to help the newly married couple settle into their life. Rosa said that it wouldn't be right for her to leave just after the wedding, so her visit to Masseggio would wait for a few more months, she said.

In the late autumn, when Rosa began to start her preparations for an eventual trip in the spring, Elena and Ernesto came for a visit after Sunday dinner. It was an unusually warm day for that time of year. As Rosa made coffee and Elena cut the cakes, and while her father and her husband sat on the front porch, Elena told her mother that she felt certain they were expecting their first child. Antonio Baldrica was born in April, 1933, the first grandchild for Francesco and Rosa. He was named after Ernesto's father, as was the normal custom in most Italian families.

Enrico and Teresa Notari's children were adding to their families as well. Elmo Lilli, son to Dusala and Nazareno, and Orlando Notari, son to Lando and Margaret Notari, were both born in 1933. Little Antonio would have plenty of playmates when he came with his parents to The Orchard for a visit with his grandparents, aunts and uncle. Rosa said that she could hardly leave now, with her first grandchild just born.

The news from Italia was also making it difficult for Rosa to plan her journey. She read the news in *Il Progresso* of what was happening at home with increasing worry. In January of 1933, there was a front page

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story about Mussolini sending his congratulations to the new Chancellor of Germany, Adolf Hitler. In the article he referred to Hitler as ‘That funny man with the Chaplin brush mustache’, but it was clear that a new order was being established on the continent, and Italia’s supreme leader was taking the country in a direction that could only lead to confrontation with many of its neighbors.



After Francesco bought his watch, after he gave Rosa the money for her voyage back to Sigillo, and told her to put it in a place where he could not find it, he still had a large sum of money left in his pocket. He had already decided to buy a truck. His Model-T Ford had a number of limitations when it was being used as a taxi for a large family, a hauler of building materials, a transporter of produce and livestock. Its biggest disadvantage from Francesco’s point of view was that it was too small to be able to carry his family, his two brothers-in-laws’ families, and as many others who wanted to come along to weekend outings in the hills surrounding the Lackawanna and Susquehanna River valleys.

Francesco used his money to buy a 1931 Chevrolet one-and-a-half-ton truck. It was black with wooden slat sides on the cargo bed. He made benches that he could fasten to the bed’s wooden base, and that he could remove when he needed to haul whatever he would find to haul. When everyone was packed in there could be over two dozen children and grownups along with all the food and drink they needed for a day’s excursion to their favorite spot, Nicholson. They would climb into the truck early on Sunday morning, after those who went to mass had done their Sunday duty at the earliest mass that was said. Tommaso and Enrico sat in the cab with their brother-in-law. Rosa sat with the children on the truck. They began singing after they passed the movie theater in the center of Old Forge, with Rosa leading everyone in song. She had a beautiful voice. They had to stop singing when they were close to Washburn Street in Hyde Park. This was one of Francesco’s rules. No singing in Hyde Park. It was an old grudge that he said he would carry to his grave against the shop owners who never paid him for his bread. He would not let his family entertain them, their families or their customers.

A gun and fishing gear came a few months after the truck purchase. One of the laborers on his crew asked him if he would buy his rifle, his

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two bamboo rods and a bait casting and fly reel, along with a toolbox full of flies and lures. The laborer said he needed the money. The laborers were not working steadily. In fact, they were only working on the seams a few days every other week. Coal prices, like the prices of everything, had dropped because of the Depression, which would not end. Francesco had been working a full five days every week ever since he returned from Italia, but half of his pay was going into the pocket of the shift supervisor, an Irishman who lived in Old Forge. The men called him “Flint”, but his name was Flynn. He had told Francesco that he could work any five out of the six work days. When he wasn’t mining, he could shore up and replace the timbers, he said. “All ya has to do Rosati me boy is ta take out half o’yer pay from yer envelope an’ put it inta ‘nother’un an’ hand ‘er o’er to me once a week.”

Francesco was not a mathematician, but he could easily calculate that one-half of his pay for five days of work was more than all of his pay for one day. Rosa was angry. “You take off the shackles of one evil man and replace them with the shackles of another. God must have plans for you in Heaven, my husband, or he is punishing you for deeds from your last life,” she admonished.

Working five days a week meant that Francesco had a free day which he could use for many purposes. One of them was adding meat and fish to the table with the gun and fishing equipment he had bought. He drove up the West Mountain over the top of the ridge and into Milwaukee. It was another world over there. There was no city with smoke belching from every chimney, no smell of sulfur from the burning culm dumps, no stench of sewage from the polluted rivers. The air was clean. There were rolling hills planted with corn, large expanses of forest filled with wildlife. He could usually coax a few bass out of the ponds or brook trout out of the small streams to impale themselves on his worm-filled hook. He almost always had a rabbit or two in his hand when he came home, and now and then he brought back a deer that he would butcher in his back yard, behind the garage.



Finally, in the spring of 1934, Rosa was ready to make the journey home. It was all arranged. Celeste would accompany her to New York and see to it that she was safely on board the ship. He would stay in New York for the two months that she would be away, meet her when she

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returned, and then travel home with her. Celeste had not been able to find a job after his graduation from accounting school. In the depths of The Depression, there were few openings for young, unseasoned workers. Franklin D. Roosevelt had been elected with the help of Francesco's vote. Americans voted for Roosevelt in 1932 because they believed that he would give them more money than Hoover and the Republicans had. They were proved right. Immediately after being elected, FDR and the Democratic Congress set about providing the three "Rs": Relief, Recover and Reform in a bundle of what became known as the "alphabet agencies", like the NRA, PWA, AAA, FERA, CCC, TVA and the SEC. But in the spring of 1934, over one year after he took office, FDR's New Deal policies were just starting to have an effect, and the effect was not very strong.

Francesco, with Maria and Jolanda, drove Rosa and Celeste to Scranton and the Lackawanna train station, repeating the scene of two years earlier, but this time Rosa and Celeste were on the train, and Francesco was on the platform with Maria and Jolanda, waving goodbye.

"Do you remember when we took this train together, when we came from Italia?" Rosa asked her son. "You weren't yet four years old, and your sister Elena was still a little *bambino*."

"You've told the story so many times, Mamma, that I feel like I remember it even though I don't," answered Celeste, laughing.

Celeste knew how much this trip back home meant to his mother. He saw how she suffered every day when she looked at the picture of her parents. She loved both of her parents, but he knew that it was her father whom she carried in a special place in her heart. His mother was now nearly forty-two years old, and she had not seen her parents since she was twenty-two. How would he feel if his mother did not come back from this journey she was now taking for twenty years, when he was almost the same age as she was now, thought Celeste. The thought frightened him, but he came closer to an understanding of what his mother must have felt when she took him and his infant sister with her and left Sigillo.

They crossed the Hudson on the ferry from Hoboken terminal and boarded the ship that would take Rosa to Napoli. Celeste talked to a

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steward and asked for directions to his mother's stateroom. She would share the room with three other women, but compared to the conditions they endured on their journey from Italia, her voyage back across the Atlantic would be a luxury cruise. They found her room, and Celeste placed his mother's suitcase next to her bed. They were alone.

"I wish we were all traveling home together," she said, and she began to cry.

"Don't cry, Mamma," said Celeste, putting his arm around her shoulders. "We'll go back one day."

"If I could only live to see that day," Rosa said wiping her tears with the scarf that had covered her head during their crossing of the river.

"You will, Mamma, you will," reassured Celeste. He wanted to believe what he was telling his mother, but he knew it was not true. He wondered if he would ever be able to return.

Soon the room filled with the other women with whom Rosa would share the voyage, along with their families. There were introductions in the different Italian dialects spoken by the members of the families. Though it had been prearranged that all the women were Italian born, they were all from different regions of the country. When the ship was ready to sail, a loud horn was sounded to announce that all who would be going ashore should do so immediately. Celeste received one last embrace and a loving kiss from his mother, and left her with her new companions.

The ship sailed and Celeste was alone on the pier. He took out the letter with the address of his friend from Rider College, Nick Santos, where he would be staying until his mother returned. Nick and his family lived in an apartment in the section of New York called Greenwich Village, a neighborhood on Manhattan bounded by Broadway on the east, the Hudson River on the west, Houston Street on the south, and 14th Street on the north. Greenwich Village was mainly known at that time as an avant-garde bastion and an alternative culture enclave. It was the center of bohemianism, but it was also a neighborhood with a large number of Italian-American residents. Celeste's friend Nick said proudly that their neighbor was the Don of the Genovese Family. It was nothing like anything Celeste had experienced before. He had been to

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Manhattan many times. This was different. He was living in The City, in The Village.

Within a few days he had a job as a bus boy at the Amen Corner Restaurant on Fifth Avenue and Ninth Street, only a block from Washington Square. The maître d' was a friend of Nick's father, and the family often ate there on Saturday evenings. The maître d', whose name was Alberto Belvidere, could see that Celeste was not made for bus boy work. Late one evening, when the last of the dishes were lined up on the racks, he asked Celeste where he was from and what he was doing in The City. He recognized the name, Rosati.

"Are you related to Francesco Rosati, who once lived in Esch-sur-Alzette in Luxembourg?" he asked.

"He's my father," replied Celeste, hesitantly, not sure if he should have given away that family secret.

"Si, Si! Now I see. You look more like your mother, Rosa, than your red-cheeked and red-haired father! This is too much of a coincidence to be true. Your father used to give me candy when I was a little boy and came to his store with my father on Saturdays to buy our meat."

Signor Belvidere was a young boy living in Esch-sur-Alzette with his family before The War. Like the Rosati family, they had to either stay and fight for the Germans, or return to Italia. Alberto's father was crippled in one leg from an accident in the mines, and he was certain that he would not be called to the army if he returned to his hometown of Torino. After The War was over, Alberto's family managed to come to America before the immigration laws were tightened. Alberto's father's brother had come to America at the same time that his father had left for Luxembourg. He worked on the docks, made good money, and could pay to get his brother a job in the fish market. Alberto's family settled in the Italian neighborhood north of Canal Street, in a building that was now owned by his uncle. Alberto began working in restaurants as a bus boy and worked his way up to maître d'. One day, he would own his own establishment and call it Ristorante Belvidere.

"Tomorrow you start working as a waiter, Celeste," declared Alberto.

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A telegram arrived two weeks after Rosa left from New York. It said simply that she had arrived in Sigillo. A letter from Rosa arrived three weeks later. After supper, Maria read the letter aloud to her father and sister, her uncle Tommaso and her cousins Livia, Giuliano and Rosolino, her Uncle Enrico and Aunt Teresa and their youngest son, Pietro.

Masseggio, Sigillo
14 June 1934

My Dear Husband and Children and Family,

God took care of me on my journey. The women with whom I shared the voyage were all very kind, and we became good friends. I arrived safely in Sigillo on Saturday, 26 May, three weeks ago. There were other women and families on the ship who were returning to Perugia, so I had company all the way to Fossato di Vico. The weather in Napoli was much better this time than when I was there last with the children and Filomena. I took the train from Napoli to Roma, and then from Roma to Fossato di Vico. My brother Antonio was waiting for me with a car he had borrowed from our cousin, Sebastiano. We arrived home late in the afternoon. My joy at seeing Mamma and Babbo cannot be measured. Mamma would not stop crying. I was so happy and so sad at the same time. Mamma has grow so old and frail. It is only the promise from you, my husband, that I was coming home that has kept her alive these past few years. I am sure of that. Babbo seemed stronger, but the years have drained him of his strength. As you said, my husband, his humor has not abandoned him.

The day after I arrived, in the morning, I walked down to meet your mother and father. It felt so good to see them and to see our house for the first time. It looked much better than I remembered it. The work you did to it before you left really does show. Your father has turned the garden into a small paradise. Your mother says she spends her days tending to the flowers and vegetables that grow there, along with your father. I have never seen your mother looking so full of joy. It was a

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wonderful gift to buy the house. I long for the day when we will live there.

The next day was Sunday, and your brother Enrico came with his wagon to take your mother and father to church. Mamma and Babbo and I walked. Don Antonio was outside the church when we arrived, and he was so pleased to see me. He asked how my husband is feeling now that his large burden has been lifted. I told him that you still do not leave enough time to rest, except on Sunday, God's Day. After mass, Mamma, Babbo and Don Antonio rode in the wagon with your mother and father to Masseggio where we ate dinner with your entire family. It felt like I had never left, although everyone has grown older. We prayed that we will all be together one day soon.

I have been spending each day visiting my other cousins and old friends, and helping with the cleaning and washing and cooking. There was never even the smallest spot of dirt in my Mamma's home. The linens were always as white as snow. Tired eyes and a tired back conspire to make older people believe that houses are as fresh and clean as they were when they were in the prime of life. There were always enough young, strong arms and backs at Masseggio, so you, my husband, never saw how the aging of the people living in a house affects the house itself. This is something you will all have to remember when I grow old, and when you, my son and daughters, also reach your later years.

Time is passing quickly. Soon I will have to leave. It is not what I want. I want you all to be here with me and with our families. I know that if God had meant for us to be here, He would have made it so. I have to accept His will and not question it, but it is difficult. I know that when I leave it will be the last time I see my parents in this world, and will have to wait until I can join them in the next. I miss you all very much and will be very happy to hold you all close to me again soon.

Your loving Wife and Mother.

Mamma Rosa

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They were all in tears when Maria finished reading the letter. There was nothing said. They held their own thoughts inside. Maria, Pietro and Jolanda were sad because their parents were sad, but they had no understanding of the pull that Masseggio or Sigillo or Italia had on their parents. Livia, Giuliano and Rosolino had no desire to return. They were perfectly satisfied with their lives right where they were.

Enrico broke the silence. “Rosa says nothing about what life is like under *Il Duce*.”

“They probably told her not to write anything about politics,” suggested Tommaso. “*Il carabinieri* read all the letters leaving the country. It would not be wise to say anything about the government, good or bad.”

At the time Rosa was writing her letter, Mussolini and the Chancellor of Germany, who gave himself the title *Der Führer, The Leader*, met for the first time. The place was Venice, in the region of Italia where German and Austrian forces had humiliated and slaughtered hundreds of thousands of Italian soldiers less than twenty years earlier. A month later, in July, Mussolini deployed Italian troops to the Austrian border and spoke out against German aggression toward its ally, Austria, with whom Italia had signed a friendship treaty in early 1930, granting its assistance in case of a German invasion. The relationship with the funny man with the Chaplin moustache was destined to be a difficult one.

Rosa returned in late July, arriving in New York on a Saturday. Francesco borrowed Pietro Alimenti’s large Dodge sedan and drove with Maria, Jolanda and Elena to New York. Little Antonio was being cared for by Elena’s mother-in-law. They managed to find Celeste among the crowd of people waiting for their loved ones, and surprised him when they appeared on the pier next to him. They each carried small bouquets of roses that they had cut that morning before leaving The Orchard before dawn. They kept the flowers fresh in wet newspapers that they had wrapped around the bouquets. Celeste had planned to tell his mother on their train journey back to Scranton that he would be returning to New York and entering art school. He had rehearsed what he would say when she began to cry and complain that he was throwing his life away in a useless pursuit, which he was sure she would do. He had hoped to convince her that he was serious about his plan to become an artist, which he had decided during the weeks he passed in the midst of

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American art world in Greenwich Village. Then she would help him convince his father. Now he would have to find another time, after they were all home. It would not be easy, he decided.



In Francesco's hand was a letter that Rosa had just read to him. It was from his cousin, Luigi Rosati. Luigi's father was Domenico Rosati, Francesco's father Tommaso's brother. Luigi had come to America in the late spring of 1909, shortly after his father had died. It was up to him to help support his mother, Domenica Mariani Rosati, and his sister, Amelia, who stayed at Masseggio. On his way to Le Havre he had visited Francesco and his new bride in Esch-sur-Alzette. He told them that he had decided to go to California, rather than settling near his cousins and his sister Amelia in Old Forge. He was going to be a farmer and own his own land. And that's what he had done.

Luigi's daughter, Editta, had written the letter for her father. The letter had arrived while Rosa was in Italia, and Francesco had left it unopened. He did not want Maria to read a letter that might contain bad news, and since he could not judge from the outside of the letter whether it contained words of good or bad news, he let it sit on the sideboard in their dining room until Rosa returned. It was a long and happy letter with a few photographs of the family. There was no shortage of work on the farm, just a shortage of good hands, his cousin's daughter had written. If Francesco had not forgotten how to till and seed and harvest, he was welcome to come out and stay for as long as he wanted. Maybe the California sun and life on a farm suited him better than the cold and coal in the east, she had continued for her father.

Maybe I'll give it a try, Francesco had said to Rosa. With the slowdown in the mine, he could use the extra money. They agreed that he would go out and spend a few months. Just for the money. Francesco drove up to the town center to send his cousin a telegram telling him he would be there in September. On his way back, he stopped at Luigi's sister Amelia Ciufferi's house. She was always happy to see Francesco. When they were growing up at Masseggio, he hadn't teased her like her other male cousins. She was very happy to hear that he would be visiting her brother. Often she had tried to convince her husband Davide to make the long trip, but there was never the time or the money. Francesco

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promised to keep room in his suitcase for something that she might want to send to Luigi.

Francesco had never thought of America as anything more than a place where he could work and take care of his family. He knew the way from the New York harbor, where the ships from Italia docked and sailed, to Old Forge. He could take the train or the street car to Wilkes-Barre and Scranton, and he knew the places in between, especially those down the line where he worked and where his sisters and now his daughter lived. He could drive to Nicholson and over the West Mountain without getting lost. In Scranton, he knew Hyde Park, where he had tried to sell his bread, and the train stations for the Lackawanna and New Jersey Central railroads.

Now he would be taking a train in the opposite direction from New Jersey and New York. He was going to California. He was both excited and nervous at the prospect of seeing this big country that was now his and his family's home, where he was a citizen and where he could vote for the President. He could speak enough English to make himself understood. "Protect your wallet, Checco," his friends had told him. "There are all sorts of people over there, the kind of people you don't meet in this part of America," they had said. What kind of people, he thought. How will I know them when I see them? Why didn't he just stay home and forget about this idea! He probably wasn't going to like California anyway, warned Rosa. She was most certainly going to be right, thought Francesco; she usually was.

Francesco drove his truck while Rosa sat in the middle of the bench seat and Celeste stared out the passenger side window. The sun was still below the East Mountain, but it was beginning to make its presence felt by lighting up the edge of the sky. This was the first time someone in the family was boarding a train at Lackawanna Station that was heading north, toward Buffalo, rather than south toward Hoboken. As Francesco boarded, Rosa said that she hoped the engineer didn't get lost, and they all laughed. They all waved him good-bye until the train had disappeared around the bend at Adams Avenue. It moved along behind the stores on Lackawanna Avenue. As it neared the bridge over the Lackawanna River, it passed by the roundhouse that was packed full of locomotives being cleaned and serviced.

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From Scranton, the train passed through Clarks Summit, Dalton, La Plume then over the Nicholson Bridge. Francesco looked out of the window, over the side of the bridge and down into the valley where he and his family had picnicked so often. This must be what it feels like to be in an airplane, thought Francesco. The train continued on to Binghamton in New York State, then to Elmira, to Corning and finally to Buffalo. It was getting dark as Francesco boarded the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railroad overnight train to Chicago.

He awoke in Chicago. The city had an odor that was different from the one he was used to in his part of America, which was dominated by the smell of sulfur. Sulfur leached into the water from the mines and was released into the air through the burning culm dumps that dotted the landscape. There was the constant smell of rotten eggs, a smell that had plagued Francesco's life since he was a child. Chicago's odor was from the animal stockyards and the slaughterhouses that were both the pride and the pestilence of this mighty city. The smells were certainly not keeping people from visiting the city in large numbers, thought Francesco. The trains were full and there seemed to be a festive atmosphere in the air among the people swarming in and out of the stations, even at the early morning hour that his train had arrived. If Francesco could have read the many signs, posters and banners that hung on lamp posts and walls and over the roads, he would have known that he arrived in Chicago at the same time as the *Chicago World's Fair*. It had opened in 1933, and was originally planned for only one year, but due to a combination of its popularity and the need to earn more money to retire the event's debts, it was extended for an additional year.

He could not read these signs, and he would not have been interested in any case. He was traveling to see his cousin in California. He found the Union Pacific Station with the help of one the city's Worlds Fair guides, who spoke to Francesco in a dialect of Italian that, with some difficulty, he was able to understand. The train left Chicago in the middle of the day and wound through the backsides of commercial buildings and tenements until it reached the edge of the city. It steamed for a another hour past small farms and through little villages until it reached open landscape, where vast fields of corn were all that could be seen all directions, and the land was as flat as the ocean. We made *polenta* for a whole year for four dozen people in our family from a

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hundred stalks of corn, thought Francesco. There must be enough corn within eyesight to feed the entire world with *polenta*. How can some people be hungry, he wondered.

Eventually the flatlands merged with the mountains. They were rising into the Rocky Mountains, his neighbor told him. He had seen mountains like this, traveling to and from Luxembourg. There they were called The Alps. What made mountains grow to such heights, he wondered. Did his children learn this in school. He made a mental note to ask Maria when he returned home.

“Going to find work, mister?” the fellow sitting beside him finally said after they had traveled in silence for over two hours. He was a young man, maybe in his late twenties, quite tall. He had blonde hair, cut short, blue eyes and very sunburned skin.

“I av’a cousin in’a San José, California. E as’a farm. I go to work wid’a ‘im fer couple’a munds,” replied Francesco. “I work in’a da coal mines in Pennsylvania.”

The young man smiled warmly, and he told Francesco he was also a miner, or he had been. He was from West Virginia. He had worked in the mines all his life, since he was a young boy, but the mines were closed. The Depression. He had gone to Chicago to try to find work, and he found jobs in the stockyards and then on some building sites. But there was nothing steady. His wife and four children were still back in West Virginia, and he was sending money to them when he could earn it. He had heard there was work on the farms in California, and he was spending his last few dollars to travel out there. He didn’t know what he would do if he could not get a job.

“You av’a da family in’a California?” asked Francesco.

“Nope. I don’t know a soul. I’m just takin’ a chance,” he replied.

Francesco listened to this young man’s story. When he was his age, he was also desperate. The difference was that he was not on his own. He went where he had family. This man was going to a place where he did not know anyone. He looked strong. He looked like he could do the work of two men. Why wasn’t there work for the young man where he grew up and where his family was? Why was he himself paying the foreman to let him work when other men had to sit idle with nothing to do? He thought of his son working now as a waiter in New York after

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spending three years in college studying to be an accountant. He would never understand the ways of the world. He wasn't sure he wanted to understand. They seemed evil.

The young man got off the train in Salt Lake City. He was going to Los Angeles, he said. He had heard that the farms were bigger and there was more work in that part of California. He wished Francesco a safe trip, and they shook hands when they parted. Francesco silently asked God to look after the young man. The seat next to Francesco was occupied by other travelers for most the remainder of the journey, but he was not interested in having more conversations. He wanted to see his cousin and his cousin's family and his Zia Domenica, then he wanted to get back on the train and go home as soon as he could.

The train passed through Nevada during the night and arrived in Reno in the early morning. After a stop that gave the passengers enough time to have breakfast in the station's diner, send telegrams to family and friends, which Francesco did, both to Luigi to tell him when he would arrive and to Rosa and the family to tell him he was almost there, and to use a toilet that wasn't moving beneath them, they boarded again, crossed into California and headed for Sacramento, Stockton and then San José, arriving in the late afternoon. In 1934, San Jose was a city of 63,000. The main industry was farming. It had been a farming community since its founding in 1777 when it was the first town in the Spanish colony of Nueva California. The farms supported the Spanish military installations in San Francisco and Monterey. The town became part of Mexican territory in 1825 when Mexico broke away from Spain. In 1846, the town capitulated along with the rest of California when Mexico was defeated by the American army, and San José became part of the United States. When California became a state in 1850, San José was its first capital.

His cousin Luigi was waiting for him on the platform. It had been twenty-five years since he last saw him, but photographs had been exchanged during that entire time. Even without the photos, Francesco would recognize his cousin. He was a Rosati. He was three years younger than Francesco.

"Checco! Over here. It is so good to see you," cried Luigi, and his blue eyes were filled with tears of joy. "My truck is over there. Let me

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take your bag. You brought a dead body with you? This bag weighs more than you do.”

“Some small gifts from The Orchard,” smiled Francesco.

Luigi’s farm was just outside the city limits, a short drive southeast from the train station. They drove past the courthouse and through the city’s business district. There were a few other cars on the streets, but most of the vehicles were trucks like Luigi’s. His was a Ford, a 1931 Ford AA stake bed. It had a yellow cab and, behind the mud there were red wheel rims. He drove it to the city once a week during the growing season to sell his produce. During the winter months, he and his family came in less often, to purchase staples, like salt, sugar and flour, and material for sewing clothes, or maybe a new stone for the grinder or parts for the truck. It was dry and hot and the cars and trucks moving along the unpaved streets filled the air with a light dust that covered everything. It reminded Francesco of the times he would go to Fossato de Vico on market day when the wagons leaving town at the close of the day created a cloud of dust that rising up into the sky that could be seen long after the town was out of sight. This place had a feeling of Umbria about it, thought Francesco.

“Do you have a market day?” asked Francesco, who was no better at small conversation than his cousin.

“Yes, every Thursday. Editta and Ernesto are now old enough to take the truck in themselves and run the stand. Dominic used to be our sales manager before he started helping his grandfather on his farm. Now he’s the competition, and we make sure we set up shop right next to each other at the market so we can keep an eye on him. We’re usually all there together. You’ll see. We’ll come next week.” Dominic was their oldest son, born in 1913. Eddita came along in 1915, and Ernesto one year later. Luigi had gone to work on Catarina’s father’s farm when he arrived in California. Catarina was still in Sigillo at the time. She came over in 1911, and they were married shortly afterward. They lived and worked together on the Marianelli farm until after Dominic was born, and then they bought their own place.

They were now driving through farmland. They passed a church. “That’s our church,” said Luigi, “San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo.” It’s an old Spanish church, and half of the parishioners are descendents of the original settlers here. Did you know that this part of America once

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belonged to the Spanish and then the Mexicans? No? Well it did. We have a lot in common with these people. We get along just fine. But I can't eat their food. The kids think its good, but Catarina and I get the runs every time we try it."

"Here we are," exclaimed Luigi, proudly.

The farm was around fifteen acres, nestled in amongst hundreds of farms of similar size at the foothills of the mountain range. A small, one storey, stone house with a high gable and two dormers on each side stood a hundred feet back from the road on a knoll, the dormer side facing the road. Francesco could see the top of a chimney rising above the far gable. There was a wide porch spanning one side of the house.

"It's not big, but there's enough room for the five of us and a comfortable place for guests like you, Checco, when we have them."

Luigi's wife, Catarina, came out to greet them as they drove up to the house. She was as pretty as Francesco had remembered her as the young Marianelli girl, when she had visited Masseggio with her parents before she and Luigi and she were married. Catarina wore a grey linen dress with a white linen apron. Covering her dark black hair that still had no tinges of grey was a bright red scarf.

"Francesco! It is so good to see you. You are a most welcome guest," she cried, and hugged him like a brother just back from a long journey.

They went up the stairs to the porch and into the house. There was a large room covering two-thirds of the first floor, a combination kitchen and living area. At the end where the chimney had stretched up above the gable was a large, stone fireplace with an open hearth. On one side of the hearth was a metal door half way up the wall covering an oven. On the other side was the metal swing for the cauldron. It was the fireplace from Masseggio, thought Francesco. If he would have had any doubts about its origins they would have been dispelled by the photograph that hung on the wall to the left of the stone construction. The photo showed a much younger Domenica stirring the polenta. The picture was brought to life, because there was his aunt, now close to the same age as his mother, stirring the polenta that they would eat for dinner

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that evening. Catarina took the ladle so that her mother-in-law could greet her nephew with hugs, kisses and tears of joy.

They were all sitting at the table when Editta and Ernesto came in from their day of working in the fields and with the animals. They were both wearing overalls. Ernesto took off his straw hat and hung it next to the door. Editta did the same with hers, then she took off the blue bandana that covered her hair. Their skin was the color of the California earth, umber, just like in Sigillo. They were *Umbrians*. They stood there, tall and straight and strong, smiling at their father's cousin whom they had never seen, other than in photographs. He was the closest person to an uncle they had in America, and he had always remembered their birthdays and sent them each a small gift at Christmas. They greeted him with warm hugs and kisses and then went out to wash off the day's grime. They went up to their rooms to dress and re-emerged as normal looking young adults who could be doing anything else with their lives than farming.

Before dinner, Francesco opened his suitcase that contained gifts for the whole family. There was a *prosciutto* that Francesco had cured and a *capacollo* from Amilia's husband. Emilia had given him sweaters for Editta and Ernesto, which fit perfectly when they put them on. Catarina received a linen apron from her sister-in-law, and Domenica wrapped the crocheted shawl around her shoulders sent by her daughter.

"When I first came over, I tried to make the *prosciutto crudo*," said Luigi. "Catarina's father told me it wouldn't work, but I had to see for myself. The meat rotted. It's not cold enough here in the winter. So we've become Calabrians and smoke the *prosciutto*."

Then it was time for dinner. Catarina and Dominica served the polenta, Ernesto poured the wine, Luigi sliced the *braciola* that had simmered in the sauce, Editta mixed the greens plucked from the garden that day into a salad, and Francesco sat and watched the performance from his front row seat. He had experienced this same feeling just a few years before, when he was back in Masseggio. Not only had his cousin created a model of the homestead's hearth, he had managed to instill in his family the same way of being as the family had in that homestead. Everything was done together. It had to do with the rhythm of life on a farm, with a schedule that was set by the animals, by the weather, by the

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seasons, by the time of day. These forces controlled the routine of life on a farm.

It was different on The Orchard, where the men walked out of their houses before daybreak, disappeared at the end of the road into a streetcar, or drove away in their cars and trucks, and returned in the middle of the afternoon. The girls and unmarried women walked to the dress factories and returned in time for supper. The school-aged children left their houses after daybreak, walked to the end of The Orchard, and then up the hill to the grade school or high school near the center of town. They returned late in the afternoon and did their schoolwork and helped with chores around the house. The wives stayed at home and took care of the children who were too young for school, did the washing and ironing and cooking and canning. Everyone had his or her own rhythm. The bonds were not the same as on a farm, where the family members spent most of their waking hours together, every day of the week.

Francesco had never thought about this before now, not even when he had been at Masseggio a few years earlier. Yes, it was different there than it was in America, but he considered the reason to be that America was different. Here, in his cousin's home, Francesco saw that the life he had chosen for himself and his family was the reason for the difference. His children were all dutiful, respectful and considerate, so they had not suffered because he had chosen to be a miner instead of a farmer. But what would their children be like? Would they be able to instill in their children the importance of family, of working together toward a common goal when the goal was no longer survival?

During the two weeks that Francesco spent in San Jose, he helped his cousin build a new smoke house, larger and sturdier than the one that burned down in the late summer. He worked with Ernesto replacing worn out fence posts, and drove with Editta and Ernesto into town on market day. While wandering about the market stalls, he bought himself a new straw hat like the ones worn by his cousin and his children. He would have something to remember the time he spent on a Rosati farm at the farthest edge of America. Francesco enjoyed his short working vacation. He would not hear of taking any money from Luigi. With his bag full of presents to take back to The Orchard, he waved to Luigi, Catarina, Zia Domenica, Ernesto and Editta as his train left the San Jose train station on its way to Chicago, Buffalo and then Scranton.

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Rosa almost fainted on the kitchen floor when Francesco walked in.

“What are you doing back so soon!?” she cried. “I thought you were going to stay for a few months.”

“I missed you,” he said smiling. “Besides, I’m not meant to be a farmer anymore, Rosa. I’m a miner, and it’s time I got back to my job.”

Rosa gave her husband a warm embrace and they kissed. Twenty-five years of marriage, four children and one grandchild. They still loved one another deeply.



“I did not leave my family to have my family leave me,” Rosa said.

“Where did he get this idea that he would be an artist?” demanded Francesco. “The men in our family work with their backs. We sent him to school to be a banker, not to make pictures like Michelangelo!”

Celeste went back to New York a few weeks after his mother’s return from Italia. His mother and father were not happy about his decision to continue to work in New York. They wanted him at home looking for a job in the area. Scranton and Wilkes-Barre were large cities and he would eventually find work in one of them, they had told him. He just needed to keep trying. He had a job, he argued, and he was earning enough money to pay rent on a small room just around the corner from the restaurant where he worked, and still send something home to them. And Signore Belvidere, the maître d’, had promised to help him get the accounting job for the restaurant, he reminded them. A paying job is better than no job at all, he said. Finally, they relented with the promise from their son that he would come home for good before Christmas. He still had not told them of his plans for art school.

Every evening Celeste served tables in the fully booked Amen Corner restaurant. Guests began arriving around six p.m. The kitchen closed at ten on weekdays, and at twelve on Friday and Saturday evenings. They were closed on Sundays. Celeste was rarely back in his little room on West 12th Street before midnight on weekdays and at two a.m. on Sunday mornings, even though it was just a few short blocks from the restaurant. He worked the lunch shifts as well, so he had no time six days a week for doing much other than sleeping, washing and ironing his clothes and walking back and forth to his job. On Sundays, he went to church and

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then walked down to the center of the Italian neighborhood on Canal Street.

On those walks he saw endless lines of hungry men, women and children leading to the soup kitchens run by churches and other volunteer groups. Businesses closed one after the other, and their windows and doors were boarded up to keep out intruders. The number of hopelessly poor people Celeste saw warming themselves at open fires and sleeping on the streets seemed to grow each night. But when he arrived at the restaurant, it was filled with people who had money to spend to buy food and drink. What each person spent on one dinner could feed a family for a week, maybe longer. New York was supposed to be where The Depression started. Either it was already over for the restaurant's guests, or it never began.

On Sundays, Celeste slept as long as he could, then threw himself into his clothes and rushed to the little neighborhood church several blocks away from his apartment. Celeste did not miss mass. The Church played a special role in his life, more so than in the lives of the rest of his family, especially his father. When he was fourteen, he talked to the parish priest about entering the seminary. He was sure he had a calling. He talked to his mother. "Your father would never agree to it, Celeste," she had said. "You are his only son." That was the end of that.

Finally, he wrote to his mother to tell her of his plan to enroll in art school. He asked for help with the tuition payment, which he could not pay himself from his salary as a waiter. He waited for her reply.

His landlord, an elderly German widower, placed the mail in neat piles on the table in the entrance foyer for each of his four male tenants. On some days, the table was bare, and on others it might contain a mixture of packages from home and letters from families and friends. When Celeste came home from his lunch round one November day, a letter was on the table in the place reserved for his mail. It was from his mother. He sat on the edge of his bed and read it.

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16 November 1934

Our Dearest Celeste,

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We hope that God is watching over you and that you are taking care to eat properly and attend mass on Sunday and all the Holy Days. Your father and I are very worried that you might be falling into bad habits living so far away on your own. We know we raised you to be a good boy and we pray for you each night before going to bed. We have prayed that you would find a job close to home, and our prayers were answered. We have very good news. We have found you a job with the welfare office in Scranton. You can start work as soon as you come home. Please do not disappoint us.

With all our love,

Mamma e Babbo

Celeste laid back on his bed and stared up at the ceiling. He had expected they would say no to his request for money, that his mother would tell him to come home immediately and stop being foolish. What he did not expect was that they would ignore his letter completely and find him a job. Every bone, muscle and fiber in his body wanted to stay in New York, but he knew that was now impossible. How could he have thought that it would be as easy as saying it was something he wanted to do? He had an obligation to do what his family expected him to do. They had worked hard and sacrificed to pay for his education. They weren't about to do it again, and they were not going to let him waste the money they spent on that education by allowing him to study something else. One day, if God gave him children of his own, they would study what they wanted to study, live where they wanted to live, he thought. But that would have to wait for another generation. He packed his things, said good-bye to his landlord and to Signore Belvidere, took the ferry across the Hudson River, and got on the next train to Scranton.



One evening, after Jolanda, Maria and Celeste had gone up to their rooms, Rosa and Francesco were sitting at the kitchen table. There were still a couple of sips of wine left in Francesco's glass, and it was soon time for bed. A few days before, they had buried Claudio Bastianelli, Francesco's sister Rosa's husband. The cause of death written on the death certificate was pneumonia. Francesco suspected that it was the black lung that killed him. Claudio never had a Silvio Amaducci to tell

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him about the danger of the coal dust in the mines. Claudio was the first member of the family to be put into a grave in the cemetery that Francesco, along with his other brother-in-law, Antonio, and some of the other men who worked together in the same mine, had helped to establish. Claudio did not have time or the money to buy a plot in the cemetery before he died, so he was buried in Francesco's family plot. There would be time, later, to make other arrangements, Francesco had reassured his grieving sister.

Francesco and Antonio Volpi were members of the Roma Society in Plains. Antonio Baldrice had brought them into the Society. *The Italian Independent Cemetery* is the name the Society members finally agreed upon for their burial ground. The idea for a cemetery started soon after Francesco moved his family back to The Orchard. Antonio Baldrice made a motion at one of the Society's meetings that they should find a piece of land where they could have their own burial ground for the growing number of Italian families, so they didn't have to be buried in one of the Protestant cemeteries. The Lithuanians were negotiating with a farmer in West Wyoming for some land and if the Society went in with them, they could get a portion of land at a good price, Antonio had said. It was a quiet place with a view up to the mountain. They decided right then to drive over to have a look at the property.

The men piled into their cars and trucks and drove along River Road from Plains until they came to the bridge over the Susquehanna River to Wyoming. Antonio was in Francesco's truck and led the way. They turned left on Wyoming Avenue and drove for a little over a mile until they came to Denison Street where they turned right. They continued two blocks along Lackawanna Avenue that bends left into Washington Avenue. The Denison Cemetery was on their left as they drove. A few dirt roads had been laid out where new houses were being built. They turned right on the second street and came to Stites Street. In front of them was the large, open field with a small pond in the middle of it.

"This is it," declared Antonio, and Francesco pulled over to the side of the road and stopped his truck. The rest of the men did the same and they walked into the field.

"How much for our piece?" one of the men asked Antonio.

"Eight hundred," replied Antonio.

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“It’s going to take a lot of us dying before we can fill up this place like the cemetery back home,” joked one of the other men.

Francesco thought about all the generations of Rosatis buried in Sigillo in the cemetery next to *Chiesa Sant’Anna*. His parents and his brothers with their families would be buried there. But things were changing in Sigillo as well, with the new generation going to school, just like his children, and dreaming about working in Roma and other places. Would they want to come home to lie next to their ancestors, or would their husbands and wives want them to be close to them, in their ancestral grounds? They were looking over an empty field, like the cemetery in Sigillo probably was five hundred or so years ago, but he wasn’t sure that this field would be filled with his family and friends in another five hundred years. Would his great grandchildren, or even his grandchildren, know where he was buried?

Not everyone in the Society would be expected to pay a share, but whoever did would have their own plot. The rest of the plots would be sold on a first-come, first-served basis. As the twenty-or-so men stood in the square section of land that was theirs if they wanted it, they agreed to put up the money for the purchase. It took some months for the papers to be finished and for all the members to be of the same mind on the name. *The Italian Independent Cemetery*. No Church involvement. No saint’s name over the entrance. Not even a reference to the Society.

Rosa’s brothers, Enrico and Tommaso, were not members of the Roma Society, although they had been asked to join many times by the men they mined with every day. Francesco never mentioned it to them. If they didn’t want to join it was up to them. But it troubled Rosa because she wanted her brothers with her when she died. Generations of Notaris were all buried in the same cemetery in Sigillo. If they could not be there, she at least wanted them to be in one place near to each other. Except for her husband and her children, her brothers were her closest family. Tommaso joked that he wasn’t ever planning on dying, so he did not need a cemetery plot. Enrico was quiet on the subject. Rosa expected that her sister-in-law had told him that she wanted their graves to be nearby. If she died first, she had told Enrico, she wanted him and the children to visit her often. If he died first, she wanted him to be within walking distance so that she could visit him every day if she wished.

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Enrico did die before Teresa. The year was 1937. He was a strong man with a powerful build. He was never sick, at least he never admitted to being in ill health. One day he came home from work looking pale and breathing with difficulty. When Teresa asked him what was wrong, he just shrugged off her question and said that he probably had a cold. Tommaso had told Rosa that their brother had stopped a falling timber with his chest and kept it from crushing two other men. The wind had been knocked out of him, but he seemed fine. The next day, Rosa walked down to visit her brother after Francesco came home from work and told her that there was something wrong with Enrico, and he could not work. In Rosa's worried eyes her brother was obviously not well, but he refused to talk about it and ignored all attempts to get him to go a doctor.

He died a few weeks later. On his death certificate the cause of death was listed as pneumonia. The Pennsylvania Coal Company did not have to pay compensation for a miner who died of pneumonia. All the miners who worked with Enrico took up a collection and gave it to Tommaso to give to Teresa. It could have been any one of them under that timber, they said. Enrico was buried in the Marcy Cemetery on Foote Avenue in Duryea, across the river and up the hill, just over the border from Old Forge. His grave was less than a mile from their house, and Teresa could walk there to visit whenever she wished.

In 1938, Francesco's sister Filomena died. She was only thirty-nine years old. She and Antonio knew that another child birth could be fatal to her and to their child. But nature takes its own course when there is nothing to stop it. Filomena was powerless, and there was no doctor who would or could help her. The cause of her death was pneumonia. She was the first Rosati to be buried in the Italian Independent Cemetery. Antonio's grief did not have any boundaries.

In November 1940, Filomena was joined by her sister Rosa. Rosa married Giovanni Galli a year after Claudio's death. She and Giovanni had a son one year later, whom they named Dino, and a second son named Servilio six months before her death. The cause of her death was ovarian cancer. She was diagnosed with it in June, had a hysterectomy in August and died in November, so the end came very quickly. Giovanni bought a plot of land in the cemetery where Rosa's sister and first husband were already resting peacefully, and the family buried her.

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Francesco's Rosa always said that God never takes an angel from the earth without putting a new one in its place. Louise Albanesi was born in 1934 to Angela and Nanno. Matilda Notari was born to Lando and Margaret in 1937, and Angela and Nanno Albanesi received a second angel in 1938 when their son Enrico was born. And August 26, 1940, Pietro Notari, Enrico and Teresa Notari's youngest son, married Margareta Bartoli. They were married on a Monday at eight a.m. because Margareta's father, who owned a grocery store, would not close it on a Saturday for his daughter's wedding, and he wanted to open it on time on Monday. "Lose a customer once, and they never come back," Mr. Bartoli told his daughter.



Italia was going to war. The men who worked in the mine with Francesco were not in agreement about what that would mean for their families on either side of the ocean. Some of the men said that Mussolini was just taking what the country should have gotten after the last war. He was bringing pride back to the Italian people, they said. Others were angry that he was sending more young men, including members of their families, to an early death. Francesco worried that if America was drawn into the war, his son and the boys in his family in America would be forced to fight against his brothers' and cousins' sons. There would be no escape.

It began in October, 1935 when a force of one hundred thousand Italian soldiers invaded Abyssinia in eastern Africa. Mussolini was repaying a debt to the thousands of Italian soldiers, and the pride of Italia, in going back to Africa and to Abyssinia. In 1896, at the Battle of Adowa, Italian forces were defeated by the Africans. To start the war, he used the excuse of an incident in late 1934 on the border between Abyssinia and Somaliland, a country already under Italian control, in which 200 soldiers were killed. What Mussolini really wanted was the mineral riches the region could provide. The Pope blessed the invasion, saying it was "necessary".

One week after the invasion, in spite of the Pope's blessing, fifty-one members of the league of nations voiced their outrage that a member of the League would resort to war. They invoked Article 16 of the League's charter against Italia, which provided for economic sanctions against a member initiating military action. Mussolini ignored the sanctions. He

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turned to his people for support, and they gave it to him. He asked the women to give their gold wedding bands to the Party in return for a steel replica. Two hundred fifty thousand women in Roma and one hundred eighty thousand women in Milano donated their rings. The playwright Luigi Pirandello donated his Nobel Prize medal. The campaign brought in thirty-four thousand kilograms of gold.

In May of the 1936, Abyssinia capitulated and was annexed by Italia. King Vittorio Emanuele III declared himself Emperor of Abyssinia. Instead of continuing with its sanctions, the League of Nations lifted them, arguing that there was no longer any point in enforcing them since Italia was no longer at war. A policy of accommodation of members was established, to keep the League intact.

Emboldened by his victories in battle and in diplomacy, Mussolini began to support the Fascist Francisco Franco in the Spanish Civil War. In September, 1936, Italia sent seventy-three thousand “volunteers” to fight on the side of the Fascists, along with supplying two thousand cannons and two hundred war planes. Hitler’s Germany joined Italia in this, even though both nations had signed a pact not to intervene in the Spanish conflict. One month later, Mussolini and his disciple, Adolf Hitler, agreed to form the Roma-Berlin Axis, and the Axis Powers were born. Franco’s rule in Spain was sanctioned by the Axis Powers in the following month, their first diplomatic statement as allies.

Nationalism in Italia began to take on an importance both on and off the political stage. The *Ministero della Cultura Popolare* was founded in June of 1937, ostensibly to protect the Italian culture from foreign influences. One of first actions was to cleanse the Italian language from foreign words, including the names of performers. Benny Goodman, the jazz clarinetist, became Beniamino Buonoumo. Luigi Fortebraccio was better known as Louis Armstrong. The humiliation of these artists did not last long because the *Ministero* eventually banned jazz altogether, labeling it as non-Italian.

At the end of 1937, Mussolini took his country out of the League of Nations. So much for accommodation.

For many Italians, both inside and outside the country, the *Manifesto della Razza* was the event that signaled Mussolini’s acceptance of

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Hitler's control over events in their country. The "racist laws" were passed into law on July 14th, 1938. These laws prohibited Jews from teaching, excluded them from the military and from being members of the Fascist Party. They could not work in government offices. Their goods began to be expropriated. An anti-Semitic hate campaign was initiated. There were no protests heard from the monarchy nor from the Church.

Four months before the *Manifesto della Razza* was passed in Italia, Germany had annexed Austria. This was Hitler's *Anschluss*, his desire to include Austria in a Greater Germany that was supported by many Germans and Austrians. He was not yet satisfied. He wanted more. To appease Der Führer, Britain and France agreed to allow him to take over a large section of Czechoslovakia, more *Anschluss*. The major allied powers of the Great War did not want to go to war again. Give him some land, they thought. He will be satisfied with these concessions. He was not. By the spring of 1939, he had taken control of all of Czechoslovakia. This was just the beginning.



*Hitler and Mussolini driving through the streets
of Munich after the Anschluss of Austria
1939*

The Pact of Friendship and Alliance between Germany and Italia, signed in May of 1939, ensured that Italia was Germany's economic and military ally, and would not engage, as it did in 1934, on the side of Austria, to spoil Hitler's plans for expansion.

Hitler's soldiers and machines of war invaded Poland on September 1st, 1939. There was no warning, no declaration of war, just a million-

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and-a-half infantrymen and cavalry pushing the much weaker Polish army to retreat and defeat, and incendiary bombs from thousands of German Dornier heavy bombers and Junker dive bombers pulverizing the cities of Katowice, Krakow, Tczeg and Tunel. This was what the Germans called a *Blitzkrieg*, lightning war. Britain and France declared war on Germany two days after the invasion, on September 3rd, so war in Europe for the second time in the first half of the twentieth century was now a reality. The Soviet Red Army invaded Poland on September 17th, carrying out their part of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact that had been signed by Russia and Germany one week before the invasion of Poland by Germany. This treaty, known as the *Treaty of Non-aggression between Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*, divided the continent into two spheres, one to be controlled by each of signatory countries. It took less than four weeks for the Polish government to realize that the situation was hopeless. The government ordered its forces to evacuate into neighboring Romania. Poland never capitulated.

During the first half of 1940, German forces rolled through much of western Europe, capturing Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg, Denmark and Norway, invading France and beginning the aerial bombing of England. The countries they did not attack were either their allies, like Italia and Finland, neutral countries, such as Portugal, The Irish Republic, Sweden and Switzerland, and countries that were taken over by Russia. In late May of 1940, Mussolini declared to Hitler that he would enter the war. A few weeks later, Italia declared war on France and Britain. On June 10th, with the defeat of the French already assured, Italian forces invaded southern France. Mussolini had been promised by his German ally the return of Savoy and Nice, the portion of France Victor Emmanuel ceded to Napoleon III in 1859 in return for Napoleon's help in his war with Austria. Perhaps this time, with Austria as an ally instead of an enemy, Italia would be successful in gaining back lost ground.

On June 22nd, French representatives flew to Roma to negotiate peace with Italia, and two days later an armistice was signed at a villa just outside the capital. The Italians were halted soon after its army of thirty-two divisions crossed the frontier with France. They suffered four thousand casualties in their return to war on the continent, while France lost just over two hundred men. When the terms of the armistice were drawn, Hitler saw no need to keep his promise, given Italia's meager

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contribution to the victory. He refused Mussolini's request to occupy the Rhone Valley, Toulon and Marseille. Italia received a tiny area in southeastern France and a demilitarized area fifty kilometers wide along the Italian border with France.

Italian forces continued on the attack, in British Somaliland, Egypt and Greece, but with little success. The Greeks repelled the Italians and pushed them back into Albania. Mussolini was forced to call Der Führer for assistance. Hitler was not pleased with Il Duce, who had invaded Greece without a word of it to him.

On September 27th 1940, Italia and Germany were joined by Japan in the Tripartite Axis Pact, broadening the war to the Pacific region. During the remainder of 1940 and 1941, Italia expanded its participation in the war, while its forces met increased resistance and defeat. On the 11th of November 1940, the Italian naval fleet was attacked and crippled by British torpedo planes sent from the aircraft carrier *Illustrious* that was anchored off the coast of the Greek island of Cephalonia. The entire fleet was in the port of Taranto, which is situated at the bottom of the Italian boot, where the heel meets the sole. What remained of the fleet after the British attack was moved to Napoli. In February, 1941, Britain completed Operation Compass in Northern Africa, causing high casualties and the mass surrender of the Italian forces. In May, the commander of the Italian forces in East Africa surrendered to the British at Amba Alagi, near Gondar. Things were going no better for Mussolini's army in Greece, where a failed April offensive was saved from complete disaster by Germany's intercession. German forces captured Athens on the 27th of April, but by November, the Greeks were back on the offensive, driving the Italian army across the Kalamus River, and then capturing Koritza.

What was becoming clear to the Mussolini's military leaders as well as to Italia's allies and enemies alike—although not to *Il Duce*—was that Italia entered the war completely unprepared. It had no tanks or antitank guns, lacked the mineral and raw material resources to produce sufficient weapons needed to engage such a heavily equipped enemy like Britain, and it had no defences against the bombing of its northern factories.

On June 14th, 1941, America took an action that caused all Italians, both in Italia and in America, to fear for the worst, that war between the

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two countries was inevitable. All the assets of Italian and German nationals and their governments were frozen. That meant that an Italian living in America who had not become a citizen, could, in principal have all his money and possessions confiscated. On June 16th, all Italian and German consulates in America were order closed and their staffs were told to leave the country by July 10th. Although America's President continued to deliver the message that America was neutral in the conflict that was ravaging the European continent, northern Africa, the Middle East and large parts of Asia, there was little question where the government's sympathies were invested. The country was beginning to take steps that looked increasingly like preparations to enter the war, and the freezing of Axis Power assets and closing of their consulates was a clear sign that a decision had all but been made. American merchant and war ships were already sinking in the Atlantic as a result of torpedoes delivered by German U-boats who accused America of aiding its enemy, Britain.

Following the attack by Japanese planes on the Pearl Harbor on Sunday, December 7th, 1941 and the declaration of war on Japan by America, Italia declared war on America on December 11th, 1941. There was no return. Every young man in America who had been born of Italian parents, and who was between the ages of seventeen and thirty-five, understood what the declaration of war between Italia and America meant to themselves and to their families. They would be shooting at their cousins, maybe even their own brothers. No one could have ever imagined this. The two countries had fought on the same side in the Great War, now they were enemies. Was it just because of one man, as Winston Churchill had said in the Parliament, referring to Mussolini?



The Rosati family sat together over dinner on that Thursday evening and talked.

“Everyone is signing up to fight,” declared Celeste. “I have to do my part! They will draft me eventually anyway.” Celeste was referring to the draft law passed in September a year earlier that called for the

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registration of seventeen million soldiers. President Roosevelt continued to tell the American people that they were not preparing to join the war, but Francesco wasn't sure he believed the man for whom he had cast his first vote.

"We came here to get away from the wars over there," lamented Francesco. "Now we have to send you back to fight against your own flesh and blood? No! Never!"

"They won't send the Italians to Italia unless we volunteer," replied Celeste. "They told us that there will be plenty for us to do to fight the Germans in other places."

"Listen to this talk," said Rosa, beginning to cry. "My son is talking about killing people. Is this why we raised you, to go off to war, to kill or be killed? You have never even shot a bird in your life, and that's the way I wanted it."

Maria thought about her boyfriend, Lorenzo. She had talked to him on Monday, after Pearl Harbor. What was he thinking now that Italia came into the war? He never talked about relatives still living in the town in Provincia di Campania where his family had come from before the end of the last century. It seemed like everyone in his family was in America, either in Scranton or in Brooklyn. Lorenzo and Celeste were the same age, so he would have to go to the war too. He was no more capable of shooting someone than was her brother. She was certain of that. He was an artist.

"Ma, please don't cry. I don't have to shoot anyone, I just have to go into the Army," said Celeste. "And Babbo, we don't have a choice. Even if we did not want to go, they would make us. That's the law."

He wants the uniform, thought Francesco. The uniform is protection for the man who wears it and his family. Once inside of it, he is part of ruling powers. He does what they tell him to do, and, in return, he is protected. Like all of his cousins and friends, he thinks he is doing it for us, so they will leave us alone. Too many of us praised Mussolini, reflected Francesco. Too many said that he was a good supporter of The Church, that he was making Italia a proud country again. Now that he is sending Italian boys to be slaughtered, just like during the last war, like

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in every war, they have changed their tune. Now that he has made that maniac in Germany his partner, they see they were mistaken. My son wants to put on the uniform as much as I wanted to keep it off in the last war, thought Francesco. He really feels like he is part of this country.

“The uniform may make a difference,” said Francesco suddenly, in the middle of his silent thoughts, “but I am saddened to think that my son has to be part of this war that will have no good end. You’ll wait until they call you. I will not hear of you volunteering, and that’s the end of it.”

The same conversation was being held that evening in all the kitchens on The Orchard. Some of the fathers may have told their sons that they would go too, if they were young enough. Some of them may have seen the horrors of war when they were young, fighting the Germans and Austrians. If they were talking about it, they were one of the fortunate ones to survive the battles that killed so many on both sides. Would they truly want to chance fate again and re-live that terror? That is not very likely, but they have to show support for their sons who, whether they want to or not, will be offered on the fields and mountains, in the cities and villages, and under the oceans, to fight an enemy that one day might be an ally again, like Germany and Austria were now to Italia.

Things began to change outside The Orchard after December 11th, slowly at first, like leaking water through a small hole in a dike, then more quickly until the dike burst. Celeste and Jolanda felt the changes first because they were in Scranton every day. They saw the posters and heard the talk of the Irish and English. Maria saw the signs as well, when she went into the post office to buy stamps, and in the pharmacy. Celeste, Maria and Jolanda talked about it together out of hearing distance from their parents.

“What does it mean?” asked Jolanda.

“Just what it says,” replied Celeste. “Speak American. Speak English, not Italian or German or Japanese.”

“What do they think, we’re all spies and telling each other military secrets when we speak Italian?” countered Maria. “We’re all American

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citizens. We were born here,” she continued, pointing to herself and Jolanda. “You have lived here since you were a baby,” she continued, pointing to her brother. “The Italians helped to build this country with their hard work. Now, they want to make us all feel like criminals for speaking our own language!”

“The English and Welsh and Scots happen to be running this country, in case you haven’t noticed, and they make the rules,” declared Celeste. “The Irish aren’t much better off than we are, except they happen to speak the language, even though it is with an accent that gives them away immediately.”

“Can they really put us in jail for talking to each other in Italian?” worried Jolanda.

“Not in jail,” answered Celeste, “but in these internment camps they are building. They’ve started in California. I heard it on the radio.”

“That’s where our cousins are!” exclaimed Maria.

“Oh my God!” cried Jolanda.

“Calm down you two,” demanded Celeste, speaking in a loud whisper. “They’re not touching any American citizens unless they have been sympathizers. I doubt that cousin Luigi and his family are going to be troubled.”

“What shall we say to Babbo and Mamma?” asked Maria.

“Babbo will be angry. He always is when people are being stupid,” replied Celeste, “but we have to tell them for their own good. We don’t want them getting into trouble because they don’t know about the new rules.”

The government began to require Italians living in America who were not citizens, or who belonged to organizations that had supported Mussolini, to carry identity cards that labeled them as “resident aliens”. Six hundred thousand of these cards were distributed. On the west coast, considered to be a war zone by the zealous general in charge of American forces, ten thousand Italian American families were forcibly removed from their homes and moved inland to internment camps during the first

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six months of the war. Italian fishermen on both coasts were prohibited from sailing out of port for security reasons. Italia was now the enemy, and Italian Americans were treated with suspicion. In spite of their treatment—or maybe because they wanted to spite the people responsible for it—one million two hundred thousand Italian Americans served in the American armed services during the war.

Those who could speak English did so. It was the patriotic thing to do, to show support for the country and solidarity with the soldiers who were fighting. Outside of the home, the sons and daughters of the immigrants began to call each other by their English names: Charles and Helen and Mary and Tony and Ernie and Pete and Johnny and Larry and Joe and Pat and Frank and Rose. They had the names since they started school, given to them by their English and Welsh teachers. Now, they would use them when speaking to each other

You're American now; speak American! the signs and billboards urged. Most of them complied in public, but not in private.

“Not in my house!” declared Rosa. “No English will be spoken inside these walls. We're Perugini and always will be.”



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It was the end of July, 1942. Francesco and Rosa were preparing for a visit from the parents of Maria's fiancée and Celeste's fiancée. They were the same people because their children's fiancées were also brother and sister. Celeste and Filomena Sena had met at the *W.T. Grant Store* on Lackawanna Avenue in Scranton. Celeste regularly ate his lunch at the restaurant inside the store, sitting on one of the low, fixed red-upholstered chrome soda fountain stools lining the curving counter. Filomena worked as a sales clerk at *Grant's*, as it was called. She worked either at the candy counter or in the baby department. Eventually, Celeste worked up enough courage to ask Filomena for a date. That was in 1939.

Maria met Filomena's brother, Lorenzo, because of a movie: *Gone With the Wind*. It was December, 1939. Celeste was taking Filomena to see it in Scranton, and he knew that his sister wanted to see it very badly. She had been talking about it for days, which Celeste knew was her way of telling him that she wanted him to take her. She was not dating anyone at the time, and, although she was twenty-three years old, there was no chance that Rosa would allow her daughter to go the movies in Scranton with her girlfriends, or even with her sister or cousins. So Celeste invited her along on his date—after checking first with Filomena, of course. Brother and sister took the street car from Old Forge to South Seventh Street, where the Sena household was located. Lorenzo, who was upstairs in his room painting signs, came down to say hello.

It was a short meeting, but both Maria and Lorenzo knew that they had met their mate. They started dating, slowly for the first two years. In fact, it was going so slowly that Rosa told her daughter that she wasn't sure he was ever going to get serious. And maybe that was for the best, Rosa said to Maria, because how was he ever going to support a family being an artist. Then, in 1942 at Easter, as they sat together in the parlor, alone, Lorenzo brought out a ring and asked Maria to marry him. She said yes, but before she could accept he would have to ask her father.

Lorenzo raised himself up directly and strode out to the kitchen where Francesco, Rosa, Jolanda, Elena and Ernesto and their son Antonio, Tommaso and Livia sat around the table. He approached Francesco.

"Signore Rosati. May I speak with you for a moment outside?" he asked in the best Italian he could muster, trying to dampen his rural

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Neapolitan accent that made conversation with anyone from the provinces north of Campania truly difficult. Francesco was not caught totally by surprise. Rosa had warned him that Lorenzo might be proposing to Maria this weekend. She just had a feeling, she said.

“Signore Rosati,” said Lorenzo, once they were in the back garden, “I would like your permission to marry your daughter.”

“Well, Lorenzo, you seem to be a good man,” answered Francesco. “Do you think you can provide for a family? The place where you work, the Scranton Lace, do they pay you a decent wage?” He knew that they didn’t. Maria had told her mother that the owners were penny-pinchers who used their employees.

“Honestly,” he conceded, “they do not pay that well at all, but I have always had a side business making signs. I will work hard and provide well for Maria and our children, if God blesses us with them.”

What could Francesco say, except “*Si*”? So Maria and Lorenzo were engaged. It was the custom that the families of the couple would meet as soon as it was convenient. It was arranged that the Rosati and Sena families would meet in Scranton. A few weeks after the engagement, Rosa and Francesco, Celeste, Maria and Jolanda were driven by Lorenzo in his car to the Sena household on South Seventh Street in the Bellevue section of Scranton. When they arrived, Michele Sena was standing in front of his shoemaker shop that was on the first floor of the two storey brick building that was their home. They all climbed out of the car and were welcomed on the sidewalk by Michele. Francesco did not remember him at first, but Michele remembered Francesco.

“I never was able to visit you in your grocery store,” he said to Francesco as the two men shook hands.

After a short moment of confusion with this salutation, Francesco smiled broadly. “That was you in the train station when I just got off the boat. We meet again after almost thirty years. I never did open a grocery shop, but I had a bakery business for a short while before I settled into the mines. You have changed since we last met.”

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“Thirty years can do a lot to a man’s appearance,” returned Michele, patting his ample stomach and his graying hair simultaneously. “This is my shop. Our home is behind and above it. That is my house as well,” he said, pointing to the three-storey wooden house to the left, separated by a narrow passageway.

“Pa, this is Signora Rosati,” broke in Lorenzo, feeling that it was time to bring the rest of the party standing on the sidewalk into the conversation. “You have met Maria and, of course, Celeste. This is their sister, Jolanda.”

“Signora Rosati, I am very pleased to meet you, and you as well Jolanda. Maria, you are looking as lovely as ever. Celeste, it is always good to see you. Please come into our home,” said Michele, and he led them into the house through his shop. At the back of the shop was a door that led into a small entrance hall. The main door to the house was from the narrow passageway. They walked up a short set of stairs, through the dining room and into the kitchen, where Michele’s wife, Giovanna, and their daughters, Filomena, Vicenza and her husband Giuseppe Giunta, and Rosa and her husband, Giacomo Pinto, were putting the last touches on dinner.

The view out of the Sena family’s kitchen window was a peculiar one, especially for Rosa, who seldom traveled to Scranton or Wilkes-Barre. The giant, iron cylindrical gas tank support structure loomed large, with the telescoping tank at the half-way mark. To the left of the tank was the furnace where coal was delivered every few minutes in a hopper by a paternoster elevator, sending flames up into the heavens. The Lackawanna River, slithering like a thick black snake between two steep banks, formed the base of the scene. Two sets of railroad tracks high up on the banks on either side of the river, one for the Delaware and Hudson and the other for the Central Railroad of New Jersey, kept humans from venturing too close to the edge and falling in to the polluted, dead river. Through the top of the gas tank trelliswork could be seen the Williams Bakery buildings, the Scranton Locomotive Works and the back sides of the buildings lining Lackawanna Avenue in downtown Scranton.

Now, in July, three months later, the Sena and Rosati families were meeting again, this time on The Orchard. Elena and Ernesto came with their son Antonio, now nine years old. Rosa’s brother Tommaso was

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there to meet his niece's and nephew's new in-laws. Michele and Giovanna Sena came with their son Lorenzo and their daughter Filomena. Maria and Celeste were the main reason for the visit, and they were helping their mother organize the dinner.



Standing: Francesco Rosati, Michele Sena, Ernesto Baldrica with son Antonio, Tommaso Notari, Lorenzo Sena

Sitting and Kneeling: Rosa Rosati, Elena Rosati Baldrica, Jolanda Rosati, Giovanna Sena, Filomena Sena, Maria Rosati

Jolanda was just finishing her nurses training and was taking the opportunity of having visitors to take a short break from her studies. Her boyfriend, a teacher from Dunmore named Pasquale Alloy, was not yet at the stage of being invited to family gatherings like this one. Jolanda had decided to become a nurse when she had her tonsils removed as a young teenager. She was fascinated by the women wearing uniforms working so efficiently to prepare her for her surgery, and then to help her to regain her full strength afterward. She told her brother about her desire to be a nurse, who encouraged her to follow her dream. When she graduated from Old Forge High School in 1938, she applied to the Mercy Hospital School of Nursing and was accepted.

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One of her best friends in the nursing school was Claire DeSantis from Mount Pocono. Clare started dating a young man from Dunmore named Nicola Lettieri, and one of his best friends was Pasquale Alloy. They had grown up together in the same neighborhood, attended same church, Saint Anthony's, gone to the same schools, played on the same football team. Clare and Nicola introduced Pasquale to Jolanda in 1940, and they had been dating since then. Like Lorenzo with Maria, Pasquale, who was an algebra teacher in Dunmore, did not seem to be in any great hurry to get his courtship of Jolanda to the serious stage, and Rosa was not overly encouraging. One of her daughters should marry a local boy, she thought. There were certainly enough of them who were willing. And why a Calabrese, wondered Rosa. Pasquale's father, Giuseppe, came to America from Nicastro with his parents, his younger brother, Francesco, and three sisters, Rosa, Maria and Giovanna. Their name was Alois when they arrived, but little Francesco was given an Irish version without the "M" when he enrolled in school by his teacher, and the rest of the family just followed along. Giuseppe grew up, became a shoemaker, married Teresa, and they had six children, including Pasquale.

This should have been a happy time for the engaged couples and for their families. However, the mood in the country and the state of the world dampened the spirits. Neither Celeste nor Lorenzo had been called to the draft, but they both knew their turns would come soon. America had not yet really entered the fighting zones. Its main contribution to the war up to the middle of 1942 was the sending of large numbers of tanks and airplanes to the Soviet Union. Hitler's forces had invaded the Soviet Union in June, 1941, but the Red Army had held their ground through the winter, and were now pushing the Nazi troops back to Germany. Josef Stalin, the Soviet leader, wanted the Americans and British to open a new front against the Germans in the west, which Roosevelt promised to do, as soon as he could get his army ready. Putting seventeen million men into uniform was a massive undertaking.

As the year progressed, Maria and Lorenzo decided that they would not wait until after the war was over to be married. Part of surviving a war is being determined to return, and having loved ones who would pray each minute for your safe deliverance. It was not a guarantee of survival, but it might make the soldier think before deciding to be a hero. They

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were married on Saturday, January 23rd, 1943, in St. Mary's Church in Old Forge. Maria's sister, Jolanda, was her maid of honor, and Lorenzo's cousin, Frank Sena from Brooklyn, was his best man. Celeste was not at the wedding. He had been inducted in the Army in October and could not get leave. The wedding reception was held in Preno's Restaurant, on the corner of Lackawanna and Adams avenues. After the reception, the couple and the entire wedding party walked the short distance to the Lackawanna Station and boarded a train to Hoboken, and then took the ferry to New York City. They stayed at the Hotel Taft, and saw a movie at Rockefeller Center.

Their honeymoon lasted until Monday morning. Lorenzo had to attend classes at Rutgers University, where he was taking a radio course prior to his induction in the Army. They stayed in Somerville, New Jersey with Lorenzo's father's first cousin, Mickey Sena, his wife Mildred, son Anthony and daughter Phyllis. He went into uniform in June and was shipped first to Austin, Texas. Maria followed. She took the train alone from Scranton to Austin. The train was filled with men in uniform who seemed to understand that she was traveling to be with her husband for the few months they had before he would disappear.

Maria was not at home when her sister, Elena, gave birth to a second son on April 16th, 1943, whom they named Francis. She followed the good Italian tradition of naming the second son after the mother's father, in this case, Francesco, but they now followed the custom of giving their children English names. "Finally," said her father, "we have a Francesco born on this side of the Atlantic."

Maria was also not at home when her brother married Filomena Sena, on January 3rd, 1944. The wedding was in St. Lucy's church, where the Sena family had been founding members. Vicenza was Filomena's maid of honor, and Roy Brey, a recently acquired friend from the army, was Celeste's best man. Celeste stood up for Roy a few months earlier when he married. They had a small reception at Preno's, just like their brother and sister the year before, and also like Lorenzo and Maria, they took the train to Hoboken and the ferry to New York City. Celeste had been granted a seven day leave, so he and his new bride had time for shows and shopping and plenty of sightseeing.

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They went to Radio City Music Hall, the Paramount Theater, the Blue Room (twice, once to listen to the popular Jan Garber Orchestra, a swing band of world renown), and the Roxy Theater. They bought clothes, a new suitcase, and a Caruso record. Celeste wrote down in a small notebook every purchase they made and its cost, from subway fares to tips for waiters, from the number of coins in the collection basket at church on Sunday to theater tickets.

After the seven day leave was over, Celeste returned to New Cumberland and his uniformed wartime job, and Filomena returned to her parent's home on South Seventh Street in Scranton and to her work at the W.T. Grant Store.



On July 24th, 1943, after a ten-hour meeting of the Fascist Grand Council, a motion had been passed by a three-to-one margin requesting that the King take over command of all Italian forces from Mussolini. On the 25th of July, King Vittorio Emanuele III dismissed Mussolini and arrested him. The King asked Marshal Pietro Badoglio to form a new government. The Marshal's first act was to dissolve the Fascist Party and form a government that excluded all Fascists. The war was not over for Italia, but it would be fought now by the Italian American soldiers against the Germans and other Axis powers, not against family members and friends.

In August, the Germans began pouring into Italia to fill the vacuum left by the surrender of large numbers of Italian troops. Agrigento, Palermo, Primosole, Catania, Messina, and finally all of Sicily was captured by Allied troops. On September 3rd, Allied troops landed on mainland Italia. The same day, Marshall Badoglio signed a secret armistice with the Allied Powers, and on September 8th, 1943, General Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces, announced the Italian unconditional surrender. Two days later, German troops occupied Roma and disarmed all the Italian troops in Italia and Greece. On September 12th, the Germans engineered a cleverly planned attack on the hotel where Mussolini was being held prisoner. They spirited him away to the north of Italia, and three days later he proclaimed his return to power.

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On October 1st, Naples was captured by the Allies. Hitler ordered a defense of Italia south of Roma. On October 13th, Italia declared war on Germany. The country was now divided between a liberated Sardegna, Sicilia and Southern Italia, what had been the Kingdom of Piemonte prior to the unification, and an occupied and subjugated north, with a puppet government led by Mussolini, but run by Hitler. Italian Jews began to be sent to concentration camps in November of 1943. From January and through March, 1944, American and French troops fought the Germans for Abbazia di Montecassino, half way between Roma and Napoli, while battles raged as far north as Venezia. On June 4th, the Allies entered Roma. This was the first Axis capital to fall.



After Austin, Lorenzo was transferred to Camp Van Doren in Mississippi, then to Fort Monmouth in New Jersey, and finally to New York before shipping out on board a troop ship on June, 1944. Maria was with him the entire time. During those months in Texas and Mississippi, Maria worked in factories where they sewed clothes for the forces, and kept house in the married men's barracks. They went to church each Sunday in the makeshift Catholic chapels, and they said the rosary together each night before retiring. When they were in New York, Maria stayed with Lorenzo's father's brother, Zio Nicole, and his family on Bedford Avenue in Brooklyn while Lorenzo was bivouacked somewhere near the docks, waiting for orders to sail overseas. He called one night. He could not tell her that he was leaving, but they had decided on a code that would he use to signal her when the time came. That night, he gave her the code. Maria returned to Scranton the next day with Lorenzo's brother, Frank, who drove her home in his brother's car.

For almost two years, Maria and Lorenzo were separated from each other. Their first child, a daughter, was born five months after her father left on the troop ship, when he was already walking on soil that had been re-captured from the German enemy, not so far from where Francesco and Rosa had their first household, where their first two children were born. Maria named their daughter Joann because she liked the name, she said. *Ann* was part of the name in the hope that Saint Ann, Mother of The Blessed Virgin Mary, would keep her husband safe. Maria did not know that her husband was in France in the town of Joan, the Maid of

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Orléans, on the day their daughter was born, November 18, 1944. She did not know that her mother-in-law was named Giovanna, the Italian form of Joann; she knew her only as Mrs. Sena. She did not know that the name *Joann* meant *God is gracious* in its original Hebrew form, *Yohanah*, or that in ancient times it was a name given to children born to late-in-life parents. She just liked the name.

Maria and her husband wrote every day to each other. Sometimes a month would pass and no letters would arrive, and Maria would be sick with worry. Francesco and Rosa could hear her crying herself and her daughter to sleep every night. Then, one day, a package of letters would arrive, and she would spend the next days reading and re-reading every one of them. Francesco had told his daughter to use her letters to tell her husband to surrender, to spend the war in a prison where he was sure not to be killed. He did not know if she obeyed him.



There were no letters from Sigillo during the war years. They stopped completely following the declaration of war between America and Italia. They had arrived sporadically during the previous two years, after the war had started. There was nothing in those letters that mentioned anything about the conditions in the country or whether Francesco's or Rosa's nephews had been called into the army. They always started with thanks to Francesco for the money he had sent, and a list of the repairs that had to be made to his house in the village, where Francesco's brother Enrico now lived with his wife Maria and their children, and to Masseggio, where Francesco's other brothers lived with their families. Then the letters would provide a report on the weather since the last letter, an opinion on whether there would be a good or bad harvest, and a list of deaths and births. There would be greetings from everyone to everyone, and finally a signature. If there were letters that contained anything more, they never arrived at The Orchard. When one of Rosa's letters was returned, stamped "Country at War: Not Deliverable", she stopped writing.

During this period in their lives, Francesco and Rosa, and the men and women of their generation who had come to America from Italia, lived in terror from one day to the next. They feared the worst each day when the mail arrived. It would be a letter telling them that their son had been

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killed or was missing or captured. It would be a letter to their daughter telling her that her husband had been killed or was missing or was captured. It would be a letter from Italia, from a relative or friend or a priest, or worse, from the government, telling them that their village had been bombed, that their families had been wiped out, that there was nothing left for them to ever go back to.

There was no laughter during this time on The Orchard or among the Italians in the village, in the shops and in the mines. There could be an occasional small smile to the shopkeeper who added an extra scoop of flour to the bag, or to the priest who offered to say extra prayers for the son fighting on the other side of the world. But laughter was disrespectful. Someone who heard it could be in mourning for a lost loved one. Someone within earshot could be deep in prayer, trying to convince the Blessed Mother to watch over her son or her husband. There could be no laughter until every one of them was home, until word was received from the home village that everyone was safe, until the two madmen who led their countries into war against their neighbors and America were dead and their machines of destruction destroyed.

Francesco and Rosa, like everyone who remained at home, worked harder, in part to keep their minds occupied, and in part because so many men and women were involved in the war itself, or making things to be used in it, that they had to work harder. The young men were gone from the mine, so the older men, like Francesco and his brothers-in-law and his cousins, had to shoulder a greater burden. The jobs that had been given to the young backs and more supple arms before the war fell now on them. These men were in their mid-fifties, and many of them had been swinging a pickax and pushing a shovel for five of the six decades that they had been alive. The irony was that now there was plenty of work for everyone. Coal was needed at home to fuel the war effort. Their paychecks were no fatter, however—especially because they were now paying Social Security Tax—but they were regular. And there was no one taking a cut out of their pay these days. Six days of work brought them six days of pay.

Even though there were no bombs being dropped on American cities and factories during The War, there was still a need to ration food and other goods that were needed for the military effort. The Office of Price

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Administration looked after the rationing program in America. Coffee, meat, canned goods, sugar and butter were strictly controlled, starting with sugar in May, 1942. Coffee rationing started in November of the same year, with an allowance of one pound for a five-week period. Between 1943 and 1945, one pair of shoes per year was all that was allowed. This, of course, was good news for the shoe repairers, like Maria's father-in-law. If people could not buy new shoes, they would have to repair the shoes they already owned.

No new models of cars came out of the factories in Detroit from 1942 until 1946. The auto industry produced cars, trucks, tanks and other vehicles for the military. For those who owned cars and trucks, both gasoline and tires were strictly rationed. The number of gallons of gasoline allowed was based on the actual miles driven between home and work during the rationing period. This meant that Francesco could continue to drive his truck to the mine each day, and he took as many miners and laborers who could fit on the benches in the back. Tires were repaired until the patches no longer held on the patches.

Some foods, like fresh fruit and vegetables, were not rationed, nor were bread, grains, cereals, fish and poultry. Even so, many of these products were scarce because the farmers who grew them, and the people who delivered and sold them, were busy with the business of war on the other side of the world.

Francesco and Rosa and most of the families on The Orchard had been taking care of putting food on their own tables for many years, including growing their own fruits and vegetables, chickens, rabbits and pigeons, and supplementing these with fish they would catch and deer and rabbits they would hunt. What they could not eat fresh, they preserved. The most important source of food was the pig. They raised it from a piglet, feeding him with the scraps of whatever they had eaten. Every late autumn, since the second year they were in their house on The Orchard, Francesco had slaughtered their pig and made *prosciutto*, *capocollo* and *salsiccia*, just as he had done at Maseggio and in Esch-sur-Alzette. Rosa cleaned the intestines to make the *salsiccia*, and she made the *cotichino*, *sanguinaccio* and the *coppa* herself.

It started early in the morning with the making of a fire in the cinderblock fireplace that Francesco had constructed behind the garage.

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A large cast iron cauldron was placed on a grate over the fire and filled with water. When the water was close to a boil, with the help of a few of his neighbors, Francesco would lead the pig out of his stall by tying a rope around his snout. The pig had to fall on clean grass when the bullet from Francesco's gun was shot into his forehead, between his eyes, and the stall was hardly clean ground. With the pig dead on the grass-covered ground, his throat was slit and Rosa gathered the blood in a bucket to make *sanguinaccio*, a sweet sausage.

The boiling water was then poured over the pig and the skin was scraped to remove all the hair. The skin was then peeled from the pig to make the *cotichinno*, ground skin mixed with ground pork and spices and stuffed in the large intestines. The pig's back legs were then tied together with a strong rope and the carcass was hauled up a tree limb so that it rested along the trunk. Then it was butchered. Francesco was the butcher on The Orchard, a trade he had learned by watching his uncle as a young boy at Masseggio. Rosa always said of her husband that he was a Jack-of-all-trades, but master of none. But she was only joking, keeping her husband humble in the eyes of God. Francesco was a master of many trades, and butchering was one of them.

With his razor sharp butchering knife, cleaver and his saw, he cut up the pig into the pieces that would become food for a year. He cut off the head and gave it to Rosa. She took the head into the kitchen and cleaned it of all blood and loose skin. "You have to clean it good, good," she used to say. Then she placed it in her big pot with simmering water until the meat fell from the bones. The liquid, cooking with the head parts, would become a thick broth. She took out the meat with a strainer, chopped and seasoned it. She strained the broth and then placed the meat and the broth in a deep, square dish she had bought specially to make the *coppa*, or head cheese. They would enjoy this the next day, after it had set.

Francesco continued with his butchering. He cut out the hind haunches for the *prosciutto*, and the shoulders for the *capocollo*. He then slit the pig down the back to peel off the two sides of fat. Lard made from boiling the fat on the pig's back was used for cooking and frying. Then he started on the inside. He carefully removed the fat from around the kidneys to make *strutto*, which was the lard that was best for baking. He sliced out the belly of the pig that was used for making

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pancetta, or bacon.. Most of the meat that was cut away from the bones was ground, mixed with wine, garlic, salt, pepper and fennel seed and made into sausages. Some were kept fresh, but most were dried and hung in the cellar drying room. Nothing was wasted.

Francesco took the rear haunches that had been cut off above the knee and trimmed any remaining skin and fat. These he would make into *prosciutto crudo*, or dried ham. He took the two *prosciutti* to his cellar and put each of them on its own large, square board he had bought just for this step in the *prosciutto* making process. He cleaned the hams with water and a soft brush and patted them dry with a newly washed cloth. Then he coated them with sea salt, lots of sea salt, and carried them up to the attic. His helpers—and he always had two or three of his own or his neighbors' children—carried up two similar boards to the ones holding the hams, along with a few light metal weights.

In the attic, he placed the boards with the hams on a table, and then set the two other boards over each ham, placing the metal weights on top of the board balanced over each ham. This was to squeeze out any of the last blood remaining in the flesh. The weights should not be too heavy, but heavy enough to cause some compression of the meat to release the moisture. Rosa had told Francesco that the Latin word for *prosciutto crudo* meant 'dried having been very sucked out'. He didn't think that Latin ever made sense, but this described what a *prosciutto crudo* actually was, a ham that had all the liquid sucked out by the salt and the air. Each day for the next two or so months, Francesco would go up to the attic to wipe up the blood that had oozed out of the hams and to pack on new salt. This stage was the most important step. If the meat got warm, the curing process would not start and the *prosciutto* would spoil. Even worse, a fly could bore into the meat and make a maggot nest. The hams had to be in a cool, dry place, and the attic during the winter months was perfect.

When the curing process was finished, the drying process began. Before the first warm day of spring, Francesco would take the hams down to the cellar. He boiled a few gallons of his precious wine and used it to wash off the salt, making sure that all salt was removed. He then coated the hams with coarsely ground pepper, tied a heavy string around the shank, and hung them in his drying room. They would remain

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here untouched for a year, kept company by the *salsiccia*, *capocollo* and other foods that Rosa and Francesco had prepared.



On June 18th, 1944, the American Eighth Army took Assisi, and two days later they freed Perugia. Then, after the Normandy Invasion on June 6th, the allies began to redeploy their most experienced divisions in the drive through northern Europe toward Berlin. The Italian campaign took on the role of a secondary theater after it had been the main event for a good part of two years. The principal resistance from German troops was in the center of the country, north of Roma and south of Bologna, along what was called the 'Gothic Line'. Allied armies drove the Germans from one city after another at the fringes of their main defenses: Siena; Livorna; Pisa. In September, the American Eighth Army crossed the Rubicon in northeastern Italia, and in December, the British army took Ravenna, cutting the rail link to Bologna. The Germans would not relinquish ground without first engaging the Allies in heavy battle. The end was in sight for the German presence in Italia, for Germany and its fanatical leader. But Hitler would not release his soldiers from their pledge to die. And they died, taking as many American, British, French, Polish and Italian soldiers and *partigiani* as they could along with them.

In April of the following year, one group of Italian *partigiani* captured Genoa, and another staged a revolt in Milano. On April 27th, 1945, the *partigiani* captured Mussolini, along with his mistress, Clara Petacci, and twelve of his cabinet ministers. They were being transported by a German convoy from Milano, on their way to Switzerland, retreating from Milano which was about to be taken by the Allied forces. The convoy was stopped by the *partigiani* near the village of Dongo, on the northwestern shore of Lago di Como. Mussolini was wearing a German private's coat over his own uniform, and was huddled in the back of a truck, attempting to escape detection. The *partigiani* took their prisoners to the tiny village of Giulino di Mezzegra. The next day, Mussolini and all the prisoners were executed before a firing squad. The following day, April 29th, the fourteen bodies were driven in a truck to Milano, to the Piazza Loreto, and hung upside down on meat hooks strung between lamp posts. This was the square where one year earlier fifteen *partigiani*

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had been executed for alleged crimes against the state controlled by Mussolini with his German ally.

On this same day, the German commanders in Italia signed surrender terms at the Palatso Royale in Caserta, but their soldiers continued fighting, to the end, until they were told that their leader, Der Führer, had abandoned them. On April 30th, as the Battle for Berlin raged, Hitler shot his mistress and new bride, Eva Braun, then swallowed poison before shooting himself in the mouth. Following his orders, his aides burned their bodies in the bunker where they had died. On May 2nd, 1945, at noon, after the fall of Berlin to the Allies, the German Army in Italia acknowledged the Caserta agreement, and surrender to the Allies. Soviet soldiers entering Berlin on the same day found Hitler's charred remains. On May 7th, what remained of the country of Germany surrendered unconditionally to the Allies. Officially, the war in Europe was now over, but The War continued in the Pacific.



The men sat on Francesco's porch on a Sunday afternoon in the summer of 1945. There had been a heavy rain during the early morning, and the hot afternoon sun burning the water out of the earth and sizzling it on the concrete sidewalks and road pavement made the air feel like a steam bath. There was no wind. Smoke from the men's cigars hung on the porch ceiling.

"What's going to happen to the country after the Americans and the others leave?" asked Pietro Alimenti, rhetorically.

"What should happen," answered Antonio Chiavarini, "is that they round up all of the Fascists and Nazis, shoot them and hang them upside down like they did with Mussolini and his gang. Then, they should do the same with the King and his whole family. Once they're out of the way, the Socialists can build a government and run the country the way it should be run."

"That won't happen," responded Dominic Cossantini. "The Americans and the British are more afraid today of the Communists than they were of the Fascists and the Nazis. Hitler gave Henry Ford a medal for praising his work to wipe out Communism, and Churchill called Mussolini a hero for murdering Socialist agitators. Do you think they're

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going to let a country they have just conquered go over to their sworn enemy?”

“They didn’t conquer Italia; they liberated it!” interjected Tommaso Notari.

Quiet laughter broke out—the war was still going on—not heavy, knee-slapping laughter, but the quiet laughter of a group who understood that Tommaso’s comment was meant to be ironic, a joke among friends.

“There will be a bill to pay by *Il Papa*,” added Valentino Piccotti, with indignation in his voice. “The Church did well under *Il Duce*. He got his own country, and laws making Catholicism the official religion of Italia. He’s not going to give up those privileges so easily. The Communists would take them all away in the wink of an eye.”

“No, I don’t see any chance of the Reds taking over any time soon,” said Tommaso Notari with finality, just before a low rumble of thunder emerged from out of the east. The sky flashed bright white as a bolt of lightning stretched from the slag pile behind the houses across the street up to the heavens.

“I’m not sure if that was a sign that He was agreeing or disagreeing with you, Tommaso,” commented Chiavarini.



The War ended on August 15th, 1945 when Japan capitulated. The country was all but beaten in June, and the emperor wanted an end to the killing. The Japan’s Generals would not consider anything other than a fight to the death. There were still two million Japanese men in uniform. They would defend the island until the last man fell. President Truman, who was completing the last term of President Roosevelt’s presidency following Roosevelt’s untimely death at the young age of sixty-three on April 12th, 1945, wanted a quick end to the war. He would not consider an invasion of Japan until all other alternatives were exhausted. The main alternative was the atomic bomb, a weapon developed with the help of Enrico Fermi, an Italian physicist who, just after winning the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1938, escaped from Fascist Italia and settled in America.

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The first bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on the 6th of August, 1945. One hundred twenty-nine thousand people died immediately. The second bomb was dropped on the 9th of August. Seventy thousand people died immediately. The Japanese generals realized that there was no defense against such a weapon. They surrendered on August 15th.



The first letter arrived from Sigillo at the end of 1945. It was written by Don Antonio, who was still the pastor of Sant'Andrea. Rosa had sent many letters by then. She started writing as soon as she learned that mail was getting through. That was news she received from the Italian radio program on station WPTS, broadcast from Pittston. The station was owned by Rosa and Angelo Fiorani from Scranton. Rosa's maiden name was Florey. Her parents owned a grocery store in Hyde Park in Scranton, one of the stores that did not owe Francesco money for bread that they did not pay for. The Floreys were a good family, and helped the new arrivals from Italia with food. One of their sons, Salvatore, became a priest and was now at St. Lucy's parish. His Godfather was Michele Sena.

*Chiesa Sant'Andrea, Sigillo
24 October 1945*

My Dearest Friends in Christ,

God has kept us all safe during this dreadful period. Our village was spared from both Allied and Axis bombing. Our homes and churches were not desecrated by the presence of soldiers. Our boys who were forced to take part in the war did their duty. Some did not return home, may God rest their souls. Your nephews all came back safely, thanks to God and your prayers.

I can also tell you that everyone in your families who were alive before the war began are still alive, except for some of the older members. Francesco, the sisters of your mother and their husbands all passed away during these past four years. Rosa, your father's last remaining sister passed away as well. May God have mercy on their souls.

It will now be necessary to heal the wounds caused by this great tragedy. We must rebuild Italia. Your prayers and your good will be

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needed in abundance. In God's name, I ask you to do what you can to help your families and help The Church to continue to do God's work.

Yours in Christ.

Don Antonio

Rosa read the letter now for her brother Tommaso and her niece Livia as they sat at the table in her kitchen after finishing Sunday dinner a few weeks before Christmas. Francesco, sat at his usual place at the head of the table, and Rosa sat across from him at the other end of the table. Livia and Tommaso sat on the side of the table facing the wall. Jolanda and Maria sat against the wall with little Joann in a high chair between them. Celeste and Filomena were having Sunday dinner in Scranton, as had become their custom. Lorenzo was not yet discharged from the army, and would be spending Christmas in Austria.

This room, this house and The Orchard had been a safe haven for the Rosati and Notari families for almost a quarter of a century. During that time, their ancestral homes had been in a part of the world that was hell on earth.

"It must have been awful for our relatives in Sigillo during the war," said Jolanda.

"It was awful all the time over there, even before the war," offered Livia. "Why do you think we are all over here? They should have all left when they had the chance. I never understood why they stayed, especially my mother."

"How do you think that God chose who would leave and who would stay?" said Rosa, not as a question for which she expected an answer.

"Oh, *la filia mia*," replied Tommaso. "You and your God. There is no God. How can you believe otherwise with everything that has been happening just in our lifetimes?"

"Don't say that, Zio! You know you don't mean that," cried Maria, blessing herself and making the sign of the cross over Joann to make sure

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that this irreverency was not heard beyond the kitchen's walls and did not damn them all to hell.

"Well if there is a God," mused Tommaso, "he has been busy doing other things and not paying any attention to what's been going on down here. Maybe he's learned from the mistakes he made with us and is trying to build a place where people don't think only about how to kill each other and take things away from one another."

"I hope my daughter never has to go through all of this," sighed Maria, reaching over to Joann and giving her little hand a gentle squeeze.

"I'll pray every day that none of my grandchildren ever has to go through what we have endured," declared Rosa.

"Pray hard, my wife," said Francesco. "Pray hard."

Francesco did not pray in church, but he did pray. He went to church only for weddings, funerals and baptisms. He did not deny God's existence like his brother-in-law, Tommaso, and some of the other men on The Orchard. He wasn't sure what God was, what He looked like, whether he was a man or a woman, or whether God looked like anything he would recognize. Nevertheless, there must be a God, he had concluded, and God must have some idea about where we are all going and how we will get there.

Francesco prayed directly to God. He asked for help, and he thanked God for hearing his prayers, whether the help he requested was received or denied. He asked for simple things. *Please God, let it rain today so that the vegetables will grow;* or *Please God, if you want it to rain today, make it start late in the afternoon when we are on our way home from our picnic.* Sometimes he prayed for big things. *Please God, bring my wife and children to me safely from across the ocean;* or *Please God, bring my granddaughter's father home from The War.*

During all of his now fifty-nine years, Francesco had put his trust in God to protect him and his family, and God had always done so. He had kept them away from trouble and clean from serious sins. God had tested them all, especially Francesco with his persecution at the hands of Signore Lucca, but they had all passed through these trials without dishonouring themselves or their family. Soon, a new generation would begin their journeys through life, the sons and daughters of his and Rosa's children. He was sure that the world in which they would grow

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up would be different from the one of his own childhood, and from the one his children had experienced. This war had shown how cruel man could be, and this cruelty would not just evaporate with the signing of a few pieces of paper.

It was not only Rosa who would have to pray hard for their grandchildren. So would he.



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Lives Forever Remembered

AFTER THE WAR, EVERYONE just wanted everything to get back to normal, the way things were before The War. Of course, they did not want The Depression or Mussolini or Hitler or any of the bad things. They wanted peace. What was so difficult with having peace, everyone wondered. As the men and women returned from The War, those who had gone and those who had been left at home tried to pick up their lives where they left them off. This was easier for some than for others. The trauma of being shot at for several years, the physical and mental handicaps that followed the soldiers from the battlefields in Europe, Africa and Asia back into the homes in almost every city and village in the world, the constant fear that news would arrive saying that their loved one would not be coming home or would arrive as a broken set of pieces, proved often to be very, very difficult. For Francesco's and Rosa's family, it seemed to go smoothly.

Celeste had been discharged in February, 1945, because of a severe eye disorder, called Kerataconis. He had spent the war in New Cumberland, Pennsylvania, serving as secretary to the Captain of the Supply Unit. He returned to his job at the Department of Public Assistance and started classes again at the University of Scranton. He and Filomena moved into the family home on The Orchard, taking over the other side of the house once the boarders, the Boriosi family, had left. As the only son, he would inherit the house when Francesco and Rosa passed away, so it was only right that he lived there and helped with the upkeep, he had said to Filomena. She was not so very pleased with the idea of living so close to her in-laws, but she could not deny that there were many advantages.

Lorenzo returned home in January, 1946, after spending over twenty-eight months in uniform, and the last six with the army of occupation in Austria. He arrived at The Orchard carrying a large Teddy Bear for his fourteen-month-old daughter whom he would be seeing for the first time. Maria, Lorenzo and their daughter Joann moved into a small house on

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South Seventh Street in Scranton, across and down the block from Lorenzo's family's home. Maria, like her sister-in-law, was also not delighted with the prospect of living within eye-sight of her mother- and father-in-law, and her sister-in-law, Vicenza. She would have preferred to trade places with her brother and live on The Orchard, but that was not an option. Lorenzo's father had bought the house for his son. How could he turn it down, he said to Maria. Lorenzo returned to his job at the Scranton Lace Company, and, like Celeste, started taking night courses at the University of Scranton.

Jolanda married Pasquale Alloy on April 22nd, 1946 in St. Mary's Church in Old Forge. Helen Manzi, a friend from nursing school, was Jolanda's maid of honor, and Pasquale's brother Francesco was his best man. The reception was held in a restaurant in South Scranton, a short distance from the Lackawanna Train Station. Preno's had become so popular as a place for wedding receptions that it had to be booked almost a year in advance. Pasquale and Jolanda were not willing to wait any longer. They took the train on their honeymoon as well, but they went to Washington, D.C., not New York. There were too many relatives, including his brother and two married sisters, living in New York, and the newlyweds wanted some peace and quiet on the start of their first day together, not a train full of party-goers.

When they returned, they walked into their new home, six feet away from Pasquale's family home on Franklin Street in Dunmore. In the family home Jolanda had her mother-in-law, Teresa, and her sister-in-law, Filomena, living on the first floor, and her brother-in-law, Antonio, and his wife, Olga, living on the second floor. All her other neighbors had lived there all of their lives and had grown up with her husband. She did have one of her best friends, Claire Lettieri, living down the street. That was consolation.

There were many more marriages. Lillian Volpi married Albert Vitelli in February, 1945; Alda Volpi married Giordano Migliosi in August, 1946; and her twin sister, Anna, married John Aliciene in November 1946. Their brother, Orlando, married Connie Mulara in Rosa and Claudio Bastianelli's Alfio married Edna Mae Brown in March, 1944 and his sister Edith married John Stanley Sott in September of the same year.

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The children began arriving as well. Albert Vitelli and Theresa Ann Sot were both born in October, 1945. Claude Bastianelli was born in August, 1946. The big year was 1947 with James Alloy born in March, Michael Sena born in July, Rosemarie Sot born in September and Kenneth Aliciene born in December. Patricia Ann Sot came along in October, 1948; David Vitelli was born in February, 1949; Maureen Migliosi arrived in November, 1950. In 1951 came Joanne Aliciene and Ann Marie Alloy; Carol Ann Rosati was born in March, 1952, and Rosemary Alloy in June of that same year. Then came Angela Vitelli, John Stanley Sot, Jr. and Thomas Alloy in 1955, and Linda Migliosi and Debbie Volpi in 1956. That was just the Rosati side of the family, and just Francesco's own children and his sisters' children.

Giuliano, Rosolino and Livia Notari were as much a part of the family as Rosa's and Francesco's own son and daughters. Giuliano married his lifelong sweetheart, Florence Scarnato, in May of 1944. Florence died of heart failure only a few years later, in 1949, at the miserably young age of twenty-five. Giuliano remarried the following year to Evelyn Ann Passeri. Julie Ann was their first child, born in 1953. David Russell came next in 1955, and Roselyn Marie arrived in 1960. Rosolino married Marie Simonetti. They had a child, born in 1949, whom they named Thomas. Rosolino and Marie separated shortly after Thomas was born, and then they divorced. Marie was not well, and could not care for their son. Rosolino decided to move to California with his young son. Giuliano and Evelyn followed him to the west soon afterward. Livia did not marry. She and her father lived in a house close to the center of Old Forge, from where Tommaso could walk and sit with the other men at the bus station, and from where Livia could walk to The Duchess, where she continued to work. On The Orchard, Richard was born on May 7, 1947 to Pietro and Margareta Notari.

The children went to school as Americans, not as the sons and daughters of Italian immigrants. They spoke English at home. They spoke English with their friends and at school. Those who lived close by their grandparents spoke Italian with them, but they weren't encouraged to become fluent. *You're American. Speak American!*



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Returning to Sigillo was no longer discussed, but Rosa always kept the thought alive. She did so throughout the years of Mussolini's dictatorship, through the years when Italia was at war with America, and during the time that the country was divided into two, one half controlled by the Allied forces and the other half controlled by Hitler and his puppet. Then, in June of 1946, something happened to make her finally decide that they would never go back. Rosa was a royalist. She had named her daughters after the queen and two of the princesses. When she had to choose sides between the government or the Church and the royal family, she chose the royal family. She saw the King as the only unifying influence in a war-torn and divided country. If she had been living in Sigillo in 1946, she would have been in a minority.

Francesco and Rosa sat in their kitchen one evening in June, 1946, and listened to their radio. The only station that was ever on in their home was WPTS from Pittston. Angelo Fiorani was interviewing a Jesuit professor from the *Università Ignaziana*. He had come to the University of Scranton to teach a course in the politics of theology when war was declared between America and Italia. He had not been able to return, and continued teaching. He was now preparing to finally leave and make the journey back home to Roma.

"*Professore dottore*, we know that the situation in Italia is very complicated, but could you try to explain to us what has been happening during the past several weeks," asked Angelo Fiorani.

"Yes, it is a political mess," replied the Jesuit, "but that is nothing new for Italia. There are three groups trying to gain control of the country after the Americans, British and French leave. The Communists have gotten strong, especially in the north, and attained a moral high ground as the main opponents of the Fascists during their over two decades of power. The Christian Democrats are the largest political party. They have the support of The Church and the Allies. Then there are the industrialists of the north, and they have been supporters of both the royal family and the military. There are many people in Italia who, after The War, have pushed to have all those who collaborated with Mussolini prosecuted. Many believe that the King helped Mussolini come to power, and supported him while he was there. They forced the provisional government to organize a special vote by all the citizens of voting age—including women for the first time—called a referendum, to

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decide whether to keep the monarchy, like in many countries on the continent, such as Belgium, Denmark and England, or to declare Italia a republic, like France and America.”

“You said that women were allowed to vote for the first time in Italian history,” commented Fiorani.

“This was an important step toward a full democracy, to make sure that everyone was allowed to vote,” replied the Jesuit. “There was opposition, of course, but the will of the people was not going to be denied this victory.”

“We need to remind our listeners that Italia has had a single royal family for only eighty-five years,” interjected Fiorani, “and has been a unified country for only seventy-five.”

“Yes, before that there were many small kingdoms with the central part of the country under the direct control of The Church. The Pope was both the head of state for what were called the Papal States.”

“What has been the sequence of events leading up to the referendum, and what was the result?” asked Firoani.

“Problems for King Vittorio Emanuele III began when Mussolini came to power. Many believed that he invited Mussolini to take over the government when he did not move the Italian army to stop Mussolini’s men’s march on Roma. When he did not raise his voice against the racial laws in 1938, he lost the support of many, including the military, who had thought that it was possible for a King to be a part of a future democracy. His fleeing from Roma in 1943 when the Allies were about to take control of the city gave the impression that he feared the Allies believed he was a Mussolini sympathizer, even though he fled to Bari which was already under control of the Allied forces. Vittorio Emanuele turned over most of his powers to his son, Crown Prince Umberto II, in April 1943, but kept the royal title. Vittorio Emanuele abdicated on May 9th, 1946, perhaps to try to influence the voters to keep the monarchy. He did not succeed.

“On June 2nd, in a national referendum, fifty-four percent of the Italian people voted to abolish the monarchy in favor of a republic, with the north voting overwhelmingly for a republic, and the south voting in favor of the monarch. On June 13th, the monarchy of the *Casa Savoia* was

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abolished. Then, two days ago, on June 18th, Italia was officially declared a republic.”

Rosa got up and turned off the radio. She had heard all that she wanted to hear about the fall of the Italian royal family.

The fall of the King was the main topic of discussion on Francesco’s porch that Sunday.

“*Il Papa* is getting the last laugh,” said Pietro Alimenti.

Francesco nodded and smiled, remembering the story that Saverio Nicoletti told them during their tour of Roma.

“What do you mean?” asked Cavarinni.

“This King’s father had *Il Papa* thrown out of the palace so that he and his family could move in,” answered Pietro. “They’ve been living there since Roma became part of the rest of Italia, in 1870. Now, the King is being thrown out himself. *Il Papa* eventually got to rule over Vatican City, thanks to *Il Duce*, but this King’s going to have a hard time finding another place to live.”

“What a lousy idea to have a king in the first place,” mused Antonio Peo, who grew up in Roma. “They were window dressing. They just cost a lot of money and did no good for anyone.”

Francesco knew that Rosa would not agree with that conclusion, but he had no desire to add a voice in favor of the now homeless aristocrats. Besides, he agreed with his neighbor. Good riddance.



Life in Sigillo, in Umbria, in Italia, and on the entire continent of Europe would not be normal for many years. While the Americans returning home from The War in Europe went back to the fields and the factories, their brothers and cousins and friends on the other side of the Atlantic first had to rebuild the places where they lived and worked. Italia was required to pay \$360,000,000 in war reparations, divided equally among Greece, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. Added on to this, Italia paid the western European countries, principally France, in machinery and factory equipment, as well as in coal. Its prisoners of war in Britain and France provided forced labor in those countries to help with the rebuilding effort. America did not seem to believe that Italia

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had anything of value that it wanted or needed. It satisfied itself with taking patents and design documents from Germany, as well as seizing all German assets in America. No one questioned the fairness of these reparations; these countries had subjected the world to horrors never before experienced in the history of the world. But most of the men—and they were mostly men—who had brought about the misery were dead. It was the poor who were left to bear the burden of their sins.

The Republican Constitution was approved and came into force on the 1st of January, 1948. The Constitution called for the establishment of a bicameral *Parlamento* comprised of the *Camera dei Deputati* and the *Senato della Repubblica*. A separate judiciary was created. The judicial system is based on Roman law modified by the Napoleonic Code. The *Corte Costituzionale*, the Constitutional Court of Italia, rules on the conformity of laws with the Italian Constitution. The Constitution also called for the formation of an executive branch with a cabinet, the *Consiglio dei Ministri*, headed by the *Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri*, referred to as the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister is nominated by the *Presidente della Repubblica*, the President of the Italian Republic, who himself is elected for a seven-year term.

Rebuilding Italia did not begin in earnest until 1949, when the country became an ally of America by joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. It was then that the country began to receive aid through the Marshall Plan. The Marshall Plan, or the European Recovery Program as it was officially called, was a project instituted at the Paris Economic Conference in July, 1947, to foster economic recovery in certain European countries after World War II. It was the United States Secretary of State, George C. Marshall, who had proposed that all European countries—enemies, allies and neutrals—decide what level of economic aid they needed to restore their economies so that material and financial aid from the United States could be given on a comprehensive basis.

In April, 1948, President Truman signed the act establishing the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA) to administer the program. In the words of the act establishing the ECA, it was created to promote European production, to bolster European currency, and to facilitate international trade. However, there was another purpose for the aid that was being given by America. It was to contain the growing influence of

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the Soviet Union through the national Communist parties that were growing in strength and influence in many corners of Europe, especially in Czechoslovakia, France, and Italia.

Rosa's brother Antonio was still in Sigillo. Francesco's brothers Enrico, Luigi and Umberto and his sister Consiglia were also there, back home. They had survived The War. Their children had survived The War. When Francesco and Rosa had been in Sigillo before The War, they saw that their families were comfortable, not rich by any means, but no longer destitute as they had been in the early part of the century. Now, they would all have to start over again.

While everyone would need all the energy they could muster, The War had made the older generation tired. Tired of thinking and worrying about what was happening thousands of miles away. The family members in America and the family members in Italia had been on different sides of the conflict, at least at the beginning, until the Allies took control of the southern half of the country. This simple fact was not easy to forget. If the men who gathered on Francesco's porch tried to forget, their government would remind them. Italians who had stayed home in Italia and Italians who had left home for America had been combatants. For those two years before the legal government of Italia capitulated—most Italians felt that they had been liberated from the Fascists and the Nazis, and their soldiers began to fight with the Allies to drive the Nazis and Mussolini's puppet government out of the remainder of the country—no one on either side of the ocean knew who in their families was fighting against whom.

They would exchange letters after The War, but there was no mention of what anyone in the families did during that dark period of time. It was easier not to say anything, to try and lock the whole mess in a room in the cellar. The distance between Old Forge and Sigillo grew during The War, and it did not get any closer afterward. Sigillo and Masseggio and all those who were there now became part of a long, lost past.

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Francesco's brother Enrico Rosati and his wife Maria

Still, there was the house in the village that Enrico Rosati, his wife Maria and their family had lived in since before The War. This was Francesco's house, bought first for his parents, then for the time when he and Rosa would return. Among the other things that went unsaid was what would happen to the house if they did not return.



A new decade had begun. America was back at war, this time on the other side of the world again, in Korea. No one knew why, but in July, 1950, American soldiers were back in battle. Supposedly, other countries were fighting alongside the Americans, but it was mostly soldiers from the southern part of Korea and the Americans fighting against soldiers from the northern part of the country. The north was supported by America's World War II ally, the Soviet Union. After the first battle involving American soldiers, the newspapers reported that the U.S. Army's 24th Infantry Division had been defeated with heavy losses. An American General was taken prisoner. When Francesco heard this he thought about his grandson, Antonio. He was almost old enough to be drafted into this war.

This new decade brought other changes. It was time he stopped working in the mines, Francesco's son had told him. Rosa had been telling him the same thing for thirty-five years. She worried every day he left for work. When he was late, usually because he had stopped to have a shot and a beer in the tavern on Main Street in Pittston, she worried even more. When the sirens sounded announcing that there had been an

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accident in one of the mine shafts close by, she was sure that all the mines had caved in and her husband was trapped. Accidents had happened in other mines, like the big one in the Sullivan Trail Coal Company West Pittston Shaft in August, 1936, when five men were killed, or the one in the Schooley Mine in Exeter when ten men met their death. They were both explosions, either caused by a spark meeting the lethal methane gas that had leaked out of a cavity in the coal seam, or by the spontaneous combustion of coal dust. The infernal coal dust found many ways to kill those who ventured into the mines. But Francesco had never been in the wrong place at the wrong time. He had survived three-and-a-half decades in the Pennsylvania mines, four years in the mines in Esch-sur-Alzette, and two years in Sardegna. Now, it was time he stopped working, they said.

Francesco was not at all sure he wanted to stop being a miner. It was the only way he knew how to make a steady living, after his career as a storekeeper was cut short by the invasion of Luxembourg by the German Kaiser's troops. He had tried to be a fruit grocer, driving his truck to New Jersey to pick peaches with the idea of selling them on The Orchard. By the time he gave away bushels to his son and daughters, to his and Rosa's relatives and to the neighbors, and after Rosa had taken what she wanted to can, there wasn't much left to sell. He had tried to be a mushroom farmer. He built the growing shelves in a section of the garage, boarded up the windows to block out all light, mixed the chicken manure with sand on trays, and carefully placed the mushroom culture he had gotten from one of his miner friends who had a small mushroom growing business himself. The white beauties grew prodigiously, but what he could charge for them—what his conscience would allow him to charge—didn't cover the cost of the sand, not to mention his time. No, he was a miner.

Now he was going to be a retired miner. Celeste had told him that he would get a pension from the Pennsylvania Coal Company, and a Social Security check from the government. Francesco did not understand how he could get a pay check if he did not work, but this was how it worked now, since Roosevelt was President. Truman had done a good job since he took over after Roosevelt's death, thought Francesco, once he stopped ordering big bombs to be dropped. Now there was talk of the general from The War, Eisenhower, running for President. He was a Republican. "He was a good general, but you still can't trust a Republican,"

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Chiavarini had said. Francesco had signed all the papers he had gotten from his son and from the mine supervisor. He had delivered all the papers to the main office in Pittston, and he agreed on the day when he would work his last shift. It was the day before he turned sixty-five, June 7th, 1951.

Francesco would like to have just walked out of the shaft and gotten into his car on his last day of work and never looked back. He could not do that. He had a group of laborers who worked with him, who got their pay from him. He felt obligated to turn them over to another miner, someone who wanted to expand his crew. He talked to them a few weeks before his last day and told them what he was doing. He got them all placed with one or two other miners, and gave them their last share of his pay.

When the last day came, his laborers could not let him just leave without a going-away party. He washed up at the mine and drove his riders to the tavern in Pittston where he usually stopped on Saturdays on his way home from work, and his men found their own way there. There were more than a few shots of whiskey washed down with the local beer. It was not a sober husband who zigzagged down the road to his house in the 1949 Chevrolet Deluxe Fastback that he had bought earlier in the year.



Francesco's 1949 Chevrolet Deluxe Fastback was light brown.

He pulled into his driveway, guided by the Old Forge police, who were used to serving as tug boats for the miners who felt the need to wash out the coal dust with an overdose of alcohol on occasion. Rosa

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was waiting for him and greeted him with an abundance of choice words. She thanked the police, who wished her well with her over indulged husband. He could not hear any of the talk. She pushed him upstairs, undressed him, placed him on the toilet so that he could flush himself out, and then stuffed him in bed with his head propped up so that he did not choke himself to death during the night with his own vomit. He was asleep before his head touched the pillow, and Rosa lay awake late into the night wondering when her husband was finally going to learn that spirits were not his friend.

The next day, his birthday, he awoke as usual at five a.m. and started to get out of bed when Rosa asked, “Where are you going? You don’t have to go to work today. Besides, it’s your birthday. *Bon compleanno*, Checco.”

“I can’t sleep,” he answered. His head was throbbing as if a jackhammer was working its way through his skull. “Go back to bed. I’ll fix my own breakfast.”

“When was the last time I let you loose in my kitchen?” quipped Rosa. “Just because you’re retired doesn’t mean you have learned how to use my stove. I’ll make your breakfast the same way I’ve done since we got married.”

They both dressed and padded downstairs in their slippers, Francesco holding onto the wall and the railing to keep his balance. Rosa put on the coffee and warmed milk for the both of them. She sliced the bread she had made fresh the day before and brought out the sausages and eggs.

“How do you feel after your party last night” asked Rosa, sarcastically.

“Like I usually feel after I have had a few too many whiskies,” responded Francesco glumly. “Like the manure I scrape out of the pigeon coop.”

“I suppose you paid for all the drinks as well, my big spender husband,” she said. “It’s lucky that the police didn’t take you into the station instead of escorting you home. They’re too kind to you.”

He ignored her remarks. He had nothing to say in his defense. The Old Forge police were lurking in their usual location just over the Duryea line, waiting to pounce on the first driver who looked like he was driving

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under the influence of too many Luzerne County shots-and-beers. Francesco was one of their regular catches. Usually, he got off with a light fine. Last evening, because it was his birthday and his last day of work, his riders had argued, he should be spared the fine. The police accommodated.

“This is my first day when I’m not going to work and I don’t know what to do,” said Francesco, as he dipped his toast in the large bowl of coffee, milk and egg. “I don’t know how we will get by on the small amount of money I’ll be getting from the pension and from the government.”

“Don’t worry. We’ll manage,” replied Rosa, confidently. “Haven’t we always managed?”

He shook his head. “I still need to find work. You won’t want me around the house all the time, and I’m not planning to spend my days sitting on the bench outside the gas station in Old Forge with your brother.”

“Your daughters can find plenty for you to do,” suggested Rosa.

“What do you mean? Are they starting a business together?”

“Maria and Lorenzo have plans to make a real bathroom and divide up the second floor into two bedrooms for the children. Lorenzo needs a workshop in the basement, and they will build in the porch above to have an extra room. Jolanda and Pasquale will build out an addition on the back of the house so they can rent out the second floor. There’s enough work with those two houses to keep you busy for a couple of years.”

“How long have you and the girls been planning this?”

“Since we knew you were going to retire.”

“I suppose I should be thankful that I have women in my life who are so concerned for my health that they want to keep me in good form,” said Francesco with a grin, “but that doesn’t help me today.”

“Today you’re going fishing to catch our supper. If you bring home some fish, I’ll bake you a birthday cake.”

“Chocolate with the white icing?”

“Maybe. We’ll see how many fish you catch.”

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Francesco's retirement came just before the birth of two new granddaughters, one to Jolanda and Pasquale, and the other to Celeste and Filomena. Jolanda and Pasquale named their daughter Rosemary. With this name, Jolanda honored both her mother Rosa and her sister Maria. Celeste and Filomena had agreed that if they had a boy, he would be named Celeste, and if it was a girl, she would be named Celestine. A girl was born to them on March 4th, 1952. Celeste entered the room where Filomena was coming back to consciousness from her anesthetic state. She was calling out the name "Carol" over and over again. He understood that his wife had other thoughts about what their daughter should be named. When she woke up and he told her what she had been saying, she admitted that Carol was her choice. They agreed, but the Church was not satisfied with just "Carol" since it was not on the list of approved names. So Carol became Carol Ann.

Rosa and Francesco loved all of their grandchildren, but having their son's daughter living in the same house was very special. It was like having their little Joann back again. Rosa had been used to mixing her daily chores with minding her own babies. Her children learned the same songs and heard the same stories as they passed from newborns to toddlers to walkers and talkers. Rosa never missed an opportunity to teach her granddaughter as she had taught her children. Francesco, on the other hand, had never been a part of his children's rearing. He left home each day before they woke, and paused only during the evening meal to exchange a few words. Sundays, when they went on their picnics during the summer, and, during the other seasons, sat at the dinner table for most of the afternoon, were exceptions. Now, after he stopped working for a living, when he wasn't helping his daughters and their husbands with their house projects, or when he wasn't hunting or fishing, Francesco was home. He could watch his little granddaughter take her first steps, say her first words. He could speak to her in his language and she could reply to him with the words that he and Rosa had taught her.

Holding her grandfather's hand, Carol Ann was led on adventures in their garden and beyond the edge of their domain into the fields behind their garage. They passed the pens where Francesco kept his hunting dogs and the chicken and pigeon coops. They walked over the place where the pigs had been slaughtered during the late autumns, but were no longer. Carol Ann's *Nonno* would carry a long stick and use it to turn

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over rocks, revealing the little toads that serenaded them to sleep each night. Carol Ann would jump and laugh as the little creature sprang out of sight. She never tired of the game, and her *Nonno*, who now had all the time in the world, showed no signs of weariness with their daily expeditions.

He remembered that it was his own *Nonno* who had the time to spend with him as a young child, who turned over rocks, who showed him fish swimming in the stream near Masseggio, who taught him the difference between one mushroom and another. He understood now, for the first time, that living long enough to enjoy the leisure of old age, and to have a chance to give to the children of your children, was a true blessing. He said one of his prayers thanking God.



*Nonna Rosa, Carol Ann and Nonno Checco
In Rosa and Francesco's kitchen
The Orchard
ca. 1955*

A new rhythm established itself in Francesco's routine after he retired. All the jobs, large and small, that he had formerly done in the afternoon, when he came home from working in the mines, he moved to the beginning of his day. Still rising at five, he finished his chores by the time the bells in the St. Lawrence belfry chimed ten times. There was

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always something to prune or chip or clip or weed or pick or fertilize in the garden; there was always something to clean or oil or mend or caulk or paint in or on the house; there was always something to feed or pluck or slaughter or butcher or pack or press or bottle or stuff or salt and pepper. He was never short of things to do on The Orchard.

But life was now different. From the time he could remember, what made him get up every morning and go to bed every evening was work. He had always reported to work. Someone was always watching and waiting for him to be on time: His father; Silvio Amaducci; Pierre Lecroix and many more. There were no rewards for being on time. If he was late, he was punished. No one was watching now. He was his only gatekeeper. He tried to keep a continuous flow. This was his natural rhythm. It was not possible. His day and his life became a series of events, sometimes connected, sometimes isolated. Things happened each day that caused the day's course to turn in an unexpected fashion. Some of his friends who had retired before he did told him that he would enjoy it so much he would wonder why he had worked all his life. Others had warned him that he would hate it. He agreed with both opinions.

On some days, his niece's son, Giuseppe Lilli, would coax him into coming with him to hunt for rabbits. "Joe" was a musician. He played the accordion. His band played the music that people danced to and sang along to in the years after The War. They played in clubs and at dances and at weddings. Francesco liked Giuseppe because, like himself, he had a sparkle in his eye. Joe liked his great uncle in return for the same reason. Joe was an entertainer. He worked at night and slept during the day. On some days, when he was in between jobs, he might appear when it was light.

One day, in mid-autumn, after Francesco had been retired for a few years, Joe drove up to the house and found his great uncle raking leaves and burning branches.

"Come on, Zio, let's go up to the West Mountain and bring back some rabbits for dinner." Francesco did not need too much encouragement. They went into the house and found Rosa peeling apples that she would make into apple sauce. Joe gave his great aunt a big hug and a kiss. Joe was a charmer of women, and his great aunt had been under his spell since he was an infant. Rosa made them a lunch while Francesco got

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into his hunting clothes and packed his gun and ammunition. They drove down the street slowly, waving to anyone who was in sight. In less than an hour they were on the other side of the West Mountain in Francesco's favorite hunting and fishing spot. It was one of those days after a hard frost during the night, when the night sky is cloudless and the full moon illuminates the ice crystals forming on the blades of dead grass and fallen leaves. As the sun rises, the melting frost rises as steam and settles back to earth to soak the ground and fill the air with a pungent aroma of moss and mushrooms and pine needles.

They walked in silence, to the clearing where they usually found the first traces of their prey. Francesco was walking more slowly than usual. He was thinking.

"You ever think about the old country?" he asked, breaking the silence.

"What's to think, Zio? I've never been there," answered Joe, adding a laugh to emphasize his surprise at the question.

"You never thought about going over to visit your cousins in Sigillo?" continued Francesco.

"Can't say that I have. Ma talked about it before The War, but not since. We have cousins over here we don't see. It's a long way to go to visit strangers. Besides, your generation made an Italian village on The Orchard. Why do we need to travel a couple of thousand miles to see one?"

"It's been good, The Orchard," mused Francesco. "We tried to make it like home—as much for ourselves as for our kids. What do you think will happen after we're gone?"

"Your grandchildren won't need The Orchard like your generation did and like our parents did, Zio. Your grandkids will go to college and move to places where they can make a decent living for their families. They're all Americans now. They can be whatever they want to be."

"We built houses so that we could pass them on to our children, so that we could all stay together, like we did in the old country."

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“The coal is running out, Zio. There ain’t many jobs in the area. Your grandkids will go where the work is. That’s what you did, and my Nonno, and Zio Celestino and Zio Tommaso.”

“There was a difference,” said Francesco.

“What?” asked Joe.

“We left so that we could send the money we made back home,” replied Francesco.

“I know. My Ma could never understand why Nonno Righetto fed his brother’s family before he fed his own,” grumped Joe.

“My kids complained about the same thing. I always told them it was out of respect, but there was another reason.”

“What other reason?”

“To make sure we had a place to go if we had to leave.”

“Leave? What do you mean leave?”

“When we left our village in the old country, to other countries or even to other parts of Italia, we were strangers, *sconosciuti*. They could always send us packing, like when we lived in Luxembourg before the first war. We thought it would be the same here.”

“No, Zio. If I wanted to, I could change my name and be a Lilly-white American,” laughed Joe.

“You won’t do that, Giuseppe, will you? Promise me.”

“No, I don’t need to. Nobody cares what the accordion player’s name is or where he comes from, just as long as he plays good.”

“You play good, Joe. You play the old songs really good. You teaching any of the young kids those songs?”

“The young kids don’t even want to play the accordion or the mandolin. They want to play drums and guitars. They all want to be Elvis Presley.”

“I’m worried that the generation after my grandkids will never know where they came from,” lamented Francesco. “Who’s going to tell them the stories that we heard from our parents and grandparents? We told Elena’s son Antonio, but he’s all the way out in Michigan. His brother

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Francis is hearing them. Maybe he'll tell the others if he's listening. Maria's and Jolanda's kids don't speak the language, so we can't tell them ourselves. Carol Ann talks Italian, but she's still too young to understand the stories."

"You need to make sure that your kids just keep repeating them and hope that there's a writer among those grandchildren of yours. Talk to your kids. Lay down the law, Zio. They'll listen," counselled Joe.

Francesco nodded approval at this idea. "You're pretty smart for a musician," he said with a warm smile for his great nephew.

"Yeah, Zio. Most people think that just because I got a pretty face I'm dumb. Let's shoot us some dinner."

"You go ahead, Giuseppe. I'll sit here for awhile. It's a nice day. I feel lazy today."

When Joe returned an hour later carrying a few rabbits in one hand and his rifle in the other, his uncle was sitting where he had left him. Francesco could not remember hearing the shots that rung out through the silent forest. He looked at his great nephew. What was he doing here? He knew this young man who was smiling at him, saying things to him, but he wasn't sure who he was. He tried to talk, but there was something holding his mouth closed. He felt his heart beating quickly. The young man was now trying to help him rise up. Francesco was not sure whether his legs would hold him up. He sat back down. A few moments passed. He felt his head clearing. His heartbeat slowed. He remembered. He was here to hunt, and this was Giuseppe Lilli.

"*Che é successo?*" he said slowly, his words slurring together.

"I don't know what happened, Zio," replied Joe with a worried tone. "How are you feeling? You sick?"

"I must'a fell asleep. *Sto bene, sto bene*"

Joe took out the flask that he kept in his hunting jacket. "Here, Zio, take a little of this. Take as much as you want. It'll fix you right up."

Francesco took a short pull on the flask. The whiskey burned as it slid down his throat. He took another short drink and handed the flask back to Joe.

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“Feel better?” asked Joe, smiling.

“*Si. Si.* You want some lunch?”

They sat together in the little clearing eating the lunch that Rosa had made for them, washing it down with a few glasses of wine Francesco had tapped from his barrel. Joe wondered what had really happened to his great uncle. He would mention it to his brother, Elmo, the doctor, when they got back to The Orchard.



Celeste came over with the news. It was seven o'clock on Saturday morning. The temperature was well below freezing, and there was over two feet of snow on the ground. Filomena had called her sister Vicenza when she heard what had happened. Celeste had called his sister Maria right afterward. Their houses were not affected by the subsidence. Neither was the Sena homestead. But many of the other houses on South Seventh Street had fallen in and were leaning to one side or another. No one had been injured, the news reported. Thank God, said Rosa. The gas mains had broken and the smell of leaking gas was filling the air around the entire Bellevue section of the city. The police forced everyone out of their homes and into the street at four a.m. for fear of fire. Mrs. Sena would not leave, and Vicenza had finally convinced the police to leave her in peace.

Francesco listened silently while Celeste related all of this to him. Rosa cried, thinking of what her daughter and her family were enduring.

“Francesco, go with Celeste and bring Maria and her family here,” she demanded.

“Mamma,” replied Celeste, “Maria and her family are fine. The last thing they want to do now is leave their home. Filomena and I will drive there to see if they need anything.”

Francesco knew what had happened. No one needed to give him their version of the details. The pillar robbers had been taking the coal pillars that the mining companies had left when they stopped mining under the city. The robbers put up wooden supports to keep the roofs from falling in on them when they took the remaining coal. It didn't take many years for the wood supports to rot. If one of the seams collapsed, the rest followed. The heavy snow might have been the last straw.

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Why hadn't Lorenzo's and Maria's house caved in, wondered Rosa. This was a miracle. Celeste said that someone told her while they were waiting in the cold that there was a mule barn under their house. Francesco didn't believe in miracles when it came to mines, and he laughed at the mule barn suggestion. "That fellow never saw the inside of a mine to say something like that," said Francesco. "There are at least seven seams under Scranton before the water starts, and seven mule barns right on top of one another would be the real miracle." Francesco said that it was probably just not time for that part of the mine to collapse. "It will, sooner or later, and I hope Maria and her family are out of there by then."

It took almost two years for the city to get everything organized to buy the houses on the street. Maria's and Lorenzo's took an extra long time because of the way it was described in a will that had been left by Mrs. Sena, who died not long after the subsidence happened. The house was left to Lorenzo and his son. "I thought your father always said this house was yours, and that we paid him rent as an expression of gratitude," Maria demanded of her husband after they were given this unwelcome news by their lawyer, Thomas Hanlon. "This will looks fishy," said the lawyer, "but we don't have time to go into it now. We'll just set up a trust for Michael and he can sign over his share of the house when he's twenty-one. In the meantime, while he's underage, I will be his trustee and sign over his half of the money to you both so that you can buy a new house."

And that is what they did. Maria, Lorenzo, Joann and Michael, and their cat, Charlie Brown, moved from South Seventh Street in Bellevue to Hyde Park, close to the high school. Vicenza and Giuseppe Giunta moved to another section of Hyde Park. Everyone else moved as well. All the houses on the street were demolished, and within a few years of the cave in, the neighborhood was gone completely.



"Checco, it will soon be fifty years we are married," said Rosa. It was January, 1959, and Rosa was referring to their wedding day in Sigillo on Wednesday, April 21st, 1909.

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“It went quick,” replied Francesco.

“For you, maybe. Still we should celebrate.”

“They should give you a medal for putting up with me all this time.”

“Sometimes you’re a problem, like when you drink too much. But most of the time you are a good husband.”

“What kind of celebration you want to have?”

“We take the family to a nice place for dinner after we go to church.”

“What do you mean ‘after we go to church’?”

“We should get married again, go through the ceremony. That’s what people do on their fiftieth wedding anniversaries.”

“I never heard that. Is this some American thing?”

“It’s a Church tradition, called renewing the marriage vows. My mother and father did it when they were married for fifty years. Your parents probably did too. You just weren’t there.”

“Do you think that priest of yours, Father Gerioux, will let me in his church! Not a chance. He’s damned all the men on The Orchard to hell.”

“Don’t worry about Father Girioux. The nuns will take care of him. Celeste has already talked to them.”

“So you’ve got everything planned already. I just have to show up?”

“Something like that.”

“Where are we having dinner?”

“We’ll find a good place in Old Forge.”

“We have the money to pay for a big dinner?”

“Don’t worry about that either. Your children are giving us the party. We’ve never let them give us anything all these years.”

“They’ve given us plenty. No worries.”

Celeste took his father to the church the day before the celebration to say his confession so he could receive the Blessed Sacrament during the marriage ceremony. It had been forty-five years since he had been in a

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confessional, before he left Esch-sur-Alzette. There were too many sins to recount, he thought. Rosa had reminded him how to start, and he began to recite the prayer, "Bless me father, for I have sinned." when the young priest stopped him.

"Francesco, it has been many years since you were in a confessional?"

"*Si, Padre,*" Francesco replied.

"Do you have anything on your conscience that you want to get rid of?"

"I never killed no one, if that's what you mean."

"Yes, that's what I mean. You never hurt anyone or took anything from someone that you now regret."

"My wife. I hit my wife."

"Too many men do this, Francesco. You know it was wrong. Were you sorry after you did this, and did you ask your wife for forgiveness?"

"She always forgave me, and I promised to never do it again, but then I drank too much wine after work and I felt angry about something, and then my hand was raised to Rosa."

"When was the last time you hit Rosa?"

"It was many years ago. She told me that time if I ever raised my hand to her again she would pack her bags and move to her daughter in Plains and never come back."

"You cannot ask God to forgive you for this. Only Rosa can give you absolution. God will help you to talk to her. Tell her you are sorry and she will lift the guilt that has followed you. Is there anything else in your heart?"

"I was not with my mother or father when they died. I feel very sad about this."

"Did you return after you left?"

"I went back many times when I lived in Luxembourg, but only once after coming to America. That was in 1932, when my parents were still alive. They died a little after that visit."

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“What was the reason you left home? Was it to send the money home?”

“*Si, Padre.*”

“Did you take care for your parents when they were alive?”

“*Si, Padre.*”

“Then you will see your father and mother in the next life, Francesco.”

“Is there really a life after this one, Father?”

“If there wasn’t, God would not have given us so many rules by which to live this one, Francesco. Those who do not follow the rules he has given to us will have a very difficult time in the next. That is the way it should be, don’t you think so?”

“Yes, Father,” replied Francesco, but he still was not sure about the answer. It seemed to him that most people had a hard time just getting by in this life. *Were they being punished? Did all the bad people have to come back here and start all over again? Why didn’t God put them somewhere else where they wouldn’t cause trouble? That’s what hell is supposed to be for, isn’t it? Why didn’t he bring just good people into the world? After all the time the world has been around, all the bad people by now should be in hell. Maybe it’s filled. That’s why he’s using the world, as sort of a holding place. Why can’t God just make hell bigger?* Francesco thought that if he could figure out this simple solution to the world’s problems, why couldn’t God? He must have a different plan, one that is more complicated, thought Francesco.

“Is there anything else?”

“*No, Padre.*” Francesco had a lot of questions, but he was certain that this young priest was not going to give him any of the answers that would satisfy him.

“Then go in peace. All you other sins are forgiven.”

Francesco was quiet as his son drove them back to The Orchard. He went into the house and found Rosa making bread.

“I thought you would be there all day,” she said, smiling at her husband.

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“The priest forgave all my sins, except when I have hit you. He said I had to ask you to forgive me for that. Then I can receive communion with you tomorrow.”

“So ask,” replied Rosa.

“Will you forgive me for the times I raised my hand and hit you?”

“Yes, my husband,” answered Rosa, stretching out her hand to him. “Now you can take communion tomorrow with a clear conscience.”

Francesco and Rosa renewed their wedding vows in St. Mary’s Church on their anniversary. Their children and grandchildren were there. Rosa’s brother, Tommaso and his daughter Livia were there. Their cousins and nieces and nephews, and their neighbors and friends were also there to celebrate the day. Father Giroux was not presiding over the ceremony. He was not missed.



*Standing: Elena, Celeste, Jolanda, Maria
Seated: Rosa, Francesco
Fiftieth Wedding Anniversary
Old Forge, Pennsylvania
1959*

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Their cherry tree had grown to a prodigious size in the thirty-five years since it was planted. Francesco made certain that he harvested more of the fruit than the birds by shooting the hapless creatures that fluttered into its branches in the hope of stuffing their little gullets full of the plump, purple-red cherry meat before flying away to regurgitate it for their young or swallow it themselves. Plucked after a quick dip in scalding water, *gli uccelli* were a flavorful addition to Rosa's sauce.

Francesco had always picked the cherries, but he gradually gave up his place at the top of the ladder to his son. Rosa coaxed Celeste to get up on the ladder before his father could do so. She worried that her husband would slip on a rung on the way up or down, or that the ladder would slide along a dew-dampened limb and Francesco would tumble to the ground, breaking an arm, a leg, or, worse, his neck. Celeste was happy to oblige because Filomena was putting up as many jars as his mother, spiking some of them with wine. Canned fresh cherries was one of the most delicious desserts he could think of, and it was worth the effort to pick them. Francesco was never convinced that he needed any help removing the cherries from the tree, and felt that he had developed an excellent technique over the years. His intimate knowledge of every limb and branch gained from working over the tree since it was a mere sapling qualified him, in his mind, as the best person to harvest its fruit, in spite of his wife's worries over his well being.

There came a time when first Francis and then Michael and Jimmie were old enough to take on more important responsibilities, and helping their grandfather with the annual cherry harvest was considered one of them—not by their grandfather, of course, but by their grandmother and their mothers. One late summer, when Michael and Jimmie were on the cusp of becoming teenagers, they were volunteered by their mothers to spend a weekend on The Orchard picking cherries. They adored their grandmother, who had a loving smile and who used the few words she could speak in the language they understood to make them always feel welcome in her home. They were never sure of what to do or say around their grandfather. He smiled sometimes, but he never talked to them. He didn't seem to talk much at all, at least not when they were around.

"Don't worry," Maria told her son and her nephew, as she helped them settle into their room for the night. "Your uncle will explain what

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to do tomorrow morning. Just behave yourselves. Don't make any noise during the night or you'll wake up everyone in the house."

The room where they were sleeping was at the end of the hall, closest to the bathroom and to the door leading into other side of the house. Whose bedroom had this been when they were growing up, wondered Michael. They had slept two, three or four to a bed, his mother had explained on many occasions. He and his cousin always shared a bed when they slept over at each other's house. Jimmie was an expert at falling to sleep, anytime and anywhere. When he was in a bed, sleep arrived immediately. Michael was the one who wanted to talk, who caused his Aunt Yolanda to get up out of bed and tell them to be quiet and go to sleep.

On this night, as his cousin slept, he heard his grandfather on the stairs. He heard him walk into the bathroom, and some minutes later the sound of the toilet flushing filled the silence. His grandfather walked past their door, which was slightly ajar. Michael saw the door moving, and then his grandfather's face appeared around the edge of the door. A full moon gave enough light to the night to show Francesco's sunburned face. He was smiling. He did not have his hat on. Then he disappeared, and the door closed to a crack. Michael fell asleep.

The morning sun was reflecting off a second storey window on Cossantini's house and into the bedroom where the two cousins lay sleeping. It was early by the young boys' standards, but their grandparents had been up for over an hour already. They had eaten their breakfast, and Francesco had been out to inspect his vegetables and fruit trees. He had fed the dogs and taken his daily walk down one side of the street to Main Street, across and down the other side as far as the road went, across and back. While he was making his routine inspection of the neighborhood, his grandsons had awaken, dressed and walked quietly down the stairs where their grandmother stood over the sink peeling apples.

She gave them a large, warm smile. "Sit down," she said with her eyes and arms. "I'll make you some breakfast." Michael always marveled at how good his nonna's toast tasted. It was the same bread his mother made, with the same ingredients. But there was something about his nonna's oven that gave it a special taste. The old-fashioned toaster,

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with the sides that flipped open was the real secret. It browned the surface without drying out the center. Butter was all he wanted. Jam would overwhelm the taste of the bread. Sunny-side up eggs and a couple of his nonno's *salsiccia* were the best possible accompaniments to the toast. Neither of the boys drank coffee, so they got warm milk with honey.

"How do you say 'I've had enough?'" Jimmy asked his cousin.

"*Basta*, I think. *Basta, grazie.*"

"*Si! Si!*" said their nonna, with obvious glee. "*Basta!*"

They went outside, the three of them together. They surveyed their day's workplace, the cherry tree.

"Where's nonno?" asked Michael.

"He gonna for'a walk," Rosa replied, surprising the boys with her command of English. She realized she had broken her own rule and quickly returned to Italian. She started to tell them that she thought the tree was too wet from the rain that fell during the night, but Michael started climbing up the tree trunk before she could make him understand what she was saying. Jimmy placed the ladder against an upper branch. When the branch moved, the leaves released their drops down on the boys and their nonna. Rosa shook her head. Still smiling, she said, "No. No," and waved her hands up at the tree. Their uncle appeared.

"I see the Boy Scouts are awake," he said. "Your nonna is telling you it's still too wet to go up into the tree. The sun will dry everything off in awhile. Why don't you two go and find your nonno and bring him back. We'll look for something else to keep you busy until the tree is dry."

The boys walked out to the front of the house and turned right, toward Main Street. Francesco saw them from a distance as he strolled back home from the opposite end of The Orchard. *The tree's too wet*, he thought. *Rosa or Celeste told them to take a walk. They're good boys, but I don't know why they have to wear all those different uniforms. The Boy Scout ones worry me. They look too much like army uniforms. I told their mothers not to let them go into the Boy Scouts. They teach them how to line up and march and salute. I don't like it. They go to camp and live in tents. It makes the army look like it's all play until it's too late and they have to shoot somebody and be shot at themselves.*

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Celeste was weeding the flower beds when his father returned.

“Where did you send the boys?” asked Francesco.

“I sent them to look for you, but I guess you missed each other,” answered Celeste.

“I was up at the other end of the street when they went down toward Main Street. We’ll see how long it takes them to find their way home.”

As the boys walked down the street, Jimmy asked, “Why is it called Orchard Street? Do you think it was an orchard here before they built all the houses?”

“I don’t know,” replied Michael. “My mom told me once that the house on the corner of Main Street was here before the other houses were built. The Steward family lives there or used to live there. They owned all the land. They have a lot of fruit trees in their back yard. Maybe the whole place was full of trees like that. I don’t know.”

“When did nonno buy his house?” asked Jimmy.

“He didn’t buy it. He built it,” answered Michael.

“He built it? When?” said Jimmy, obviously surprised at this piece of news.

“My mom says that she was little when she helped him make the cinder blocks for the garage, so it must have been in the early ‘20s.”

“He built it! Wow! I wonder how where he learned how to do that, and if the other men built their houses.

“I wish we could ask nonno these questions,” reflected Michael. “He’d probably enjoy telling us the story. He probably has lots of stories he could tell.”

“He doesn’t seem to talk much, does he?” replied Jimmy. “Even when he’s with the other men on the porch, they do all the talking. Anyway, he doesn’t speak English.”

“He can speak English,” replied Michael. “I’ve heard him in stores. Did you know he spoke French?”

“How do you know that?” exclaimed Jimmy.

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“He was talking to Antoinette Richards, my father’s cousin’s wife. She’s French. They came here one time with my parents, and he started talking to her in French. Boy, was she surprised.”

“How did he learn French?”

“My mom said that he lived in Luxembourg and they spoke French there.”

“You’re kidding! Where’s Luxembourg?”

“I don’t know. I guess it’s somewhere near France if they speak French. Uncle Charlie and Aunt Helen were born there.”

“Really? I thought they were born here like my mom. Where was your mom born?”

“Here. In Old Forge, but then they moved to someplace close to where Aunt Helen lives now. They moved back here before your mom was born.”

“If Uncle Charlie and Aunt Helen were born in Luxembourg, why don’t they have a French accent? Aunt Livia still has her Italian accent, so she must have been pretty old when she came over.”

“I guess. Here’s where Richard Notari lives,” said Michael, changing the subject. “His dad’s our mothers’ first cousin, so that makes Richard our second cousin.”

“It’s funny when your mom tries to explain all the relations. ‘He’s your grandfather’s first cousin’s son’s son.’ It’s like a riddle you have to solve.”

“Maybe some day it will all make sense,” replied Michael.

They reached the end of The Orchard, and looked up and down Main Street without seeing a trace of their nonno.

“He either went back on Morten Street or along the tracks,” offered Michael. “Which way shall we pick?”

“Let’s just go back the way we came,” said Jimmy.

“You don’t want to explore?” questioned Michael.

“We can explore after we’ve picked the cherries,” responded Jimmy.

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“You think Nonno will be angry if we’re away too long?” said Michael, now with a mischievous tone.

“I don’t know what to think,” replied Jimmy. “My Nonna Alloy speaks English, so we can talk to her. Nonna Rosa doesn’t need words. She’s always smiling when I see her. Nonno Checco seems so strict. I don’t know what to do to make him like me.”

“He does like you,” said Michael. “He likes all his grandchildren. I’m sure of that. He just has a funny way of expressing it.”

“What makes you such an expert?” questioned Jimmy.

“I’m not an expert. I asked my mom the same question once, and that’s the answer I got.”

They retraced their steps back to their grandparent’s house. When they walked into the back yard, their uncle was up at the top of the ladder filling a pail with the purple jewels. Their nonno was up on a short ladder plucking the fruit from the branches. He cast a glance down at his two grandsons. He gave a short laugh and said two words: “Boy Schkouts!”

“See!” scowled Jimmy.

Michael just shrugged his shoulders.

Francesco climbed down from the ladder and moved it close to the trunk of the tree. He motioned to the boys to climb up into the tree. When they were both up into the lower branches, he climbed up the ladder and handed them each a pail.

“Uncle Charlie!” shouted Jimmy. “What do we do when we’ve filled up our pails?”

“Hand them to Nonno,” he shouted back from the top of his perch. “He’ll empty them for you. Try not to squeeze the cherries. They’re very ripe. And put more in the pail than you stuff into your mouths.”

The four of them spent the rest of the morning plucking at the tree with nimble fingers, filling pail after pail with cherries. They took a break for lunch, then Francesco moved to his garden to weed and prune, and Celeste left in his car to do some shopping chores. Francesco placed the step ladder close to the tree with a large pail on the top so his

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grandsons could empty their small pails into it. Most of the branches were empty by the middle of the afternoon when Rosa walked out the back door and around to the front of the house.

A horn had sounded. Michael thought it was the scrap collector like they had on Seventh Street, who picked up everything no one wanted. He drove a decrepit wagon that was pulled by a forlorn horse. When he heard the cackling, he knew it was a chicken wagon. A few minutes passed, and their nonna appeared around the corner of the house carrying a big, white hen. She had its body cradled in her left hand and its neck firmly in her right. She looked up at her grandsons in the tree as she gave her right hand a sharp twist. This would be dinner, she said with her smile.

The boys did not notice that their nonna moved up the stairs to the back porch with difficulty, but Francesco did. She never complained about her health, but recently she had been having pains that caused her to do something that she had never done in her life: rest in the middle of the day. She had an appointment to see a doctor next week, thought Francesco. It was nothing to worry about, she had said, but he was worried.



A letter arrived from Sigillo. It was from Francesco's brother, Enrico. It was not written in Don Antonio's hand. The priest had retired. He wrote a letter from himself to Francesco and Rosa telling him of his plans to withdraw from the daily life of an active priest to devote his last days to prayer and to visiting the sick. He was leaving Sigillo after over fifty years as pastor and moving to a monastery in Perugia. The writer of the letter was not given, but, according to the signature, the author was Francesco's brother, Enrico.

Masseggio, Sigillo

21 November 1961

My dear brother, Francesco,

God bless you for allowing us to live in your house all of these years. It is only because we have been here that we survived the worst of the economic times after The War. We are getting old, Maria and I, and we will not have much time left to enjoy life in the village. I am writing to

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ask you if you will consider selling this house to me so that my daughter, Tommasina, and her family can continue to live here after we are gone. I know that your daughters have their own houses, and that Celeste will have the house that you built. We cannot pay you very much for the house, and hope that you will accept a symbolic payment.

Your faithful brother,

Enrico

Rosa read the short letter aloud. She shook her head when she had finished. They wanted her husband to give them the house. Although it was almost thirty years since she had seen it, and although she had resigned herself to the fact that she would never live there, she thought about that house every day. She imagined waking in it each morning to the church bells, walking the short distances from it to the church to attend mass, and to the cemetery and to the market. When she died, she thought, this is how she wanted heaven to be, a house in the village close to everything that mattered. Now her brother-in-law wanted it to belong to his family instead of Francesco's.

My brother did not write these words, thought Francesco. Enrico understood what his brother had endured in order to be able to buy the house in the village. He was only a small child when Francesco left home, but he knew what it meant. He had grown up under the long shadow of Lucca. He was always grateful for what his brother had done for the family. Tommasina could not have written this letter either, concluded Francesco. She heard the stories many times, and when her uncle visited Masseggio thirty years before, she was the one who asked the question: 'Why did Zio Checco have to leave?'. No, it was his sister-in-law, Maria, who had laid this egg, and he was not planning to crack it or sit on it. He would just let it dry out on its own.

"What do you think?" asked Rosa, bringing her husband back from his musings.

"I don't think Enrico had anything to do with this," sighed Francesco.

"This has Maria's hand on it. I think that it is not only your decision to make;" replied Rosa, with some indignation in her voice. "The house

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belongs to you, but it also belongs to your children. Maybe they want to live there some day.”

“Maybe,” said Francesco, wearily. “I have thought many times about giving the house to my brother, but then I think it’s the only foot we have in the Old Country. It’s all this part of the family has left after so many years of living in Sigillo. But then I think that we have left that all behind us, and our children have never said they want to go back.”

“Celeste could not go back,” replied Rosa. “We would not let him go back to serve in the army or go to jail. He has talked about making a trip with Filomena and Carol Ann. He has written to his cousins.”

This was the first time Francesco heard this.

“What do you think he hopes to find back there?” he asked.

“Does he have to find something, my husband?” retorted Rosa, trying to maintain her humor, but showing signs of being short of patience. “He has always had good memories of Masseggio and of my parents’ home in the village. He wants to see these places again. He can be our eyes and ears. He can come back and tell us what he saw.”

“You sure you do not want to go back, Rosa?” asked Francesco, now with his eyes beginning to redden and tears beginning to form.

“We are too old now, Checco. We would die before we arrived, or shortly after, and spoil our visit. Everyone would be unhappy because they would have made so much food and then we wouldn’t be there to eat it. Anyway, I want to die in my bed with my family around me. I always said that I would not go back unless we could all go back together. Not for a few days or weeks or even months, but forever.”

They sat quietly for a long while, Francesco wiping his tears away with his red bandanna, and Rosa picking up her knitting. She was making sweaters for her grandchildren. She wanted to finish all of them before she went into the hospital to have a small operation. Rosa spoke.

“Celeste can write to his cousin, Tommasina, and tell her that we will keep the house in our family until after we are gone. Then the four of our children can decide together what they want to do. It has to be a decision that all four of them agree to. I will talk to the girls. You talk to Celeste.”

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Rosa was happy. A few months earlier she had heard the news on the radio: *For the first time in history, a Catholic has been elected President of the United States.* She had voted for him—because he was Catholic. The parish priest told them it was a good thing that a Catholic finally had a chance to lead America. “The Protestants have controlled this country for too long,” he had said in his sermon. “It’s time for us to take a more important role in this country, just like the country where most of us have our roots.”

John Fitzgerald Kennedy, son of Joseph Patrick and Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, became the thirty-fifth President of the United States on Friday, January 20th, 1961. He walked down Pennsylvania Avenue in freezing temperatures in his dark overcoat and grey pin-striped suit. Heavy snow fell on the capitol the night before. There was talk that the inauguration might be postponed, but these thoughts were quickly put aside. Nothing would delay this historic event. Rosa was watching the spectacle on the television in her son’s and daughter-in-law’s living room. Celeste was at work and her granddaughter was in school. Filomena had asked her mother-in-law if she wanted to watch it with her. Rosa did not usually watch television. She did not really understand what was being said, and the only time she saw such small people was in the puppet shows back in Gubbio during the feast days. But the idea of seeing it intrigued her.



John F. Kennedy on his way to his inauguration

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“He should keep his hat on,” scolded Rosa, as she watched him shaking hands with the priest who had just said mass for the new President and his wife, Jacquelyn. The priest’s name was Casey. Maybe he was related to the people who owned the hotel in Scranton, she thought. “Keep your hat on or you will catch pneumonia before you have a chance to do anything good!” she warned.

Francesco was watching television as well, but he was not with Rosa and Filomena. He was at the Roma Society in Plains. The room was filled with a heavy haze from the smoking Parodi cigars that were clenched in the teeth of most of the club’s members. The men were not happy.

“Damned Irish!” one of the men said.

It didn’t matter to them that he was a Catholic. He was Irish, and these med did not believe that the Irish followed the Roman Catholic Church. They had their own rules, with confession as the eighth and most important sacrament. All of the members of the Roma Society had been miners or the sons of miners. They all had experienced the feeling of being pressed down by an Irish foreman or shift boss. Each of them in one way or another felt they had been mistreated by an Irishman. A step forward for one of their kind meant two steps back for the Italians. That’s what the men sitting in the smoke-filled Roma Society meeting room were thinking and saying as they watched their country’s next President swear to uphold the Constitution of the United States of America, just like many of them had done thirty or forty years before when they became citizens.

Francesco had a coin in his hand. He turned it between his fingers. Two sides. He thought about the good Irishman who helped him learn English, who picked and shoveled with him until they were both black and only their shining blue eyes were visible. Brian McGlintey. He hadn’t seen him in many years, but he was still his friend. Then there was Flynn, who took a large part of his pay in the hard times. He was the Irishman these men were talking about. Which side of the coin did the new President fall on, he wondered, as he listened to his speech.

...And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you: ask what you can do for your country.

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My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.

Finally, whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world, ask of us the same high standards of strength and sacrifice which we ask of you. With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own.

“He has the gift of gab, I’ll give him that,” laughed one of the Society members.

Let’s see if he can keep us out of war, like the last President did, thought Francesco.



Francesco asked Rosa to stop subscribing to *Il Progresso* and to stop listening to the radio. He was hearing enough bad news already from the men on his porch and the men in the Roma Society. It seemed like there was only bad news all the time.

“One day, we were going to be bombed from Cuba,” said Tony Cossantini. “The next day we were going to bomb the Soviets. We send soldiers into Cuba to take over the country, and they end up getting licked really badly by Castro’s army. Then we tell the Soviets that they can’t protect the Cubans in case we want to try it again. Didn’t we fight on the same side in the last war? What are these two countries fighting over?”

Photographs started appearing in the newspapers of people being murdered by soldiers in the streets of a city named Saigon in a country named Vietnam. Where was this place, asked Francesco.

“Why don’t we leave them alone so they can take care of their own business?” continued Tommaso Notari. “Do we let other countries come over here to stop us from killing people in our streets? Not a chance! And now we are going to the moon! That’s what the President has said. We are going to send men up to the moon in a space ship. Why don’t we solve the problems down here first before we start taking our problems to new places?”

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The newspaper kept coming, the radio kept playing, and the men who sat on Francesco's porch kept talking about all of these things. But what was happening in the world was getting more difficult to understand. How was it possible to send a rocket carrying a bomb half way around the world and hit a target, even one as big as New York City? Weren't most people afraid to go down into the cellar without turning on the light? How could anyone think about getting into a space ship and landing on the moon without being scared out of their wits at what they might find up there, asked Francesco.

"At least he won't have to worry about where this world is coming to anymore," was a common refrain when one of the members of the Roma Society, or one of the men on The Orchard passed away.

Francesco and Rosa wondered together if it was just old age that made the world more difficult to understand, or if things had really gotten more complicated. Rosa was finding it tiring to keep up with the housework and climb the stairs to their bedroom and the bathroom. Worrying about what was happening outside of The Orchard, beyond the walls of their home, was also becoming more difficult for both of them. They were growing weary. It was the course of nature, said Rosa.



Francesco and his family buried their beloved Rosa on this day in the Rosati family grave at the Italian Independent Cemetery in West Wyoming, three days after she died on August 10, 1963. It had all happened so quickly. She had been sick for some months. They had moved their bed down to the living room because Rosa had been too weak to climb the stairs. Then she went to the hospital for an operation. The doctors had told the family that it was a simple operation, and she would be fine afterwards. Monsignor Florey had called Lorenzo that morning to extend his best wishes on his name's day, San Lorenzo, as he had done every year on this day since he became pastor of Saint Lucy's Parish. This was out of respect for Lorenzo's father, Michele Sena, who was the Monsignor's Godfather. The Florey and Sena families had been good friends since the days when their businesses were next to each other on top of Scranton Street, and when they worked together to make St. Lucy's Church a reality. Monsignor had talked to Maria and asked about her mother. Maria told him that the operation was successful, and that

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she would be coming home soon. But she never came home from the hospital. Now she was gone.

All of the family, except for Francesco and one of his grandsons, Michael, were next door on Celeste's side of the house. They were doing what all Italian families do following the sorrowful days of a death and a burial: visiting with one another, cheering up one another, and eating. Food had been brought to the house by all the neighbors in a continuous stream. The last thing a family should be thinking about during the days of the wake is cooking, not only for themselves but for all the relatives who traveled from far off places to sit with the deceased and see their loved one into the grave. Maria had sent her son to see what was keeping her father. Francesco said he would join them as soon as he had taken care of a few things. That was over half an hour ago.

"Go see what your grandfather is doing, and tell him to come over now," she had instructed her son.

Francesco was sitting at his normal place at the kitchen table when his grandson entered the room from the back porch. His hat was off. It rested on the table next to his right hand, the hand that was wrapped around his wine glass. The glass was empty. In the middle of the table stood a gallon jug of wine, nearly full. Francesco had not made his own wine for several years. This wine came from one of his neighbors with their condolences. He motioned to his grandson to get another glass from the cupboard. "You take a glass," he said in English. He pointed to his glass, instructing his grandson to fill it up. Then he gestured for him to do the same with his glass. "You take some wine too." His mother would not be pleased, thought Michael, but he had to listen to his grandfather, especially now.

Siediti laggiù, he told his grandson, pointing to the chair at the opposite side of the table. This was Nonna's place, thought Michael. He wasn't sure he wanted to sit in his nonna's chair, but Francesco pointed with his hand using the gesture that Michael had seen so often, where the four fingers were held together, all of them slightly curved, at a right angle to the earth, the thumb separated from the palm, also pointing straight ahead. This formation of the hand could be used in many different gestures, each with its own meaning. This one meant "Listen to me! Sit down!"

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When Michael had sat down in his nonna's chair, Francesco raised his glass off the table with the same hand that he had used to motion his grandson into his wife's chair. Michael followed suit and raised his glass.

I am the one who was supposed to be lowered into that hole today, thought Francesco, not Rosa. She had everything to continue living for. She wanted to see her grandchildren finish college, especially the girls. Joanna is there now. How proud and happy Rosa was when Maria told her Joanna was going to college. Maria, too. She is like her mother. Smart. Stubborn. Rosa wanted to be a teacher, so she taught her own children. Maria just wanted to finish high school, but I sent her to work. Rosa was against it. Rosa deserved a better life than I gave her, pulling her up from her family and home and taking her over here. She should have stayed in Sigillo and forgotten about me. But she wouldn't. No one ever cared for me the way she did. Every day I thanked God for that one blessing. I won't thank him for taking her first. No, that was cruel. I was the one who should have died.

Francesco looked long and hard at his glass. Michael watched him, waiting for him to move the glass to his lips to drink. Seconds passed.

I hope the same thing doesn't happen to him that happened to my Nonna Sena, thought Michael. She was always a quiet person, but when my Nonno Sena died, she lost all contact with the world. She became a recluse. She didn't remember me or Joann. She seemed angry when we went over to visit with Daddy. Sometimes, I would see her at the shoemaker shop window, pulling the curtain away that covered the large pane of glass where the Sena's Shoe Repair sign Daddy had painted was wholly intact. She would peer out at the people on the street, total strangers now. The other children called her "The Witch". That was my nonna they were mocking. I remember feeling sad that my nonna could not be happy during the last days of her life. Why does this happen to old people? Why do they lose their memories? Does it have to happen to everyone? Will it happen to Nonno Checco?

His nonno stared, seeming to be looking for something, appearing to be waiting for something. Then he spoke.

"Salute," said Francesco.

"Salute," answered Michael.

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Francesco drew the glass toward his lips and drained it. His grandson, never taking his eyes off his nonno, did the same. Francesco put down the glass. His eyes were red, his cheeks were flushed. He looked at his grandson, and began to speak, but no words came out. The sparkle that had always been in his glance was gone. One side of his face smiled while the other side frowned.

“I thought I told you to bring your grandfather over!” said Maria as she came through the back door. “Are you two sitting her having your own party?”

“I don’t think Nonno is feeling too good,” answered Michael.

“*Babbo? Che fai?*”

“*Niente, niente,*” answered Francesco slowly in a low, raspy voice.

But something was wrong.



His eyes were closed, but he could hear their voices, faintly. His son-in-law, Pasquale, was talking. “He had a good, long life.” It could have been a little shorter, thought Francesco. The last years without his Rosa were difficult. He would be with her soon. It was time. They were all there in the room where he was lying, his son with his wife Filomena, and his three girls with their husbands, Ernesto, Lorenzo and Pasquale. He always thought he would leave before Rosa. She was younger and lived a more healthy life than he had with his wine and cigars and the sixty-five years of coal dust in his lungs. This was just one of the things he would take up with God when they met, he decided. If they met.

He was lying in the bed he had slept in since he came to Hyde Park to live with his daughter Maria and her family in their one-storey, white stucco home. He could not remember how long he had been lying there, unable to open his eyes, a week, maybe. It was the day before Easter Sunday when he had last seen the light. Easter was on the 10th of April that year, 1966. Maria told him that she was going to New Jersey to visit her son the next day. He was at college and could not come home for Easter. Jolanda would stay with him during the day, Maria had said. He went to bed that Saturday evening and slept a deep sleep. Some time in the middle of the night he sensed that he had to waken and go to the

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toilet, but his body would not move. He could see in his mind the way from his bed the short distance to the bathroom, but he could not travel that distance. He had walked his last steps.

During the time he spent at his daughter's house, he thought about how he would feel when it was his time to join Rosa. On the cold days, he sat in his chair in the living room. He daydreamed and slept and woke in between his first and second and third meals of the day. Maria asked him if he was too warm or too cold or if he needed anything or if he had to go to the toilet. When the days were warm, he sat on the swing sofa on the back porch. It was a small porch, not like the one on his own house on The Orchard. On some days the neighbor from across the street would come over to talk. His name was also Francesco, but everyone called him Frank, Frank Parisi. He came from Roma. He laughed and he made Francesco laugh. Sometimes they talked about the things Francesco and his friends talked about on his porch on The Orchard, like what was happening in the world.



Nonno Checco on Maria and Lorenzo's Porch in Hyde Park ca. 1965

Only a few months after Rosa was buried, just after Francesco came to stay with his daughter in Hyde Park, their Irish Catholic President was

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assassinated. Frank Parisi was certain that it was the FBI and Herbert Hoover who killed him. “Dirty SOBs,” he said. “Kennedy was going to push Hoover out on the street. They tried to tie it to Castro, because of the Bay of Pigs, but I’m not buying that bullshit.” As soon as JFK’s Vice President, Lyndon B. Johnson, took over, he started to send more troops to Vietnam, and America found itself in yet another war. “This country needs to be in a war to keep the factories busy,” commented Frank Parisi. Francesco didn’t know what to think. As always, he nodded in agreement, and Frank was happy that he had convinced someone of his conspiracy theory. Francesco thought about his grandsons, especially Francis, who could find themselves in the middle of this new war. He needed to tell them not to fight. But he could not find the words. They were stuck in his head.

His granddaughter was living at home, even though she also went to college like her younger brother. She sat and read all the time. Always reading, thought Francesco. She wanted to be a teacher. Rosa would be so proud of her, the first grandchild to finish college. Rosa said that if she could be anything, she would be a teacher because teachers could read all day and get paid for it. This was the gift that Rosa had given to Joann, her love of reading. She talked to him in Italian, a few words at a time. They were the words Rosa had taught her when she was just a little child and would come to visit. She would stay in the same room that she and her mother had slept in when her father was in the war, when she was just an infant, too young to speak.

There were days when Francesco felt strong, when his head was clear. It was on those days that he would try to make his way home to The Orchard. He knew the house was still there, that Celeste was looking after his garden. There were days when he would get past Galdieri’s *Banner Food Store* on Luzerne Street, or even past the high school building before his daughter, granddaughter, grandson or son-in-law would catch up to him and turn him around and lead him back to the white stucco corner house that was the last place where he would live. He was sure there were spies who were always on the watch for him making his escape. He was certain they were the ones sending an alarm to his ever-watchful daughter. He had managed to travel across half a continent and over an ocean without being questioned or apprehended.

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Now, he could not manage to walk more than a few short city blocks without detection by the watchful neighbors.

When Maria and Lorenzo drove him to the cemetery to visit Rosa's grave, they would not stop at The Orchard on the way home. They would take the Keyser Valley Road instead of Main Street. He knew that road. He had driven along the Keyser Valley Road many times to go up onto the West Mountain, the mountain he saw from the back of his house, to hunt rabbits and pheasant and to fish. He knew why they were avoiding Old Forge, avoiding The Orchard. He was old, but not a child. He understood. If they took him back for a visit, he would not want to leave. It was his home. He had built it. He would go back himself, he thought. He tried many times, but he was never able to get past all the sentinels.

The sound of the voices grew dimmer. Francesco knew that he was in the final hour of his life on this earth. He thought of The Orchard, the fruit trees he had planted, the garden, the garage filled with over forty years of things he had collected. His grandson, Francis, had his car and his fishing rods. He thought of his wine press. Would his son begin to use it after he was gone? He thought of the attic, filled with everything that he and Rosa could not throw away, but had no room for in the rooms he had built. He thought of the porch he had sat on with his friends over the many years he and Rosa lived on The Orchard. Other thoughts began to enter his mind, but he pushed them away. He did not want to think about his journey to America, or his house in Sigillo, or, most of all, of Maseggio. Not now. He had said his good-byes to that part of his life many years before.

Would he do anything different if he could begin all over again? He had thought about this question, especially during these past three years. He would talk more with his children and his grandchildren, he had decided. He was always busy with his work, getting the money and keeping his family's bellies full, but they needed more of him than he had shared. This is what he would change if he had the chance to do it again. He would talk to Jolanda's youngest children, Ann Marie, Rosemary and Thomas. He would sit with them for many hours and tell them stories from the Old Country. He would talk more with Carol Ann and Joann, and encourage them to speak Italian. He would talk to Francis and Michael and James, and convince them never to go to war, to

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honor their names and remember the sacrifices their mothers and fathers made for them. He would talk to his oldest grandson, Antonio, and encourage him to come home more and visit with his family and his cousins. He had many other faults. He did not want to think of them now. He had already done his penance for them.

Did he believe that there was life after death, and that he would be reunited with Rosa and all those who went before him? This question was the one he had never found an answer to, an answer that he was certain was true. Maybe he was about to find out; maybe not. He was once told by a very religious miner that if you didn't believe before you died, you would never know the true answer to the question because God only let the true believers into heaven. Hell, the coal miner preacher had told Francesco and the others, was nothing more than death without an afterlife. How could he know this, Francesco had thought at the time. It was too late now. He couldn't fool God into thinking that he did believe if he didn't, and he still wasn't sure that he did. Whether or not there was a heaven or a hell, he would just have to trust that he would get what he deserved because he had done his best.

"Do good things well," the old Jesuit missionary priest had told the young boys studying for their confirmation in Sant'Andrea. *Fac bona bene facias.* Francesco had never forgotten these words. They had guided him through his entire life. He had married a beautiful girl who was his trusted partner for fifty-four years. They had raised four wonderful children, who gave them nine grandchildren. Surely this is the most meaningful reason for having lived, he thought.

He heard a voice, very faintly. *Babbo. Babbo. Babbo.* The voice faded. Then there was only silence.



Chapter Eight



Tutto il mondo è un grande paese – All the world is one, big country.

The Final Journey



Chapter Eight

Acknowledgements and Reflections on the Journey



The author at Masseggio in the spring of 2004.

I did not make this journey alone. My mother was with me every step of the way. She was there in person for a large part of her father's and mother's journey, and what she didn't experience herself, she heard directly from them. I heard the stories from her as we sat at her kitchen table. This is where all conversations were held in the Sena household. It had been the same in the Rosati home where she had grown up, and in the homes of her ancestors. Hours would pass on a Sunday afternoon after dinner, or during the mornings, afternoons and evenings when I would come in for a visit as we sat and talked about anything and everything that had to do with the Rosati and Notari families. Then there were the weekly telephone calls, on Saturday starting when I left for college at the age of eighteen, and then on Wednesdays and Saturdays after my dad died in 1999. Sometimes, family news would trigger a

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memory that would lead to another piece of the puzzle being revealed and put into place.

My uncle, Charles Rosati, (or Uncle Charlie as I and most of his nieces and nephews called him—Tony Baldrice and his brother Francis called him Zio Charlie), wrote a twenty-seven page autobiography ten years before he died in 2003 at the age of ninety-two. His story, which he titled *Our Roots*, was a major source of inspiration to me. It contained many new and some of the same bits of information that I had heard from my mom, but with a slightly different twist. Their versions of fact did not always match, and trying to reconcile their different views has been a constant challenge.

My cousin Carol, daughter to Uncle Charlie and Aunt Fannie, filled in beautifully for her dad. She was with me in this project right from the beginning. She read the chapters as I wrote them, provided details that she had remembered from the years growing up right next door to our nonno and nonna, and sent photographs that her father had taken as he was growing up on The Orchard, and also in Sigillo during their frequent visits back to Italia. These photographs are many of the ones reproduced in the book.

Richard Notari was my childhood friend. Whenever we visited The Orchard, I walked down to Richard's house and called him out to play. That's how I came to know Zia Teresa so well, as well as Richard's parents. Richard was as close to my grandparents as anyone of my generation could have been, and he filled in many pieces of the puzzle for me. One piece that I filled in for him was that his Nonna Teresa was my nonno's first cousin. Somehow, that detail had never been revealed to him. Richard's first cousin, and my second, Rico Albanesi, son to Angela and Nanno Albanesi, was a source of both information and inspiration. Rico also grew up on The Orchard.

Robin Bastianelli, wife of Claude Bastianelli, whose Nonna Rosa was Nonno Checco's sister, sent a letter to my mother just at the point in my writing when I was about to describe the immigration years. She was preparing a family tree, and could my mom help fill in the blanks. My mom sent her letter to me. What she had already gathered was pure gold to me. I sent her what I knew, and she produced a beautiful picture of the Rosati family that helped me to put together an entire part of the picture

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that was completely unknown to me. Robin also helped me connect with the Volpi cousins, with whom I have communicated ever since.

Albert Vitelli, son of Lillian Volpi and Albert Vitelli, has been a major source of facts about his Nonna, Filomena Rosati Volpi, and the families in Exeter. Albert also worked for my Uncle Charlie in the Department of Public Assistance, so he has heard our family histories from both the brother' and sisters' sides.

Julie Markwith, daughter of Giuliano and Evelyn Notari, came into the project just at the time that I was writing about the end of World War II. It was perfect timing. My mom had not heard from Giuliano and his wife Evelyn for a few years, and she was worried. She asked me to help find him. I called all my cousins and finally Michael, Julie's husband, answered. That call got my mom and her cousins reunited, and me connected with Julie, whom I had met only once when she and her family were visiting Old Forge. Julie filled in a lot of holes in my story, as well confirming much of what I had heard from my mom.

My cousin Jim Alloy, who shares a small story with me near the end of the book, provided the impetus for a visit to Sigillo in 2004, which got things moving on the book. His and Bonnie's daughter, Leah, was completing a junior year semester abroad in Florence. They were going over to visit her, and Britt Marie and I took the opportunity to meet them and then drive together with them to Sigillo, with an overnight in Gubbio. On our first visit to Sigillo, in 1997, Britt Marie and I did not find the in-town Rosati house, and I decided that the wrong house was Masseggio, so this visit was important. We found both houses, and I could set the records straight.

Dr. Gino Mori, whose great grandfather was my great grandfather's brother, making him my third cousin, provided the connection to the part of the Rosati family that did not stay on The Orchard or in Old Forge. It was his great uncle Luigi, Francesco's first cousin, who decided to move to California and start his own farm, while Luigi's sister, Gino's grandmother, stayed in Old Forge. A wonderful part of writing this book was that it brought me in contact with members of my family whom I knew were there, but whom I had never met. Gino is one of those family members, and I trust that the bond that was made through these pages will continue.

Acknowledgements

I owe a large measure of gratitude to my chief Italian editor, Paolo Abbate. Paolo is a friend whom I met through my work. I mentioned to him that I was working on a project involving my nonno. He knew Gubbio very well, and became interested in the idea of an Italian American Swede writing a family history. I sent him the first chapter, and I guess one could say that he was hooked. He reviewed all the chapters and has provided me with both factual information about Italian history and corrected my Italian translations.

Thanks need to go to the Ellis Island Foundation for providing the records of our ancestors. Getting the times and dates correct was an essential part of writing as accurate account as possible of the factual part of the book, and this source of information was absolutely invaluable. Thanks also to the Internet. I could never have managed to make the number of visits to the library as would have been needed to gather historical and incidental facts as was made possible by searching as I edited.

Finally, my wife and best friend, Britt Marie, provided all the support and encouragement I needed to complete this project. She organized both expeditions to Sigillo, and walked with me every step of the way while I uncovered bits and pieces of historical facts. She helped me to get started with the storyline, offering her objective (negative) opinion on my first attempts to introduce the subject, and finally giving her blessing to what appears here. For over four years she patiently listened and offered suggestions while I related historical details and tried to connect them into Francesco's life and that of his family.

Writing this book has been an enlightening journey. It gave me an opportunity to learn in more depth than was possible during my years of schooling about the history of Europe, especially Italia, from ancient times to the present, and about the years of immigration in the country of my birth, America. I have gained a greater understanding of, and appreciation for, what our grandparents endured when they came to America, and what our parents experienced growing up in a country that was foreign to their parents. The last chapter, about the declining years and the eventual death of Nonno Checco and Nonna Rosa, took the longest to write because it felt so difficult to lose my grandparents a second time. It was also the most difficult chapter because I did not want the story to end. I had grown to love the moments when, sitting on a long

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flight from some place far from home, I could pick up a piece of blank paper and form letters into sentences, sentences into paragraphs, and paragraphs into part of a larger story that was my own history, and the history of all those who sprung from the well shared by the Rosati and Notari families. I cherished the last hour on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon when work was finished for the day and there was time before the dinner hour when I could type into the manuscript the words written on my notebook pages. I delighted in sending a finished chapter to my sister and cousins and my Chief Italian Editor, and receiving their responses.

Now it is time to bring this story to a close. Remember, it is the story as I imagine Nonno Checco would have told it—if he chose to relate it and if I could have understood him.

Michael Lawrence Sena
Åsa, Sweden
March 2008

