

This historical novel covers the 15th to the 20th Centuries and explores the major historical events that shaped the character of the peasants from Montaguto, Southern Italy. It is a testament to a resilient people who refused to give up.

The Montagutesi: From Feudalism to Freedom

By Joseph Morley, DC, PhD

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THE
MONTAGUTESI

*From
Feudalism to Freedom*

JOSEPH MORLEY, DC, PHD

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This is a work of fiction and historical fiction. Some parts are based on actual persons and events. The author has taken creative liberty with some details to enhance the reader's experience.

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CHAPTER 1 – DESTRUCTION AND ESCAPE

War

The journey from Constantinople to Italy was fraught with danger and those few who made it in the fifteenth century were fortunate. The impetus for their journey was fear, a fear that transcended time, a fear that had been passed down from one generation to the next, a fear that culminated on Judgement Day, which was now at hand. It had been delayed for years but was now inevitable. But out of unrealistic hope, faith, fear, or self-delusion, a few men tried to convince themselves and others that disaster, Judgement Day, could be avoided – not just delayed but avoided. Surely God would intervene, and surely the military would rise and win the day. Despite man's ability to convince himself that the reality in front of him was under his control, there were no bright, positive choices for avoiding the impending doom.

Preparations for this moment had been ongoing for seven centuries. One man's idea, be it good or bad, can be transmitted intact over centuries. But it takes competence, confidence, and an iron will to bring that idea to fruition. The idea, the man, the competence, confidence, and the iron will were now present. Mehmed II was born in 1432, the youngest of three brothers. Some insist that it was luck, cunning, the intervention of another, or perhaps divine will that caused his two older brothers to die – or be murdered. Thus, whether by circumstance or intent, Mehmed became heir to the Sultanate when he was twelve. His father, Sultan Murad II, resigned and allowed Mehmed to accede at this young age; however, he came out of retirement due to a military

threat. Murad died in 1451, allowing his son to become Sultan permanently. Mehmed was confident that the failures of previous Sultans to conquer Constantinople, the last stronghold of the aging, crumbling Byzantine Empire, would not continue.

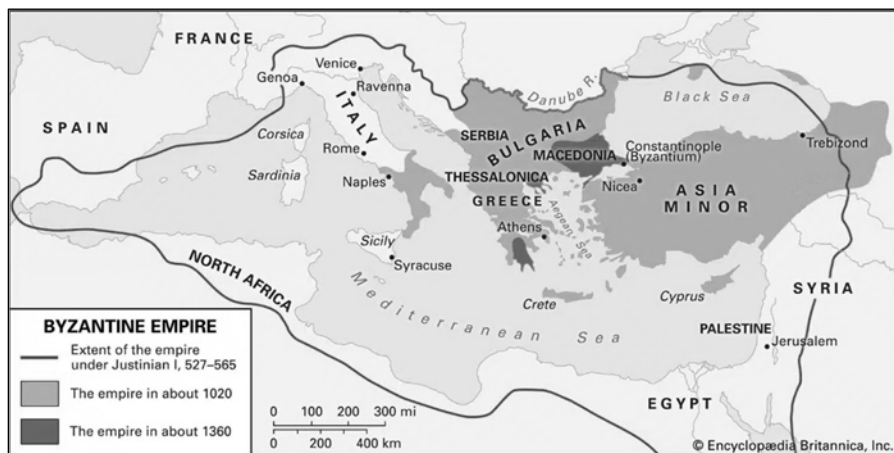


Figure 1. The Byzantine Empire in different centuries. Map courtesy of Made in Turkey Tours, <https://madeinturkeytours.com/history/byzantine-empire>.

Although now surrounded by the Ottoman Empire, Constantinople had managed to avoid defeat for centuries. But Mehmed was determined that he would succeed where his predecessors had failed in conquering Constantinople. The Crusades were over, no other major wars would compete for an all-out assault on Constantinople, and the city was ready to be taken. Circumstances favored Mehmed. This was seen as a divine intervention in which the remaining infidels within the Byzantine empire, as per the Koran, would be subjugated, slain, or converted to Islam.

It was true that there were treaties between Byzantium and the Ottoman Empire, but treaties were only as good

as the honesty of the men who signed them. No piece of paper was going to stop Mehmed from his conquest. Deceit was yet another weapon at his disposal when dealing with Byzantium. But, one may ask, why should Mehmed be singled out for his deceit? Was deceit not a well-honed skill that had been practiced by various European diplomats and rulers for centuries? Was not diplomatic deceit partially responsible for the rift between Greek-speaking Christian Byzantium and Latin Speaking Catholic Rome? Yes, all of this was true, but deceit was not enshrined in the theology of Christianity; it was so in the theology of Islam when dealing with the infidel.

And what can be said about the Byzantine contemporary of Mehmed, Constantine XI? Can words assign culpability to him alone for the conflagration that was to come, or can words absolve him for any blame? Words can be carefully chosen and cunningly crafted to do either, but words could not camouflage the weakness of Byzantium. Upon the death of the Byzantine Emperor in 1448, Constantine XI and his brothers all contested for the throne. It was their mother, Helena, who decided that Constantine should be crowned Emperor. Tragically, perhaps unknown to her, she was fulfilling the final prophecy regarding Constantinople. The original Constantine was the founder of Constantinople. He was the Roman Emperor who made the decision to move the Roman Empire eastward in 324. Initially, it was referred to as the Eastern Roman Empire, but eventually became the Byzantine Empire. He prophesied that the Eastern Roman Empire would fall when three conditions occurred; the avengers would come directly from the east of Constantinople; the moon would give a sign from the

sky; the final emperor would be named Constantine, son of a Helena. These conditions were now in place.

Upon the death of the Byzantine Emperor, his wife Helena dispatched an envoy to the Ottoman Sultan Murad for his approval to recognize her son Constantine as the new Emperor. That the approval of the Ottoman ruler was even a consideration demonstrated the weakness of Constantinople. Murad approved, although he would have preferred one of Constantine's brothers instead. His misgivings were due to Constantine's favoring a religious union with the Latin West, while Constantine's brothers did not. Union with Rome, be it political or religious, was not in Sultan Murad's best interest. Despite his misgivings, he approved Constantine's ascension to the throne.

Constantine XI had been married twice, but both wives died without bearing children. Thus, there was no heir to the Byzantine throne. He was urged by his advisors to marry again and negotiations to find a suitable wife went on for some time. While they were ongoing, Constantine tried to take advantage of the perceived weakness and inexperience of the new Ottoman Sultan, Mehmed II. This would prove to be a fatal mistake, not only for Constantine but for Constantinople and its citizens.

Ohran, the grandson of a previous Ottoman Sultan, was living in exile in Constantinople. He had been receiving regular payments from the Ottoman court for his maintenance. Mehmed had previously agreed to continue this payment when he acceded to the Ottoman sultanate. On paper, Ohran was a threat to the legitimacy of Mehmed's accession to the Ottoman throne. So, Constantine tried to take advantage of this by informing Mehmed's advisor that the payment for maintaining

Ohran in exile in Constantinople was not sufficient. If the payment was not increased, then Constantine intimated that Ohran would be let loose from his exile in Constantinople and could thus contend for the Ottoman throne. Deceit and veiled threats as part of diplomacy had worked before, so why not try them again? When Mehmed's advisor told him of Constantine's proposal, he was furious and, after a short delay, took the first step in avenging this insult by canceling all of the agreements and treaties with the Byzantines. This was the opportunity to achieve his goal of conquering Constantinople. He immediately ordered his workmen to start preparations for an assault on Constantinople by first encircling the city. When Constantine saw what was going on, he protested. Mehmed did offer Constantine a way out – surrender and no one would be harmed. Constantine and his advisors rejected this. After all, the Byzantine Empire had withstood much in its one-thousand-year history; it had been protected by God and God would surely intervene again, wouldn't He? Unfortunately, with the rejection of Mehmed's offer, there would be no stopping this assault on Constantinople.

Adding to the likely success of the assault, circumstances would fall on the side of Mehmed yet again in the presence of Orban, a Hungarian cannon maker. He had spent time in Constantinople, attempting to get the Byzantines to purchase his much-improved cannons and thus make himself very rich. He had devised a method of casting large bronze cannons that greatly exceeded the size, firing capacity, and potential for destruction of anything seen before. After much delay and wasting of Orban's time, Constantine informed him that he was unable to afford to purchase these new cannons. The

inability to pay for this new advance in warfare or perhaps the unwillingness to pay what was being asked, was another incident that would favor the defeat of Constantinople. So, Orban made his way to the court of Mehmed and was successful in getting him to agree to pay for the construction of his unique cannons. After forging them, several weeks were required to transport them the one hundred and forty miles from the point of their casting and position them for the assault on the walls of Constantinople.

The assault began on April 12, 1453, and continued non-stop, day and night. This type of continuous assault was new to warfare, and the effects were devastating on the walls of Constantinople. Small gaps appeared in a previously impenetrable wall. Mehmed's attritional warfare and the psychological impact of non-stop bombardment took their toll. On May 29, 1453, after midnight, he felt that the time was right to make the final assault on the city. While his soldiers were advancing towards Constantinople, the barrage of cannons continued, until a large hole was made in the wall. This allowed the Ottoman soldiers to enter the city at sunrise. The destruction, mayhem, and murder that followed were documented by a Venetian observer, Nicolo Barbaro:

“At this moment of confusion, which happened at sunrise, our omnipotent God came to His most bitter decision and decided to fulfill all the prophecies, as I have said, and at sunrise, the Turks entered the city near San Romano, where the walls had been razed to the ground by their cannon ... anyone they found was put to the scimitar, women, and men, old and young, of any conditions. This butchery lasted from sunrise,

when the Turks entered the city, until midday ... The Turks made eagerly for the piazza five miles from the point where they made their entrance at San Romano, and when they reached it at once some of them climbed up a tower where the flags of Saint Mark and the Most Serene Emperor were flying, and they cut down the flag of Saint Mark and took away the flag of the Most Serene Emperor, and then on the same tower they raised the flag of the Sultan ... When their flag was raised and ours cut down, we saw that the whole city was taken, and that there was no further hope of recovering from this”.

Byzantines trying to flee the destruction were cut down by the swords of Ottoman soldiers. Houses were entered and inhabitants killed, be they men, women, or children. Churches provided no refuge for anyone. Those hiding there were slain by the sword. After the killing spree, the soldiers turned their efforts to looting, rape, and pillaging. Churches were ransacked and desecrated. Those who survived the massive killing spree were taken captive to be executed or sold as slaves later. The Byzantine cross was no longer an impediment to the Islamic crescent.

The obedience, ruthlessness, fanaticism, courage, and skill in warfare of the Ottoman soldiers were especially evident amongst the Janissaries; they formed an elite fighting force at Constantinople and other battles. Rigorous training methods, discipline, and absolute loyalty to the Sultan were essential to become a Janissary. Created about 1365 by Sultan Murad I, the Janissaries became part of a standing army, a concept in European warfare not seen since the Roman legions. Janissaries began their training as boys. Recruits for the

Janissaries were mostly kidnapped Christian boys or youths. At its peak, the western part of the Byzantine Empire included Greece, the Balkan countries, Southern Italy and Sicily. With the progressive Muslim victories over Byzantium, the former Byzantine areas in the Balkan lands (modern-day Croatia, Serbia, Albania, and surrounding areas) became part of the Ottoman Empire. As per Muslim custom, those Christians and Jews living in Muslim lands who refused to convert to Islam were required to pay an annual Jizya, a humiliation tax. Failure to convert or pay the tax meant death for these infidels. (Jews fared better living under Islam than they did living under Christianity). The dehumanization of Christian subjects living under Ottoman Muslim rule was exemplified by Sultan Murad's cruel but novel and ingenious addition to the humiliation tax, the devshirme – a certain number of Christian male children were to be forcibly taken from villages in the Ottoman empire. The number of boys kidnapped depended on the military needs of the Ottomans. These boys were taken captive and sent to Istanbul for years of education and training to enter the Janissary Corps. Those boys who were eventually deemed unfit for military service were trained as administrators. All had to convert to Islam. Entry into the Janissaries meant a good life, a regular salary, and a pension when finished.

The irony is that many Christian boys become fanatical anti-Christian soldiers. How malleable is the young human mind, how like sand is it that what is written once can be erased and re-written to suit the teacher's needs. Blood ties with parents, brothers, sisters, aunts, or uncles could be obliterated, and friendships formed with villagers could be erased. The young mind

could be taught that all of these relatives and friends were in fact, enemies. And what of the anguish of Christian parents as they saw agents of the Sultan enter their village? ‘Will the agents stop and take our son to fulfill the new kidnapping tax, the devshirme’? What a relief parents felt when the agents rejected their son but took a boy next door. But what a twisted sense of morality it was that relief could be felt due to another’s misfortune.

Escape

When the slaughtering ended and the soldiers started pillaging, their attention was diverted for a short time. This provided an unexpected opportunity for the fortunate few who had evaded death or capture. Merchant galleys of the Genoese and Venetian fleets were inside the harbor, some having arrived to aid in the defense of Constantinople, bringing in much-needed supplies, fighting materials, and soldiers. Some of the ships still had many of their crew members on board. Captains and crew realized that it would be best to get out of the harbor as quickly as possible since they might be attacked later by the Ottoman navy. The Ottoman ships were deserted at the moment, the crews having gone ashore to indulge in the looting of Constantinople. During all of the confusion of pillaging and looting, there was a small opportunity for some to float on makeshift rafts or swim to the Venetian and Genoese galleys, without being detected. Once all escapees had boarded ships and no more were likely to make it, some of the aiding ships edged their way stealthily out of the harbor. However, there was one obstacle to overcome. Previously, when Constantine saw that Mehmed was preparing for an assault, he ordered a boom to be erected across the entire

harbor. This boom, a chain barrier, fastened on both sides of the harbor and supported by numerous buoys, prevented Ottoman ships from entering the harbor. It could be lowered to allow Venetian and Genoese ships, laden with supplies and soldiers for the defense of the city, to enter, and raised again to prevent Ottoman ships from entering. However, always resourceful, Mehmed devised a brilliant plan to overcome this obstacle; he had his workmen transport ships over land and put them in the harbor.

With the attempt to escape blocked by the boom and no Byzantines in control of it any longer, the lead ships in the escape convoy approached the boom slowly. Then, several men cut the boom with axes. This opened the escape route to the sea. That, linked with the aid of strong wind and deserted Ottoman warships, enabled many of the Venetian and Genoese galleys to escape and gave a reprieve of the death sentence for those fortunate enough to have made it to the ships. One of the Venetian ships had many escapees. It, along with the other Venice-bound ships, would make a stop in Shengjin, Albania, which was controlled by Venice. The stop in Shengjin would prove to be a major turning point in the lives of some escapees

One who had made it to safety was Father Glinatsis, an Orthodox priest. He had been bringing communion to an elderly bedridden woman when the Turkish soldiers breached the defensive walls of the city. Fortunately for him, the woman lived near the harbor, so escape was easy. However, his decision to escape was made only after much mental anguish, deliberation, and eventual justification as to why his living was more important than dying with the other priests and citizens. At the moment that the Ottoman soldiers breached the wall and entered

the city, he and his fellow clergy were under no illusion that they would over-run the city and slaughter many. The Ottoman soldiers' reputation preceded them. He reasoned that death at the hands of the Ottomans would be based on their animosity towards Christianity. Thus, he would be a martyr for the faith and gain heaven if he were to die at their hands. However, he also felt that if he lived, he would be able to lead more souls to heaven. So, maybe God wanted his life to be spared for this reason. He finally rationalized that his decision, albeit made under duress, was not based solely on fear of dying. Thus, his conscience was clear regarding his decision to escape. However, once on the boat, in the open sea, with freedom achieved and bound eventually for Venice or elsewhere, he felt a strange sense of guilt that had not been present when he was making his decision to remain or flee. "I should be dead. Have I erred in cheating death? Am I a coward, a traitor to my fellow priests, my parishioners, and my faith? They are now martyrs in heaven. What of my faith – wasn't it weak? Didn't Jesus say that he would vomit those of lukewarm faith, out of his mouth? Yes, yes, but what about Peter? He denied Jesus three times and surely he is in heaven, so there is hope for me". A reassuring sensation came over him like a welcome breeze in stifling heat. But like the cooling breeze, it did not last, as he reconsidered Peter's denial. "Wait, wait, Peter did deny Jesus, but he was eventually martyred for his faith, for not denying Christ. But I have denied Jesus, my faith, becoming a martyr, and now what will be my eternal fate"? Father Glinatsis was both grateful to be alive and depressed because of his decision. Now, the man of no faith may not at first relate to this crisis of the conscience, but it plays out in many at some time, in some form. A

dilemma is presented in which no decision is the best. Guilt, self-doubt, the to-and-fro thinking of the mind, and the inability to put the matter to rest are unfortunately the lot of many. Father Glinatsis tried to put the matter out of his mind. He felt that, with the horrendous events of the day and his overwhelming fatigue, after a few days' rest, he would be able to think clearly and resolve this matter. Besides, there were people on the ship who had undergone terrible losses and his priestly advice and counsel would be needed. Yes, keeping busy helping others would be the temporary answer to his dilemma.

There was a strange man amongst those on the ship. He wore clothes that were much too big for him. When asked by one of the other passengers his name, his garbled response was barely intelligible. It was obvious that his Greek was very bad; save for one or two words, no sense could be made of his reply. The man who had enquired as to his name was Michael, who had been a high-ranking official in the administration of Emperor Constantine. Michael spoke fluent Turkish. He detected what he thought was a Turkish accent in the strange man, so asked him again what his name was, this time in Turkish. The man grunted one word, "Demetrios". He then remained silent when asked another question. It was apparent that he did not want to talk. As a government official, Michael felt a bit insulted when no response was forthcoming to his question. But, given the day's tragedy, he reasoned that Demetrios had the right to remain silent. However, it puzzled him deeply why this man might speak Turkish, but not Greek, yet have a Greek name. Then, a sense of dread engulfed him as he thought to himself, "This man is a Turkish spy and has been put on this boat

to do the bidding of Mehmed. Disaster is awaiting us in some way. I must inform the ship's captain”.

As he was about to go to the captain's quarters, Demetrios began to sob and said in Turkish that he wanted to speak. Michael sat down next to him and Demetrios recounted his story. “My real name is not Demetrios, but Kudret. I am a Janissary soldier and was with the soldiers that overran Constantinople today. I don't know how many I killed – one doesn't keep a tally. When noontime was approaching, our killing ended and the cry went up to loot what we could find. One man stood in my way of entering a church and tried to prevent me from taking jewels from a chalice. Before I put him to death by my sword, I heard him yell that he would not give up this chalice to an infidel. It was very strange, but he screamed that in my native tongue, Albanian. You see, I was from a village in Albania. I was a big lad, bigger than the others. When Sultan's agents came, looking for boys to be taken for the Janissaries, I was the first one considered, because I was so big. I was only twelve and was taken from my family, as were some other boys from my village. It was terrible to see my parents sobbing. As a boy, I didn't think that that would be the last time I would ever see my parents, friends, and others in the village. We were taken to Istanbul and trained for the military, the Janissary Corps. The training was very difficult, but we were well-trained in warfare and education, well-fed, and eventually entered the corps. We also learned Turkish and had to become Muslims. Over time, the memory of my parents and the village faded. Eventually, I saw the Christians, especially the Byzantines, as the enemy. We were very successful in fighting against the Byzantines in other areas and today was supposed to be the pinnacle of

our success – the capture of Constantinople. But something happened when that man spoke in Albanian – you know you never forget your first tongue; I understood perfectly what he said. As he lay dying, muttering in Albanian, there was chaos, with soldiers grabbing everything they could, and running in all directions. I stood over his body and felt something inside of me say ‘run away’. So, I ran to the harbor – with all of the chaos of looting, the other soldiers had no idea where I was going. On the way, I found the dead body of a very big man. I knew that I couldn’t get onto any of the Venetian ships wearing my Janissary uniform. So I disrobed and put on the clothes of the dead man. Now that I’m safe, what’s to become of me? A deserter from the Janissaries has a death sentence on his head. I only hope that I’ll be considered as one of the soldiers who died in battle – you know, many of us also died in the assault on Constantinople – it wasn’t the Byzantines only who died”. Michael winced at those words as if there was a moral equivalence between Ottoman soldiers’ intent on killing and looting and Byzantine soldiers and citizens defending their city, families, and lives.

However, there was real sympathy for Kudret. Michael reminded himself of what he had been taught regarding forgiveness; King David had been forgiven for arranging the certain death of his military commander Uriah, so he could marry the man’s wife, Bathsheba; Saul of Tarsus had been forgiven for being responsible for the killing and imprisonment of Christians. So, maybe Kudret’s epiphany was genuine and he, along with the others on board, should be allowed time to make sense of the day’s horrific events. They were all tragic, lost souls on a ship that was but a temporary transition to a new life –

somewhere. After this uncharacteristic outpouring by Kudret – after all, Janissaries were reputed to be tough, battle-hardened, and did not yield to soft emotions – he sat quietly. Michael joined him in this wordless conversation, content to understand the importance of the silence as he had just understood this sad man’s story. After the silent communication served no more purpose, Kudret sat up straight and said that he was aware, from military information, that Venetian ships stopped at a port in Albania. He asked which port. “Shengjin”, Michael responded. Kudret’s countenance changed and a small smile appeared on his face. “Shengjin is close to Lezhe, which is only about one or two days’ journey from my village. I’ll get off at Shengjin and walk to Lezhe and Allah willing, will get to see my parents and friends again. It’s been almost twenty years since I left”. After pondering Kudret’s story - the forced abduction and military training, the intent to inflict harm, the slaughter, the final killing of a fellow countryman, the decision to desert this military way of life and risk execution, the flight to safety and the risky decision to let all of it be known to a stranger, a stranger who could easily incite the other escapees to kill Kudret – Michael had forgiveness in his heart for this strange man. He had been on an emotional journey with Kudret, a journey that had plunged him to the depths of Hades and then lifted him high in the clouds. Michael was very familiar with and partial to Greek tragedies. He understood perfectly that this was indeed a Greek tragedy played out in real life, but not by an actor. As Greek tragedies were able to evoke emotional responses from the audience, Kudret’s tragedy had the same effect on Michael.

Michael and Kudret sat, just staring at the floor beneath them. An agreed and polite piece of etiquette told them that they had run out of conversation and must do something to pass a few minutes. Suddenly, Father Glinatsis walked over, shocked at whom he saw. “Michael, is that you”? He turned and immediately recognized the priest. “My God, Father, you’re safe. How, when...” Michael was so excited that he couldn’t put his thoughts into words. “Yes, I swam out to this galley at an opportune time”. Because Father had not resolved his guilt, he determined that telling his story would not benefit Michael. It might cause Michael to think of him as a coward and a traitor to God for not dying with the others. Father did not need more input. Even if ten others, upon hearing his entire story, were to say he did the right thing, he still would have nagging doubts. So, it was best to recount the minimum. “And your family Michael, are they with you”? “Yes, yes, we made it across the water, all of us. Theodora and I swam and pushed a makeshift raft with the two children on board. It was big enough so that Theodora and I could rest our arms on it every few minutes. It was strange, but with so many soldiers running around, no one seemed to spot us in the water. They were so busy with looting”. Michael and Father Glinatsis spoke for a few minutes. Finally, Father asked him who the man was sitting nearby. Michael hesitated. Then he turned back to Kudret, “It was brave of you to tell me your story. I can assure you that there is no vengeance in my heart towards you. Would you be agreeable to letting me tell your story to Father Glinatsis? I’ve known him for years and he’ll listen to it with no malice towards you and with a promise not to reveal the details to anyone”. Michael felt that this would be a type of

confession, even though from a Muslim. So, Father would be bound by Liturgical authority, not to reveal anything told to him in the confidence of the confessional. Besides, Michael reasoned, Kudret was once a Christian, so this could be a sacramental confession. Kudret was hesitant initially. Then, perhaps it was reckless folly, perhaps the atmosphere on the ship was as a soothing ointment that would allow his words to slide out, or perhaps it didn't matter anymore. Whatever the reason, Kudret nodded his head yes. Michael started by telling Father that Kudret spoke very limited Greek, but spoke Turkish. Father said to Kudret in halting Turkish, "I speak your language". A smile came across both of their faces. Although Father's Turkish was not very good, his inflated statement had the effect of establishing an initial bond of confidence. Michael related Kudret's entire tale, from being kidnapped to joining the Janissaries, to participating in the assault on Constantinople, to deserting.

Father was silent for a while and then told Kudret that it was brave of him to bare all in front of strangers. He said that, as a priest, he could not forgive his sins, since Kudret was not of the Orthodox faith. Kudret understood and was content that these two potential enemies had listened and been sympathetic and forgiving. Father asked, "Where will you go now"? When Kudret mentioned that he would disembark at Shengjin, travel to Lezhe, and then make his way to his village, Father smiled and said that he knew the village priest in Lezhe. He might be able to procure a horse for Kudret to ride to his village, instead of walking. "I'll write a note for you to give to the priest. He'll probably be able to help you".

Kudret was elated. In the few hours on the ship, he could see the direction of his life changing. In a week or

two, he would be with his family and friends again. What a reunion that would be, what festivities would happen in the village when a long-lost son, an important soldier, and a friend returned. He pictured over and over what it would be like, with each mental rendition becoming more joyous. His father would be in tears and would take him around the village to see old friends, cousins, aunts, uncles – oh the celebrations would go on for days. And his mother, he could see her weeping tears of joy and bustling about, preparing a feast for all of the relatives. At the feast, he would answer all of their questions about his life away from the village and would regale them with tales of his life as a Janissary. Yes, the young boys would be envious and the girls of the village would all dream of being his wife. It would be like old times – no, even better because he would not be taken away from his family and village ever again.

In the few hours on the ship, Kudret had just uncovered a treasure – his future. To him, this treasure was worth even more than the jewels he had looted earlier in the day, from the chalice. These he kept secreted in his pocket; the other treasure, his future, he now willingly shared with Michael and Father Glinatsis. They were both excited about him and his decision to return to his village. They spent the next hour enquiring about his village and relatives. His memory, although somewhat hazy, enabled him to tell his two new friends all about his family, friends, and some of the odd characters in the village. One story in particular dealt with a very pompous village official who was riding on a cart through the village, in his best clothing. As his cart turned a sharp corner, the horses lurched forward, causing the official to fall off and roll onto a newly made straw and manure pile. Normally,

the villagers would have run to help, but this pompous person deserved what he got, and the villagers stood and laughed at his misfortune. This story made Father and Michael laugh. Even in the throes of tragedy, as existed on the ship, the human spirit can find something to make men happy, if only for a short while. Perhaps it is the small respites from tragedies that keep men from giving up.

The news came from the captain that they would not be going directly to Shengjin, but would be stopping in Heraklion to pick up cargo for Venice. The captain felt that the tragedies that had befallen those on his ship were indeed very sad, but commerce was more important. An opportunity to make money, a lot of money, would not be overridden by the desire of those on the ship to reach Shengjin or Venice quickly. Besides, a delay of another few days would not affect anyone.

There was another escapee on the boat, a woman named Maria. She had witnessed the killing of her husband and two children. She just sat and stared ahead, a stare that did not allow her eyes to make contact with anyone. When asked what had happened, she recited the events she had witnessed calmly, as though reading from a book. She had no problem repeating her story, with all of the horrendous details, to anyone who asked. Finally, she broke down and started screaming and crying. She kept screaming the names of her children and telling them to get back behind her, over and over. This went on for several hours until she was exhausted and finally fell asleep. Now that Maria had fallen asleep, others started drifting off to sleep also. It was night. But the tranquil view of so many people sleeping belied yet another horror some would undergo – dreams reliving the brutality of the

assault on Constantinople. Daytime was the time to try and control thoughts, overcome individual trauma, and learn to live as normally as possible. But nighttime dreams were uncontrollable. It was as if the Turkish soldiers had control of the thoughts of the people. For some, it would be impossible to fall asleep in the immediate future. The uncontrollable dreams at night were too horrible to face – better to toss and turn all night and spend the next day tired than to relive May 29, 1453.

There was also a calm period back in Constantinople after all of the killing and pillaging abated. Some ships had escaped with former citizens of Constantinople, most shedding tears at the day's events. In Constantinople however, only one of the conquering Ottomans shed tears. Sultan Mehmet II walked through the streets and buildings after the battle, cheered by his troops for his brilliant military planning leading to the victory. However, the sight of so many dead, of blood-filled streets, of the destruction of an empire, caused him to stop near the Byzantine Cathedral, Hagia Sofia, and weep. He sat down on a pile of rubble and remained for a while, with his head in his hands. When he arose, he noticed a piece of parchment sticking out from the rubble and picked it up. The writing was in Greek and appeared to be fairly recent. Since it was so close to the Church, it had probably been written by one of the priests or administrators. Mehmet read it:

“I have withstood the month of bombardment of our city and am sure that the end of our civilization is at hand. I write the following Lament for my beloved Byzantium, now lost. I hope that God willing, it will be found by someone and remain as a tiny ember that will

keep the flame of our great civilization alive for posterity.”

‘Offspring of the sons of Romulus and daughters of Athena, nurtured by the god Ares, adorned with a crown of jewels and with pearls, wrapped in finest silk from afar, conceived with a body astride two mighty continents and a soul destined for heaven, noble Byzantium, you were nurtured as a child by the spirits of Athena’s ancestral gods. It was Plato and Socrates that gave you your reasoning, it was Aristotle who breathed his knowledge and wisdom into you. And as your childhood passed and your body grew in strength, you heeded the lessons of your forefathers, Caesar and Constantine.

Who could threaten you with such strength and wisdom flowing through the blood in your veins? The only strength that no other man, the world nor demonic spirits could ever overcome was Christos. Like a father, He was also in you. However, as a man in his prime, it was only you yourself who could diminish or destroy the strength within you. It is the spirit that when controlled, wields domination over the body and the body drifts with the spirit. Sadly, your spirit slowly sailed away from the secure moorings of your ancestral fathers and mothers and was set adrift. As a man aging and weakened by rejecting your ancestors, your enemy, an offspring of the spirit of destruction, first nipped at your heels and then further emboldened, slowly devoured your feet, your hands, your legs, and your arms. And your ancestral fathers and mothers in spirit neither could nor would any longer help you. You wandered further adrift. Soon,

your whole body was consumed, and now, of your body, only memories remain, memories that speak of glory, magnificence, might, courage, and salvation. Sadly, memories of the offspring of destruction that consumed you also remain and they speak of terror, subjugation, never-ending war and condemnation’.

Mehmet kept the paper for the rest of his life. He was able to read Greek and was a collector of ancient writings. After the defeat of Constantinople, his Sultanate was noted for supporting writers of poetry and literature, both Muslim and non-Muslim. The parchment he found near Saint Sofia was copied and several copies were located amongst his personal effects when he died.

The ships that had escaped from Constantinople had an uneventful journey to Shengjin. Cargo was picked up in Heraklion and the weather was good, with a strong breeze to speed up their journey. Many of those on the ship had started to return to a semblance of normality. Everyone realized that the Byzantine Empire was no more and returning to Constantinople for them was impossible, at least for now. Maybe the future held the possibility of their children returning; maybe the Turks would alter the harsh policies against non-Muslims, or maybe they would see that they needed to replace the skilled administrators and tradesmen that had been murdered, sold into slavery, or escaped. For many, their future was held hostage to a belief that they might be able to return to Constantinople someday, or if not them, their children. Others had spent time on the ship enquiring about various places that might take them in. Some would be disembarking in Shengjin, others would sail on to Venice since there was a colony of Greek exiles and merchants there.

In early June 1453, the ship docked at Shengjin, Albania. Father Glinatsis, Michael and his family, Kudret, Maria, Sophia, a single woman whose parents had been murdered, and six single men left the ship there. Kudret was very anxious to start his journey back to his village. Michael and Father Glinatsis could see this, so they made Kudret their priority. Since Father spoke no Albanian, he wrote a note for Kudret in Greek and gave it to him to deliver to Father Dhamo, the priest at St. Nicholas' church in Lezhe. It explained who Kudret was and requested that the priest help him on his way to his village by supplying him with a horse. Father also included sufficient money for the horse. Kudret was very happy and thanked both of them. In Turkish, Father wished him good luck and told him to pray for God's forgiveness. As Father was saying these words in Turkish, Kudret and Michael looked at each other slyly and stifled grins. They both complimented Father on his Turkish. Flattery necessarily borders on lying at times. With that, Kudret was on his way to the church in Lezhe. The others who had disembarked found accommodation for a few nights near the harbor. Communication was not a major problem, since some people near the port spoke several Italian dialects and Greek. This was so because of the influence of the former Byzantine empire and the many Venetian, Genoese, and other ships that stopped at Shengjin.

The next day, Kudret found St. Nicholas's church and met Father Dhamo as he was working outside. The priest spoke Albanian since he was born nearby. As a Byzantine priest, he was able to read the Greek note from Father Glinatsis. Kudret was happy to be able to speak Albanian again. After enjoying the hospitality of the priest and a

simple meal, he paid for the horse and was on his way to his village. The journey would take a little over two days, so he would have to sleep out on the road for two nights. He was fortunate that the directions given to him by Father Dhamo were very accurate. The second night, he could not sleep due to the excitement and anticipation of being able to see his parents and friends the next day. Then, a terrible thought occurred to him; what if one or both of his parents were dead? He could not decide how he would handle that. Better to get there and see. Finally, the day arrived. He was in the village early in the morning. He tethered his horse and walked quietly to his parent's house. He peered in a back window and was happy to see both of his parents alive and looking well. So, he went around to the front of the house and knocked on the door. His father opened the door and was at first stunned to see his son, then he hugged him and hollered for his wife to come to the door. When she saw her son, she started crying and hugged and kissed him. Their conversation was an amalgam of uncontrollable joy, compliments, and interruptions, as they all tried to speak at once. Events were going exactly as Kudret had imagined. He was looking forward to seeing others and anticipating more joyous receptions and a return to his old life. In this, he was to be sadly mistaken.

Merchants had traveled from Kudret's village to the port of Shengjin to haggle over the price of goods brought in by ships. They would be back in a few days, with wares to sell - and detailed knowledge of the atrocities in Constantinople. Kudret enjoyed the next few days. However, the atmosphere started to change, imperceptibly at first. He was now being asked more details about his life as a Janissary. He could only repeat

the same general stories a few times before more details would be required about the Janissaries, details that would be damning if told. Everyone knew that Sultan's agents came to villages, looking for boys to take for training as Janissaries, and Kudret was one of the boys who had been taken years ago.

Three days after Kudret's arrival back home, the merchants returned to the village and told all who would listen what they had heard about the fall of Constantinople – the savagery of the bombardment, the murders, raping, pillaging, selling of people as slaves and desecration of the churches – and the participation of the Janissaries. These stories were from eyewitnesses who had escaped from the ship Kudret was on, and other Venetian ships that had docked in Shengjin. What had been a barely perceptible trickle of uncertainty about Kudret now became a deluge of accusations and desires for vengeance. Everyone knew Kudret had been a Janissary. Everyone had heard the horrific tales regarding Constantinople. Everyone now knew that the Janissaries had played a big role in the horrors at Constantinople. Kudret had already mentioned that he had sailed on the Venetian ship. Now, the merchants had told everyone that that ship had carried escapees from Constantinople. What was Kudret doing on that ship if he was not somehow involved in the fighting at Constantinople? Kudret was now taunted with cries of Christian killer, baby killer, and rapist. Although there was talk of mob vengeance meted out to Kudret, that never materialized. The people knew that as a trained Janissary, it would be foolhardy to try and fight him with bare hands or even knives or swords. In addition, if word got out to the Ottoman officials that villagers had beaten

or killed a Janissary, there would be severe retribution. Kudret took refuge in his parent's house, but his father was becoming agitated with his son. To try and defuse the situation, he reverted to being called by his birth name, Gjergi, jettisoning his Turkish name. That turned out to be a useless attempt to garner support. One day, his father asked him directly, "Did you kill Christians and rape women? You were there, so don't lie to me". He hesitated and then said, "Father, you don't understand the situation of..." Before he could finish his sentence, his father interrupted and asked him again if he had killed Christians or raped any women, this time with anger in his voice. Gjergi could no longer take the badgering, the insults from former friends, the hostility from his own family. He blurted out, "Yes, of course, I killed Christians. What do you think a Muslim army does? Who do you think they fight against? Other Muslims? You are a fool. You have no idea what it was like to be kidnapped in front of parents and friends and to go through the Janissary training. You and the other men in the village stood by with long faces, weeping like women instead of acting like men, and not one of you lifted a finger to rescue your own sons, the future of this stinking village". No more about this was said in the house for the next few days.

Then, one morning, a cry went up by one of the workers in the fields, "The Ottomans are coming". This caused fear in the villagers. Were they coming to take more boys away? As they approached the village square, people could see that this was a different group than they were used to dealing with. This appeared to be a military group. Finally, they arrived in the square and the leader said, "Please find the parents of Gjergi Celaj, whose Muslim name was Kudret, and bring them here

immediately”. No one knew what was going on. Gjergi heard their command and pleaded with his father not to mention that he was hiding in his house. His father said, “I detest what you've become, what you've done, but you're my son and I won't tell them that you're here”. Gjergi was shocked, having been almost certain that his father would tell the officials that he was in the house. Finally, the frightened parents came before the military group. This was the first such meeting in their village. The group leader said, in a very formal manner, “We are here to give you the sad news that your son, Gjergi, called Kudret, was killed in the battle of Constantinople. His bravery and loyalty were without question and we convey our sympathy to you and his family. You have the right to be proud of him. Here are his belongings and his final salary for this month”. That ended their message. The officials were in no doubt that Kudret had been killed in battle. Many Ottoman soldiers had lost their lives and not all of the bodies had been recovered, nor would they be. Besides, any Janissary who was wounded or lost would eventually return. It was unthinkable that any Janissary would desert.

As the officials were leaving, one of the villagers cried out, “Gjergi, or Kudret, or whatever that swine wishes to call himself, is not dead. He's hiding in that house”. He pointed to the house where Gjergi was. The military group stopped dead in their tracks, turned around, saw the house being pointed to, and the leader said, “If you're telling the truth, you will be rewarded. If you're lying, you'll pay a heavy price”. Some of the soldiers raced to the house and surrounded it as two more entered. They found Gjergi and dragged him outside. Some of the villagers identified him, so there would be no doubt. The military

commander was furious and, as an Ottoman official, pronounced the death sentence on him, to be carried out after his grave was dug. Gjergi did not resist. Finally, when the grave had been dug, he knelt down, and with one swift stroke of the sword, he was decapitated. His body and head were dumped angrily in the grave. The military commander spat on the body now lying in the grave, grabbed the salary money back from Gjergi's father, gave half to the informant, and threw the rest onto the corpse. No one knew, but the jewels Kudret had stolen from the church chalice during the battle of Constantinople, were in his pants pocket, now buried with him.

A New Life

Michael and his family, Father Glinatsis, Maria, Sophia, and the six single men who had disembarked with Kudret, spent several days in Shengjin. Thanks to the sympathy and generosity of the church and the locals, they were able to find free rooms and meals near the port. However, the days had not been fruitful in helping them find directions in their individual lives. The recent tragic event in Constantinople still weighed heavily on all of them. In addition, the idea of finding a new direction in their lives had been thrust upon them suddenly. Father and Michael could talk of possibly going to Rome, Genoa, or Venice. So, although they discussed these cities with enthusiasm, the chances of them finding high positions in Rome or Genoa were unlikely. Father Glinatsis was indeed a priest, but a Byzantine priest. The rift between the Latin church in Rome and the Greek-speaking church in the former Byzantine empire led to a bilateral excommunication in 1056. He could not thus be a priest in

the Latin-speaking Roman Catholic church anywhere in Italy, nor did he want to be, given the mutual animosity between the Byzantine church and Rome.

Three of the single men who had been farm workers in Constantinople, had their dreams and possibilities limited by their lack of knowledge outside of the confines of their city. These three were at the mercy of anyone who could tell them or lead them to where any opportunity was. All they knew was that they did not want to live under Ottoman Muslim threat anymore. Sophia dreamed that marriage would be her lot some day, whereas Maria was still in a state of confusion and could not contemplate a change in her life at this time. However, both being unaccompanied women, they were completely dependent upon traveling with males; their destinations were out of their hands at the moment. Two of the remaining single men from Constantinople, Stauracius, and Constantine, had been low-level government officials. They were going to follow the lead of Michael, wherever that took them. Being low-level bureaucrats and having been given jobs due to their family connections, they did not have much drive or individualistic spirit in them. As always for them, the safe course would be taken, and in this instance that meant following on the coattails of Michael. In their favor, Michael liked them and was very fond of their families.

The remaining single man, Nicholas, had been a merchant, buying wholesale goods from Genoese and Venetian ships and then selling those goods in Constantinople's markets. He was a shrewd businessman and often played the Genoese ships off against the Venetian ships and vice-versa. Many were the times when getting a price from one of the ship's captains, he would walk away saying that the other ship had the very same

goods at thirty percent less. Often, it worked, and he would get his desired price. Captains of ships changed frequently, so his ruse was usually not known by a new captain. Nicholas had a very good understanding of several Italian dialects, so, of all the people disembarking at Shengjin, he had the best opportunity of finding a good position in various cities in Italy. However, his years of haggling with ship captains from Venice and Genoa left a negative impression on him so he did not want to live in either of those cities.

Amidst the doldrums of trying over and over not only to foresee the future but control it, Father Glinatsis decided that a respite was necessary. So, he visited his priest friend, Father Dhamo, at St. Nicholas's church in Lezhe. With initial conversational formalities between the two priests at an end, and with those formalities having included a description of all of Father Glinatsis's companions from the ship, Father Dhamo pondered in silence for several minutes, minutes that seemed like an eternity to Father Glinatsis.

The silence was becoming uncomfortable when Dhamo started jabbing his finger at Father Glinatsis and with a grin said, "I've listened to you talk about your friends from the ship and have some news that just might be helpful, not only for you but for every one of your traveling companions from Constantinople. Skanderbeg, our leader of the League of Lezhe, will be here in a few days. He and a few other members of the League will be meeting to discuss matters regarding the Ottomans. It's ironic that only five weeks before the horrible tragedy in Constantinople, Skanderbeg had completely routed a secondary force of Mehmed's at Polog. He's kept much of our beloved land free from Muslim domination. If only

God had seen fit to have Skanderbeg fighting alongside our dead heroes and martyrs at Constantinople, you would be celebrating a mass in Hagia Sophia, giving thanks to God for His almighty hand in defending Constantinople. The League will be meeting here in the church. I'll make introductions and can guarantee you and all of your friends a brief meeting with Skanderbeg. But you must all show the utmost respect for a man of his stature”.

Skanderbeg was born Gjergj Kastrioti in 1405 in Sine, Albania. Due to politics, his father had to send him as a hostage at the age of 18, to the Sultan. He became an influential fighter for the Sultan and rose through the ranks of the Ottomans and was given his Turkish nickname Skanderbeg then. Love for his native Albania and its people, and weariness of fighting against Christians led him to desert the Ottoman forces in 1443 and start fighting against them, winning many battles in Albania. Ironically, some of his latest battles were against Sultan Mehmed. Skanderbeg's forces usually emerged victorious. His skill in fighting the Ottomans inspired other important Albanian families to join forces with him. These families formed the League of Lezhe around 1444 and Skanderbeg was appointed leader. In 1448, at the behest of King Alfonso V, the Spanish Aragonese ruler of Naples and Sicily, Skanderbeg helped quell a rebellion in one of Alfonso's Italian provinces. He had sent Albanian troops to aid Alfonso and they were successful in ending the rebellion. Alfonso showed his gratitude by making the Albanian general Reres governor of the province of Calabria. Alfonso also gave land to some of the Albanian troops who had fought for him. A number of these troops

had brought their families with them, so they were able to establish small Albanian enclaves in Italy.

Three days after the two priests met, Father Glinatsis arranged for all of his group to make the journey to Lheze, where Skanderbeg and other members of the League would be meeting. Whilst informalities were being discussed by League members, Father Dhamo approached them and said that he had a group of people that would like to meet with them briefly in private. There was a general sense of annoyance. One of the League generals said, “Why must we postpone important matters to receive more insincere flattery and inane questions from people who know nothing of fighting against a bloodthirsty enemy? Let them go to church and pray for our success in upcoming battles. Much better yet, let them go or not go to church, but have them make generous contributions towards our military campaigns – and the devil to them if they pray for us or not”. Father replied, “Begging all of your indulgences, but you see, all of these people are survivors of the terrible tragedies at Constantinople, just a short while ago. Many of them watched in horror as parents, spouses, and children were butchered before their eyes. They risked death to try and escape and for some reason, God saw fit to allow this. They are demoralized and have lost their homes and families forever, whereas we, with the protection of you, our most God-worthy servants and mighty warriors, are able to retain our lands. Perhaps I am wrong, but I thought that there might be a small chance to allow these poor wretches to meet with you and seek your advice as to where they might go now that their lives have been completely shattered. Again, I may be wrong, and pray to God that I am not insulting any of you, but I thought,

perhaps unjustly, that even the smallest words of advice from you, or mercy shown, would do more to uplift these wretches' lives than anything I, a humble servant of God, could do. I thank you for allowing me this intrusion on your matters of utmost importance and will convey your best wishes to them. I am sure that doing so, although technically a lie, will be forgiven by our God most Holy. Again, I apologize for my impudence in asking an unjust favor". Father's overplayed ploy of faux humility worked. The League members felt embarrassed by their misreading of the situation and not knowing about the horrors witnessed by these people. As Father was leaving, one of the League's members said, "Give us a few minutes to discuss this and we will certainly meet with them". All heads nodded in enthusiastic assent. Father Dhamo turned and faced them and bowed repeatedly on his way out of the room. Having dealt with the Ottomans on several occasions in another village not under the League's protection, he knew that using false humility to humiliate an exalted opponent worked more often than not. His recall of the Biblical passage of Luke 14:11 helped him in this instance.

"For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but the one who humbles himself shall be exalted".

After a few minutes, one of the League members exited the room and told Father Dhamo to bring in his group. Upon entering the room and seeing Skanderbeg, they were awestruck by his imposing figure. His military bearing was accented by a long flowing beard and a helmet of menacing design. Father Dhamo introduced each one and translated their stories from Greek to

Albanian. When all of the tragic stories had finished, there was silence, but it was the calm before the storm. Finally, one of the League members slammed his fist on the table as he cursed the destruction of Constantinople and the misery caused to so many. He thundered, “Go out and give us some time to discuss this matter. I can promise you that we will do something to help you – every one of you”. Michael and the rest of the group left the room. Back inside, there was silence. Finally, one member said to Skanderbeg, “You have familiarity with King Alfonso V. You signed a treaty with him several years ago. Isn’t that true”? “Yes, we signed the Treaty of Gaeta two years ago. He’s in control of Naples and much of Southern Italy and sent Ramon d’Ortaffa and a troop of Aragonese soldiers here to help us fight the Turks. But we can’t ask him for money for these people”. “No, not money – that’s not what I’m thinking. With Alfonso in control of southern Italy and with there being no Ottoman or other Muslim enclaves in mainland Italy, why not have these people go there? We can easily have them accompany our soldiers and officials who will be traveling to Bari, and then to meet with Alfonso in Naples. It won’t be much of an added expense for us. Once in Italy, they will be on their own. A few of them, the clever ones, will have enough wits about them to make it all the way to Naples. We’ll have done a good deed in finding a potential new life for these poor wretches. Then it’ll be up to them to take advantage of what we’re giving them. And, let’s not forget gentlemen, good deeds properly publicized, say here, in Rome with the Pope, in our native Albania, and with King Alfonso, will undoubtedly equal more donations for our military cause, of course, not to mention more prayers and possibly more political influence with Rome in the future.

Remember that the Pope may not like the Orthodox faith, but he does like acts of Christian charity and soldiers who join in the fight with Catholic Kings". This elicited laughter. Then, slowly, every head nodded in agreement. Michael and the others were called back into the room. When they were told that the League members had agreed to allow all of them to accompany their soldiers and agents on the next trip to Bari, they were ecstatic. The bowing, hand-kissing, and promises of daily prayers for the League's battles would have gone on for an hour had not Father Dhamo gently ushered the Constantinople group out of the room.

The obstacles that this unlikely collection of people had overcome, both individually and collectively, were many. Now, there remained yet another obstacle; money was in short supply. Michael had been able to take some with him when he fled Constantinople. Nicholas had done the same. The two women did have some valuable jewelry that they had hidden, but the subject of having them sell said jewelry had not yet been broached. Father Glinatsis had very little money left, having given the majority of it to Kudret for purchasing a horse. The other five single men had next to nothing. The generosity of the ship's captain in providing free transport and very meager rations was an unexpected help, as was the generosity of the townspeople and church of Shengjin, and Father Dhamo's congregation in Lezhe. Now with a trip to Bari assured, it would be necessary to purchase some supplies for the journey. Fortunately, the Albanian contingent would pay for some of the food on the way to Bari. But Michael and the rest of the group knew that transport, food, and lodging in Italy would require money. The idea of being destitute in Italy was frightening. Obtaining

money was now their top priority; something had to be done soon since the Albanian contingent was due to leave for Bari in a few days.

The day after the meeting with the League, Michael and Nicholas were walking. They had had little to do with each other up to this point. Michael had been a career bureaucrat and always moved in Emperor Constantine's circle and was well-liked. His popularity, competence at his job, tact, and diplomacy ensured that he would have had a high position for life. On the other hand, Nicholas had been used to the rough and tumble ways of buying and selling, haggling at each phase of marketing, and not averse to using less-than-noble ways of negotiating. While they were walking, Michael groaned over and over, "What are we to do? How can we get any money for the trip to Bari? Are we now doomed after the journey we've just survived"? Nicholas replied, but not in his usual bombastic, over-confident manner. "There might be a way for us to procure some money. While walking by the docks the other day, I overheard some officials talking about a Venetian ship arriving tomorrow, and what cargo it might be carrying. Because they're in the employ of the Venetian shipping company, they spoke in Italian. I heard them talk about the Administrator for all Venetian ships arriving here, Marco Spinelli. Apparently, he just left on a ship bound for Constantinople to try and negotiate new trade agreements with the Ottomans. Normally, he meets incoming ships from Venice and handles the cargo. With Spinelli gone, it might be hours before another agent is sent to the incoming ship. That will give us time to meet the captain on arrival. I'll tell him that I am Marco Spinelli and maybe he will let us have some of the goods on board. Anyway, the ship will probably dock just after dawn. With

a bit of luck and the usual disorganization of the Venetians, we might get the captain to release some of the goods to us; glass from Murano, silks, spices, and other merchandise. We would only take merchandise that could be sold right away to other merchants, townspeople, and agents for other ships. Then, we could sell it and use the money for the trip. What do you think?” “That would be stealing”, replied Michael. “No, no, you don’t see. What we sell, we use to repay the captain. By the time he figures out what has happened, we should be able to sell enough to pay him back and make enough for our trip to Bari and then some. And, if everything doesn’t sell, we can give it back to the captain”. “Would enough be earned to pay for all of us?” “All of us? All of us? What are you talking about, all of us? If you help me, then you and I split the money”, Nicholas retorted. Michael’s interest was piqued, but he was not about to abandon the others. “What if we get a few of the others to help sell the goods? More hands selling means getting rid of more merchandise sooner. That would allow us to use the money for everyone. I’m not going to participate in anything that’ll abandon any of our group”. “All right, a good idea. You, me, and one or two of the lads can do the selling. We’ll need the others to unload and set up the merchandise. By the way, it would be pointless to ask Father to help. It would be better not to mention this to him”.

Just as Michael was beginning to think that this might work, a thought entered his mind that cast doubts on even trying the scheme. “Wait a minute. So you speak Italian and can bargain with the captain. None of us speak Albanian. It could be difficult to sell much here unless we only dealt with Italian and Greek-speaking merchants. We need to think of something else”. Nicholas

just laughed and said, “True, I don’t speak Albanian, but I speak the language of all sellers – finger language”. “What is your finger language?” “You put the merchandise in front of you. When someone looks at one of the items, you pick it up or point to it yourself and hold out the number of fingers that it costs. Simple. Everyone understands that”. Michael agreed that it could work. He now had a grudging admiration for this bombastic, pushy man. Aglow with the confidence of the possibility of procuring some much-needed money, they went back to their accommodation and told the other men about their plan. All agreed to help with the merchandise and all agreed not to tell Father. When the money was in hand, they could say to Father that the League of Lezhe members, in their benevolence, had donated the money.

The next morning just as dawn was breaking, the seven men went to the port where the Venetian ship was just docking. When the captain appeared on deck, Nicholas hollered up to him, “We’re here to put some of the Venetian glass and other items in storage for the merchants to pick up later”. “What? Who are you?” “I’m Marco Spinelli”, replied Nicholas, confident that his ruse would work. “Ah, Marco, good to see you again. It’s been a while and I didn’t recognize you. My apologies, my eyesight must be fading. Before I unload the merchandise for you, tell me dear cousin, what’s the name of our grandmother back in Venice, and is it calamari nel suo tinta or vitello that she prefers for dinner? Get out of here you imposter, you thief, you liar, before I contact the police”. Seven dejected men walked slowly back to their rooms. Their incredible luck had just run out in a most unlikely way. What were the chances that the one name that Nicholas had used would be a close relative of the

captain? When they got back to their rooms, they all went to sleep, a sleep that would be devoid of any happy dreams.

Later that day, Father Dhamo paid a visit to Father Glinatsis. The others had arisen and gathered together with the two priests. “There’s still fallout from the defeat of Constantinople. It has come to our shores, just this morning”, said Father Dhamo. “A ship bound for Constantinople, with a full load, had to remain here. There’s a complete blockade of the harbor. I feel sorry for the captain and crew. They won’t make anything on this voyage, and their families will suffer. With an already loaded ship, there’s nothing they can haul back to Venice”. Nicholas stood up and motioned to Michael and the five others to go outside with him. “This is our opportunity. The captain we confronted earlier will be looking to unload his cargo here at a low price so he can pick up cargo for transport back to Venice. If he doesn’t get rid of what is on his ship, he’ll go back to Venice with what he started with. He won’t make any profit, his crew will make nothing and they’ll be angry. The captain will be desperate to sell. Let’s go down to the dock again”. When they arrived back at the dock, Nicholas approached the boat with a swagger. He yelled to the captain on board, “So, I’m a thief and you’re going to call the police, eh? Well, I’m willing to let your insult pass. What are you going to do with your cargo now? I’m willing to buy it from you so that you can unload and take another shipment back to Venice. You see, despite your poor treatment of me, I’m going to help you”. The captain smiled and retorted, “You fool, this load of merchandise bound for Constantinople was paid for in advance. I’ve already received my money, so stop annoying me. Instructions

were that only an agent of the former Emperor Constantine could take possession of any part of this load. Otherwise, it goes back to Venice. Am I right in assuming that with all of your polish and honesty displayed today that you're an agent of Constantine"?

Nicholas fumed at being rebuffed and humiliated a second time. Indignant, he told Michael and the others what the captain had said. Michael could not believe what he had just heard. He blurted out, "Nicholas, tell the captain that I'm an agent of Constantine and have the royal seal here in my pocket". He pulled out his official seal and showed it to Nicholas. "Captain, this man with me is an agent of Emperor Constantine and he has the Royal seal to prove it. Can we come onto your ship and show you"? Reluctantly, the captain allowed them to come aboard and Michael showed him the seal. It matched the seal on the merchandise. "Well, this is most unusual, but I can see that you have the proper identification. I'm therefore authorized to allow you to take possession of this cargo. How do you wish to proceed"? Michael would soon be in his element again, using charm and diplomacy to negotiate, even if he had to use a rather crude instrument in the person of Nicholas for translation purposes. He knew that he could not possibly deal with a shipload of merchandise. He suggested to the captain, via Nicholas, that he and his group help sell all of the merchandise now on board, at a lowered market price, here in Shengjin. There were many merchants and other ships present, some empty, so this would not be difficult. This would greatly enrich the captain, his crew, and Michael's group. Michael also pointed out that if the captain did sell everything, he would be able to pick up a full load to take back to Venice. Thus, the captain would

be profiting enormously. Given all of that, Michael said that he would agree to split the profit from the sale of the ship's cargo captain fifty-fifty; but he wanted a money of account note from the Venetian company for an amount equal to fifty percent of an agreed-upon estimate of the value of the Venetian goods, due by tomorrow. Finally, Michael apologized profusely for the conduct of his merchant friend; that was painful for Nicholas to translate. After explaining the trials that they had been through, the captain was sympathetic and no longer angry. After discussing the matter with the officials of the Venetian company, an agreed estimate of the value of the goods was confirmed by both parties. Michael was given the note the next day. One official asked him where he was going. When he responded "Italy", the official said that there would be no problem using the money of account note there. The note could be presented at various centers, some money withdrawn on the note, and a new note issued for an amount less the money withdrawn. Venetian ships and agents were well known (but not always well-liked) and the note would be honored everywhere in Italy.

Now, Michael's group not only had enough money for their journey to Bari but Michael was well-set financially for life. In a brief moment, he had earned several times more than he would have earned for the remainder of his career in Constantinople. Nicholas was upset that he had been humiliated twice by the captain, but that paled in insignificance to him being upstaged in a business transaction by a mere civil servant. Never wanting to concede defeat, he quickly devised a new scheme. "Well done, Michael. You are indeed a master at negotiating and I see that you've been a scrupulously honest man,

concerned for the welfare of all of our little group. I also see from how you negotiated with the captain that you're a fair man and struck a fair bargain for both yourself and the captain. I'd like to remind you that it was I who first thought of this plan and I also interpreted for you. Surely you would want to compensate me for my efforts, in the name of fairness. Had it not been for me, you wouldn't have made such a fantastic bargain". "My dear Nicholas, had it not been for me, there would be no money available for us to be talking about right now. You now have guaranteed passage to Bari and I will see to it that your food, transport, and lodging will be taken care of in Italy, until we part ways there. That's a bargain that you would not have but for me". Michael then started walking back to their rooms. Nicholas was angry with Michael but did not bring the matter up again. He had no control over the situation and he knew it. A bruised ego with money was a better prize than a bruised ego without money.

As often happened, the scheduled departure for Bari was delayed for several days. This allowed the group to get everything ready for their journey to a new life. It also allowed all of them to say farewell to Father Dharmo in Lezhe, and some of the townspeople of Shengjin who had helped them out with lodging. By default, it appeared that Michael had become the leader of the group over time. He now saw a potential problem that Nicholas could resolve. None of their group spoke Italian dialects, except Nicholas. Not being able to communicate would be a huge disadvantage once they arrived in Italy, especially for the two single women. He approached Nicholas and said that his service in teaching the others some basic Italian would be most helpful. Ever the diplomat, he first flattered Nicholas, hoping to assuage his ego that had been so

sorely deflated. He told Nicholas that the future success or failure of every member of this group now depended largely on him and his ability to teach the others some basic Italian. He offered Nicholas the pay equivalent of an extra day's worth of food and lodging for each day the group was still together and he was involved in improving their language skills. Now, in a veiled threat with comforting words, he also told Nicholas that if he couldn't agree to these terms, then he would be forced to hire someone in town to accompany them to Bari and teach them basic Italian; thus, his promise of paying for every day's food and lodging for Nicholas would, unfortunately, have to be canceled, the money being needed for the new teacher. Nicholas weighed up the advantages and disadvantages for himself and found that, even with another humiliation from Michael, he would be further ahead financially in Italy if he accepted the offer. He only had enough money to live in Italy for several weeks. Nicholas always reduced everything to a business transaction and if he came out ahead financially, it was worth it. The cost of arriving in Italy with more money than anticipated came with the price of a little humiliation. He could agree to that and accepted Michael's offer. During the remaining time in Shengjin, the group did well with the language and seemed to be progressing. However, out of necessity, it was the two women who were learning Italian faster than the others.

Finally, the day of departure arrived. Everything had been readied before, and all goodbyes had been said. The ship would set sail in less than an hour, with no more delays. While Father Glinatsis was standing on the dock waiting to board the ship, he overheard a few merchants speaking in Greek. He joined in their conversation and

told them of his group's escape from Constantinople. They were very sympathetic and had to fight back tears upon hearing of the horrific details. As Father started to leave them and board the ship, he heard them talk about the same village that Kudret had gone back to. He turned to them and said; "One of our group was a dear friend who was originally from your village. You must surely know him. Can you tell me how Kudret is doing now that he's back with his family"? There was a palpable change in the congenial atmosphere and one of the merchants retorted, "You harbored that traitor on your ship? That murderer, that rapist? You didn't turn him in to the authorities? We have no more time to waste on you. May God punish you and send you to the same place as that agent of Satan. He was sent to his final judgment without his head". Father was stung by this outburst and wondered about the eternal fate of Kudret as the ship set sail for Bari.

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Sahih Bukhari Volume 9, Book 84, Hadith Number 64

CHAPTER 2 – ARRIVAL IN ITALY



Figure 2. Map of Italy, 15th Century, showing fragmentation into separate states. Map courtesy of the United States Military Academy Department of History.



Figure 3. Map of Southern Italy showing position of Montaguto (circle).
Map courtesy of the United States Military Academy
Department of History, modified.

Fortune smiled on the group as they made their way to Bari. Father Glinatsis and Michael had made good friends on the ship with the Lezhe League delegation. The Albanians were familiar with Bari and the Strada delle Puglie, the major road going from Foggia to Naples. They

were due to meet with King Alfonso¹ of Aragon, the ruler of Naples and Sicily. There were more Ottoman threats to Albania and, as per the Treaty of Gaeta that King Alfonso and Skanderbeg had signed, there might be a need for Alfonso to send reinforcements to Albania. Jonuz, one of the Albanians who would be leading the trek to Naples, told Father and Michael that they would be in Bari for two days. “Father, Michael, I suggest that you and your group accompany us by ship to Manfredonia. A ship is leaving in two days. It’s only a short journey from Bari. We’ll travel to Foggia and then take the road across to Naples to meet with His Excellency, Alfonso. It’s a bit longer than going directly from Bari, but the road is well-traveled and mostly level. Besides, I have a sister who lives in Greci and we’re going to stop there and visit. Maybe one of the villages that we pass on the way will be where you or others in your group will be able to live. If not, you’re welcome to come with us all the way to Naples”.

Jonuz’s sister had married an Italian from Greci, a village near Montaguto. He had been in the military when Alfonso sent him and other soldiers to Albania to help Skanderbeg fight the Ottomans. While in Albania, he met Jonuz’s sister and married her. Whether it was love, lust, or loneliness that brought them together, expediency pointed to a better life far away from the Ottoman Turks. So, after the fighting ended, they both returned to Greci, his birthplace. Knowing that every new day would be one spent free from continuous threat from the Ottomans and

¹ King Alfonso’s titles were Alfonso V of Sicily and Alfonso I of Naples. At this time, Sicily and Naples were separate Kingdoms, with an occasional history of different Spanish Monarchs; hence, the different titles for King Alfonso.

life as Christians under the yoke of Islam, was as irresistible to them as was the siren song to Jason.

Father and Michael told the rest of the group the offer that the Albanians had made, to take the ship to Manfredonia and then travel across to Naples. Nicholas didn't hesitate and agreed. As always, he was thinking of whether this was in his financial interest. He had already seen that the Albanian contingent had very good contacts – lodging and food had been given to the group gratis in Bari. This made perfect sense to Nicholas. The Albanians were traveling across Italy to meet with King Alfonso, who controlled Southern Italy. The king would certainly have agents in many towns and these agents would be able to procure food and lodging for this very important Albanian delegation, and anyone else who traveled with them. He also knew that, with a day's travel to Manfredonia, a day to Foggia, and then several weeks to Naples, the Albanians would have most of their food and lodging taken care of free – and so would he. But if he chose to set out on his own, he would have to start spending his own money; also, leaving the group would mean that his salary for teaching Italian would end. Nicholas had done the financial calculations well.

The three farm laborers from Constantinople told Michael that they would be leaving the group. “We've found some people who speak Greek here in Bari and there's work for laborers like us. It would be better for us to stay here. Although it's getting easier, it's still a slight problem for us to communicate with these Italians. And God willing, we'll never be under the rule of the Ottomans again”. There was a personal sadness felt by the other group members, but an understanding that these young men saw an opportunity here and were going to take

advantage of it. Besides, the three of them staying together would be good for their chances in a new country.

Maria didn't seem able to make her mind up when asked if she wanted to go with the rest of the group to Manfredonia. There was no expression on her face. She was always very quiet, or so it seemed. The day prior, she had confided to Sophia that she felt that she was pregnant, telling her that she had not experienced a period for almost two months. Maria was going through the days since escaping on the ship, in a fog. One day melted into another; reality and fantasy were one and the same; some days she would awake and think that this was all a bad joke, that she was in Constantinople and her two children were outside waiting for her. That fantasy was now joined by a new one - probably being pregnant, a prince or high-ranking aristocrat would marry her and her life, as known in Constantinople, would resume. But, as the others waited impatiently for her to say yes or no, she snapped out of her self-imposed fantasy world and muttered yes, she would go with the group.

Sophia was very enthusiastic and said yes. She was looking forward to finding somewhere to settle down and had a slim hope of eventually marrying. She knew that she would be competing with local women for the attention of potential husbands, so that was a constant concern. Her limited option was to improve her Italian, and even that would not put her on an even level with local women. Perhaps Naples would be her best option since there must be many women there who were foreigners. She had been used to living in a cosmopolitan city and Naples might suit her.

Out of courtesy for what they had gone through, they were asked if they wanted to stay with the group. In reality, Maria and Sophia had little choice but to travel with the men; unaccompanied foreign women would have a very hard time surviving.

Father and Michael had made their minds up as soon as the offer was made. They would go to Manfredonia and then to Naples. Stauracius and Constantine, the two low-level bureaucrats from Constantinople, also agreed to go, believing it inopportune to cut ties with Michael. Michael's wife was content to go along with his decision and obviously, their two children would also be going. Michael's new-found wealth was an insurance policy that would almost guarantee that he could not fail. So, ten of them planned to continue to Manfredonia.

Early that evening, Nicholas told Michael that he had something important to discuss and that Michael's wife and children should also be present, for what he had to say would affect them. Michael was very suspicious of this. What possible benefit would there be in having his wife and children there? They would not be making the decision, he alone would do so. But, then again, if they were not involved in the decision, there would be no harm in letting them hear what Nicholas had to say. So, he decided to have Theodora and the children present. They met later that evening. "Michael, Theodora, children, I'm very grateful that you've come to hear what I have to say. Michael has proven to be a true leader in guiding our tragic little group from Constantinople to this place. He's also been like a father to all of us, listening to our problems and helping all of us financially when he didn't have to do so. He demonstrated a sense of business that even I, an old hand at business, was amazed at. And for

you and the children, he's been able to amass a small fortune that will ensure a good life for all of you. Michael, I'm sincere in what I am about to propose. Let's both go to Naples. Form a partnership with me in commerce. Naples is a big port, as was Constantinople. Your expertise in administration and diplomacy and mine in buying, selling, and always negotiating the best price, will ensure the success of such an enterprise. And it's true that I must ask for your help in financing this partnership, because I lost all that I had in Constantinople. For that reason, I can't ask for a fifty percent share but would be content with forty percent. You may think that too high, given that you will be financing the start of our business. But don't forget, I speak Italian and can get us business and make money from the very first day. There've been ups and downs in the few weeks that we've been together, but it's time to put that behind us and make a good life for all of us in our new country. I'll leave you and your family to consider my suggestion. I now bid all of you good night”.

Michael was stunned. Good actors in Greek plays could play roles equally well in tragedies or comedies. He couldn't make up his mind whether Nicholas was one such actor or was genuine. Theodora wasn't much help. She had had very few dealings with Nicholas since they left Constantinople. Of course, Nicholas was as always, considering what would be the best way to proceed in his life in order to make the most money. The next morning, Michael told Nicholas that he was in favor of agreeing to the previous evening's proposal, but that they should wait until arrival at Naples. That way, a proper legal agreement could be drawn up and a suitable office could be found. That suited Nicholas. His ability to speak Italian and thus

influence the wording of the legal agreement would favor him. For now, they both saw many possibilities arising out of a partnership and would let the matter rest until arrival in Naples.

The morning of their departure for Manfredonia had arrived. As they all walked the short distance to the port, they saw the three farm laborers who had decided to stay in Bari, running to meet them. One of them yelled from a distance, "Father, please wait". They finally caught up with him. "There's a man who wants to go with you if he's allowed". The young man with them was ragged looking, obviously a laborer. "Father, this is Basil. He's been in Bari for almost two years and is from Thessaloniki. He had to run away after getting involved in rioting against the Turks." Basil pleaded, "Please, let me come with you. I want to get as far away from the Turks as possible. There's a price on my head and some of the Greeks in Bari would turn me over to them for the reward money. You never know if the Turks will invade Bari. I just hope that they can't invade further inland. I think that I'll be safe there". Basil made his case as best he could and let the matter rest. Jonuz, the Albanian leader, didn't hesitate, "Well, we originally planned on having thirteen of you come with us to Manfredonia. Three left your group and one wants to join. That'll be fine. Basil, you're welcome to come with us".

The ship arrived in Manfredonia early the next morning, just after sunrise. For the well-connected, the machines of normal bureaucracy worked very smoothly. The Albanians, with their connections to King Alfonso and Skanderbeg, had no trouble organizing travel arrangements to Foggia. Horses and guides were provided. Jonuz told everyone, "Enjoy this short journey

with horses. The trip from Foggia to Naples will all be by foot. It could take several weeks, depending on the weather and how long we stop in villages along the way.”

The Byzantine Empire was no more, but the Byzantine Orthodox Church and its influence still did exist. The western part of the Church had included a portion of Southern Italy and Sicily. The group would be traveling through the remnants of the church’s domain on the Foggia-Naples road, the Strada Delle Puglie, on their way to Naples. Father Glinatsis had heard of the village of Troia, a village not far from the road they would be traveling. The legend was that it had been founded by Diomedes, the Greek warrior who destroyed ancient Troy. Much of Southern Italy and Sicily had once been a part of Magna Grecia, with Greeks establishing towns and cities, including Troia. Father gave a thought to ending his journey in Troia and hopefully finding a Byzantine Orthodox church where he could function as a priest again. However, the influence of this church in Italy was disappearing as the Roman Catholic Church took advantage of the weakness of the Orthodox Church in Southern Italy. More and more of these Byzantine churches were just being taken over by Roman Catholic churches as Byzantine bishops and priests died and were not replaced.

Father knew for sure that if he sailed from Naples to Sicily, he would be able to find several of the Greek churches still in existence, still catering to pockets of Greek speakers, Albanians, and other Byzantine Christians who had fled Balkan lands to get away from the Ottomans. He would travel to Naples, spend some time there, and then go on to Sicily. Father Glinatsis was now sure that God had indeed wanted him to survive the

slaughter in Constantinople. He would now be able to do God's work in Sicily and bring more souls to heaven. This decision finally assuaged his guilt about fleeing the carnage in Constantinople, a guilt that had been with him every day since leaving, a guilt that had not shown on his face nor in his actions with his traveling companions, a guilt that he was unwilling to share with others. But he was now willing to share this decision with the others.

After leaving Foggia, the group spent the first night just outside of Bovino. As everyone settled down, Father let Michael and the others know of his decision and did so with a great deal of enthusiasm and confidence. "Father Glinatsis, Theodora and I were hoping that somehow you would decide to remain in Naples. I imagined all of us in our old age, being able to reminisce about Constantinople and embellishing how important we were there, what it would be like if it had not fallen, and what a loss the world had suffered. The air, the majesty, the power of Constantinople that once was is still within us Father. I'm afraid for my children; they'll soon forget all of that, but you and I, never. I remember you teaching us that our baptism left an indelible mark on our souls. But I know that Constantinople has also left an indelible mark on us". Michael was feeling the loss more than ever now. He knew that if he continued reminiscing, he would break down in tears. "Ah, I must already be getting old – getting so emotional". Michael knew that he and his family would be losing a real friend in Father.

Following another day's travel, they arrived at Panni, just below Montaguto, which was at the southern end of the Apennine mountains. It was at a height of two thousand three hundred feet, so there remained a climb to reach the village. Although fatigue was overtaking

them, they arrived and were able to find accommodation and food. This would be the last village before Greci, only a short distance further on. Montaguto and other villages along the road to Naples were under the control of King Alfonso. Many of the small villages along the Strada delle Puglie had been built in the mountains for protection. Stories passed from generation to generation about the invasions by the Longobards and Normans centuries before were an incentive to maintain this isolation.

The next morning, Maria was very ill; she was sure that she was pregnant and suffering from morning sickness. Sophia was very concerned for her and their travel plans. She could not conceive of the two of them leaving the group now and then going on to Naples by themselves. The rest of their travel group did not want to delay their departure and anticipated that Maria would be well by the next morning. However, she was still very sick and had to admit that she could not travel. Father insisted, "We can't let her and Sophia travel alone. We must do something". Jonuz devised a plan that would resolve the problem for everyone. "We already planned to stay in Greci for several days. We'll leave enough money with the innkeeper for Basil's, Maria's, and Sophia's food and lodging and a bit extra for travel to Greci – it's only about two hours away. When Maria is better in a day or two, she and Sophia can rejoin us. Basil, you'll stay with them and travel with them to Greci. We'll all meet up there and continue towards Naples". Everyone agreed. Father, Michael, and Nicholas all contributed money, as did the Albanians. Michael was very aware that Nicholas did not even hesitate to contribute. Perhaps his character was really changing. Michael, having been an excellent diplomat, was of necessity aware of small things people

did that told a lot about their character. He was surreptitiously paying a lot more attention now to everything that Nicholas did. Jonuz went and told Maria and Sophia their plans. They were very relieved to find out that they would not be abandoned. He then went and paid the innkeeper for food and lodging for the three. "Here is a little extra. If anything happens in the next two days, use this to send someone to Greci to inform us. We'll stop here on our return to Albania and take care of any other expenses that they may incur." With that taken care of, the rest of the group departed for Greci.

Father Glinatsis, Michael and his family, the two junior officials, and Nicholas, would never see Maria, Sophia, or Basil again. This was sad, but forced friendships formed in a crisis are not immune to the vagaries of fortune, distance, and the passing of time. All of these factors coupled with personal problems settling in Italy, pushed the aforementioned friendship, ever so slowly, further and further into the back of the mind, until it evaporated like the morning dew. Years later, Father Glinatsis did make it to an area just outside of Palermo, Sicily, and found a Greek Orthodox church needing a priest. He ministered there until he died in 1480. Why his letter to Sophia never arrived at the church in Montaguto is not known. Perhaps it was not delivered, perhaps it was lost, perhaps the priest in Montaguto never received it, perhaps the letter was written in Italian and the priest in Montaguto would not have wanted to encourage heresy in Maria, for she had been in the Orthodox faith in Constantinople, and perhaps because the letter was written out of religious duty and not from the heart, fortune negated its delivery.

Michael and Nicholas did form a very successful business partnership. They employed the two junior officials from Constantinople, Stauracius, and Constantine, and everyone did well financially from the very beginning. However, as age accumulates experience, knowledge, business acumen – and ruthlessness in some, Stauracius and Constantine banded together with Michael and eventually forced Nicholas out of the business. He had offended many sellers with his unabated aggressiveness, and some buyers with his periodic dishonesty, all done in the name of profit. Italian, which had been his advantage initially, eventually receded as the others learned it well. That, coupled with Michael's tact and diplomacy, and no more tolerance for excusing Nicholas's behavior, enabled the three of them to form a new company, dissolve the old and leave Nicholas out. However, he had managed to do what was most important for him; to whit, amass enough money to live comfortably for the rest of his life.

With the death of Michael, Theodora, their daughter, and the departure of Stauracius and Constantine from Naples, Michael's son took over the business. Unfortunately, he squandered the profits on the easy life in Naples and wound up destitute. His early end was unfortunate and tragic, but self-inflicted. With his death, there would be no descendants to carry on the family name, to praise him in death as a great ancestor, or to mull over if he was now really any better off for having escaped certain death in Constantinople. There would be no one left to weigh up if, in Christ's judgment, he would have been better off dying as a child martyr in Constantinople or drunk and destitute as an adult in Naples.

Things did not work out as planned for Maria and Sophia. Daniele, a contadino (peasant) in Montaguto, had been left to care for three children, with the very recent passing away of his wife. His children were Marco, age thirteen, Luigi, age eight, and Angela, age six. As often happened in such cases, Daniele felt the need to find another wife soon, so someone would be able to look after the children and do other needed chores. That would free him up to work in the fields. The thirteen-year-old boy was able to help look after the younger siblings and do some of the household chores, but he was really needed to help work in the fields. Daniele was a hard worker and had been able to provide food for his family and a bit extra. Having some of his time diverted away from working the land was not only a waste of his time but would eventually affect how much food he was able to grow and provide for his family. At forty-one, he was much older than a man normally looking for a first wife. His friends and some of the elders were interested in having their daughters marry him, despite the twenty+ year age difference between him and a potential young wife. Life in a small village like Montaguto meant that there were no strangers, so he knew all of the potential brides.

Maria, Sophia, and Basil were supposed to depart for Greci once Maria was better. Daniele passed by where the three were staying and struck up a conversation with Basil. He told Daniele about the trauma that both women went through and the fact that he is a hunted man by the Turks. Daniele stopped him to ask who the Turks were. After Basil's brief explanation, peppered with expletive descriptions of the Turks, they resumed their conversation. However, Daniele kept turning his head and looking at Sophia. He was immediately attracted to her.

She was very pretty and not being from Montaguto, from Italy, or from that culture, was very alluring to him. Finally, Daniele went over to the women and asked when they would be leaving Montaguto. “Maria is sick and we are here until she is better. She is...” “Quiet – I don’t want anyone to know I am pregnant”, Maria shouted to Sophia in Greek. She was afraid to let others know. With no husband, a long way from home, and obviously a foreigner, she would be considered a loose woman, fair game for others. After Maria’s outburst, there was silence, so Daniele decided to go back to the fields. However, for some reason, unknown to him, out of character, like a force over which he had no control and completely against his cautious nature, he went back to his dwelling, gathered his three children, and marched them back to where Sophia, Maria, and Basil were. He beckoned Basil to come with him and went up to Sophia, with his children. “Basil, please translate what I’m saying to Sophia. My name is Daniele and these are my children. My wife, their beloved mother, died two weeks ago. We are poor, as are all here. I’m a good provider. My family never goes hungry. I need someone to look after my children while I work in the fields. I can’t do both and bring in enough food for all of us. Life here in Montaguto and all of the nearby villages is hard, but those who work hard, eat well. A wife is needed to look after the children, prepare meals, mend clothing, tend the animals, and do other things that I can’t do with three children. I want you to be my wife. You won’t want for anything, that I can promise. It’s normal for a man to first arrange with the parents when he wants to marry a woman, but Basil has told me that you have no father and Basil here is not your brother, so it’s up to you to say yes or no. I’ll go back to

the fields now and return tomorrow. If you say no, I'll marry one of the other women from the village, but it's you that I want to marry". Daniele departed, stunned at what he had just said. Likewise, Sophia, Maria, and Basil were speechless.

Sophia went outside to be alone and gather up her thoughts. Although Montaguto was pretty – the view from the summit was magnificent - life would be hard here. But life was hard in Constantinople for those who worked the land. Getting married now would be normal, since she would probably have been getting married about now had she been able to stay in Constantinople. She would more than likely have children if she married Daniele. Going to a large city like Naples, unknown to her, was maybe not the best thing to do. However, if she stayed here, she would have to give up her Orthodox faith and become Roman Catholic, since there were no Orthodox churches or priests here. Just then, she visualized the image of her father being murdered before her. She thought that could not happen here, so far from the Ottoman Turks. The emotional back and forth went on for some time. Finally, she started thinking about what would happen to her two friends if she were to marry Daniele. She and Maria had been through a lot and had become close friends. Maria would be facing many dangers if she had to go to Naples with Basil. Although Basil and Maria were close as friends, it was Agape alone that would be accompanying them to Naples, not Agape and Eros, so who was to say that Basil would not decide to live somewhere along the way, in another village, and leave Maria? What would become of her then? With that final thought, she made up her mind and went back inside, not saying a word to the others. She slept very well that night.

Maria and Basil had arisen early at the behest of Sophia. She said to them, “I’ve decided to marry Daniele, but it depends on a few things. He must agree that you, Maria, will live with us. When the time comes, you’ll have your child. Daniele will not be happy with the idea of two more mouths to feed, so I’ve decided that there is a way that you can not only pay for food and lodging for yourself and baby, but earn extra. You were an excellent seamstress in Constantinople, much better than any of these women here, I’m sure. So, you can do all of the sewing needed for repair. That’ll free up some time for wives to do the cooking, gathering of firewood, and other chores. You can also look after children when the women are needed in the fields at planting and harvest times. With two women in our house, we can easily do the chores of one and do a lot more. And you, Basil, will also stay with us. You’ll be an extra pair of hands in the field. You are much younger than Daniele, so can work harder. One extra pair of hands that works hard does not earn food for one, but for several. Hopefully, Daniele will see the advantages in my suggestions”.

As promised, Daniele arrived in the morning. He was invited inside and with a nervous look, asked Basil to translate, “Sophia, I hope that you’ll say yes, but that is your decision”. Sophia knew enough Italian by now to say, “Daniele, I will marry you”. She then asked Basil, to translate. “I’ll marry you, but under the following conditions. I’m not demanding something, for that’s not how a possible bride should act. Rather, my conditions are due to the uncertain future of my beloved friends”. Sophia repeated exactly what she had told Maria and Basil the previous day. Daniele listened and slowly paced back and forth, not indicating whether he would agree or

not. Finally, he said, “I wouldn’t agree to marry you if it meant me having to feed two more mouths now and another when Maria’s baby is born. That would be too much for one man. However, you’ve thought that out and I must agree that your decision is good for all. We’ll all do well and God willing, will be happy. I’ll go to the church and make arrangements for the marriage. I also have to speak to the owner of Montaguto, Baron Cortez. There’s a small piece of unused land that can be cultivated and now that I have an extra hand, I can arrange for Basil to work it. That will mean more food for all of us – extra food will bring in some money. You’re not yet my wife but have already solved problems for me and others. This is a good day”. Then, Sophia started laughing and said, “And I promise that I’ll learn Italian much better”.

The marriage between Daniele and Sophia presented a slight problem for the village. There were established customs and traditions in Montaguto, as in the rest of Southern Italy and Sicily. They were not trifled with, for they were established for the most part to ensure the survival of the people and the village. They were almost like the ten commandments, written in stone, to be obeyed. One such custom, marriage, was much too important to be left to the vicissitudes, immaturity, and romanticism of youth. Parents, with their maturity and wisdom and their successful experience of life, were the ones who influenced which young man would marry which young woman, or in some cases, adolescent girl. Parents had succeeded in living to a mature age, of surviving difficulties and as such, their decision should take precedence over that of young people. It was the custom for the father of a young man to determine when it was time for his son to be married. A son who was

obedient, a hard worker, frugal, and respected by his fellow field workers, was a son ready for marriage. He would discuss this with his wife and she would then discreetly bring the matter of marriage up with the mother of a daughter who was known to be a good worker, obedient, and above all, a virgin. Only then would the young man and woman meet, always under family supervision. If matters progressed, an announcement of betrothal would then be made formally, and the date of the nuptials arranged. However, Daniele was in his forties and his parents had died. Sophia had witnessed her parents' murder. These were people who had no parents, so a degree of latitude had to be given to them. In addition, Daniele's age, and his well-deserved reputation for hard work, precluded anyone else from making a decision for him.

The marriage of Daniele and Sophia was arranged for the following month. Word of the pending marriage spread fast amongst the peasants since weddings were happy occasions in their lives. However, there was an undercurrent of resentment amongst some of the young women who had hoped that Daniele would marry them. One woman who was especially resentful was Donatella. Her young cousin whom she was very fond of had hoped to marry Daniele. Now, this would not happen. This gave rise to anger and resentment towards these foreigners.

Donatella and the other villagers did not have all of the information about Maria, Sophia, and Basil. This was the perfect situation for rumor and gossip to fill in missing details. Unmarried women traveling from God knows where could be prostitutes. No, nothing had happened to support that rumor, but they could have been prostitutes back in their own country. The desire for revenge often

percolates just below the surface. Patience, stealth, deceit, and cunning are its tools and Donatella would become very adept at using them.

The wedding was on a Sunday, a day when the peasants did not have to work. As was typical, there were festivities, and blessings of long life, happiness, and many children showered upon Daniele and Sophia. The festivities included the typical abstemious banquet seen in poor villages. The men and most of the women were genuinely happy for the new couple, for Daniele was very well-liked and respected. If Sophia was his choice, then that was fine. However, the words of well-wishing by a few of the young women were feigned, especially those of Donatella.

The marriage seemed to suit Daniele, Sophia, and Daniele's children. It also had a positive effect on Maria. Word soon spread that she was an excellent seamstress and some of the women started asking her to repair items of clothing that were difficult to mend. A few eggs, some vegetables, some milk – her work was bringing in just that little bit extra that helped this unusual family arrangement. Occasionally, Maria would also watch some of the children when their mothers had to lend a hand in the fields or became ill. This was also rewarded. Maria was very good with children. She was most happy when watching children or doing seamstress work. Maria also helped with the cooking, cleaning, and looking after animals, tasks she shared with Sophia. She was very fond of Sophia and her new family. However, she often withdrew into herself, never having gotten over the murder of her two children. She would eat the evening meal with the family and Basil, but would then often retire

to the tiny makeshift hut that Basil had built for her, next to the family dwelling.

Months later, Maria, Sophia, and some of the women were talking near the fountain in the piazza. Maria, now obviously pregnant, was asked by one of the women what she was going to name her baby. Maria came out of her self-isolation whenever talk of her baby came up. She smiled and her face radiated a happiness not often seen. "I really need to think about it. A Greek name, an Italian name, a boy's name, a girl's name, I..." Suddenly, Donatella, who had been listening to the conversation, blurted out "There's one name, whether it is a boy or girl, that you can call it – Bastard. And when the child is old enough to speak, he can address his mother properly – Whore". Now with anger rising, she raised her voice and hollered, "Malocchio on you and the other trollop Sophia. May this evil eye curse both of you and drive you out of our village". She then strutted away triumphantly. This was her victory. This would surely impress the others and get them to join her in humiliating – no, more importantly, isolating and driving out these foreigners. This woman, this Maria was surely a loose woman, the type of woman that Montaguto did not need. Who knew who the father was – a Greek, an Italian, only God knew for sure, and He certainly wouldn't approve. Donatella's victory was short-lived. The other women were shocked at this insulting behavior. One of them said to Maria, "Sometimes Donatella is mean to others. She snipes much of the time. Don't listen to her. We're glad you came to Montaguto". Suddenly, Sophia broke away from the group and, like a beast pursuing prey, chased after Donatella, grabbed her by the arm, spun her around, and screamed at her, "Maria had her two beautiful children murdered right in

front of her. Her husband was also murdered in front of her. He's the father of the child she's carrying". Sophia then slapped Donatella across the face and spat on her. "Now you can go away". From that day onwards, no one would mistreat or insult Maria or Sophia, at least to their faces.

Donatella's husband, upon hearing of the incident with Sophia and Maria, knew that his wife would be judged harshly and brought her to Father Torrio to confess her sin. "Father, I called Maria a whore and said that her child is a bastard. I also wished a curse, a malocchio, on those women. I confess this, but what I said is all true, so why is this a sin? We don't need people like that here. She will ensnare some other man and do the work of the devil here. She should leave and go elsewhere. And that other one, that Sophia, she's the one who needs to confess – slapping me and spitting on me". "I can't forgive your sin, since you aren't sorry. Since your sin is serious and you don't repent, I won't be able to give you communion at Mass until you are sorry and truly repent". Not going to communion at Mass would be noticed by everyone. Donatella, being probably the only woman not receiving communion, would stand out and be an embarrassment. All would know that she had committed a serious sin. Repentance, whether driven by truth or convenience, was still repentance, or at least the appearance of repentance designed to fool the priest into giving absolution. What was needed was Father's forgiveness. That was the key. That would allow Donatella to go to communion. Everyone would see her going to communion at Mass and know that she was in God's favor. Confession was private – no one, save her husband and Father would know that she had to confess for her

outburst against Maria, and no one would know that she had sinned. Getting Father's forgiveness was paramount. "I'm sorry for what I've done". "Your sins are forgiven, but you must come to church and pray for God's forgiveness every day for the next week. That is your penance". Even better, Donatella thought. Now, people would see her in church every day. They would truly know that she was a holy person.

Basil was content with the way his life was going. One of the Baron's agents who managed the land was pleased with his hard work. "Basil, what's your last name? I need to have information on everyone who works in our village". "Karyophillon." "What? Say it again very slowly". "Karrrr yyyy oooo phillll onnnn". "Eh, it sounds like you are still speaking Greek. I'll put down Garofalo – that's what it sounds like to me. Good, you can go back to work now. You're a good worker – we need more like you". The other men working with Basil were impressed with the hard work he did. They soon developed a liking for him and often joked, "When are you going to stop speaking Italian like a Greek"? He would always laugh and respond, "When you start speaking proper Italian like the Pope". Basil now spent less and less time worrying about reprisals from the Turks. He was feeling more secure with every passing day and exhibited a knack for solving problems. The crowding in Daniele's house was just one problem Basil was able to fix. He gathered tree limbs, branches, straw, and other cast-off materials and built two small sleeping huts attached to Daniele's dwelling. They were constructed well enough so that rain didn't enter. One room was for Maria and the other for him. Daniele's family was appreciative of this. It allowed for a

degree of privacy that was uncommon with extra people living in a small house.

Basil, having worked the plot obtained by Daniele several years earlier, would be able to continue working it in the future. The friendship formed between Basil and Daniele was soon strengthened even further. One day, Daniele slipped and fell, landing on his shoulder. He was in a lot of pain and Basil and others took him to his dwelling. He was unable to work for several weeks. Unfortunately, this was harvest time. Every hand was needed in the fields. Although Daniele's son now worked in the fields, he was too young to do all of the work required. Daniele would be sorely missed. This could mean less food for his family and Maria, now visibly in the latter stages of her pregnancy. Basil made a vow to Daniele, "I will complete your work and mine. I won't let your family suffer a winter with little food. Maria will stop sewing and watching children during the harvest. That way, she can do work in the house and free up Sophia to help in the fields until harvest is finished. We'll survive this until you're better". With the cooperation of everyone and Basil's extra work, they were able to get the harvest in on time and were well-prepared for the coming winter. With the harvest over and the knowledge that food for the winter months was secure, there was a sense of contentment and happiness in Daniele's household.

Montaguto's priest, Father Torrio, paid a visit to Basil, Maria, and Sophia on a Sunday after the harvest was completed. He sympathized with their losses and then talked about their journey into a somewhat new faith. He told them that there was no chance of them continuing their Byzantine Orthodox faith in Montaguto. It was fast disappearing from mainland Italy. He urged them to start

attending the Catholic church. The advance of time is often a difficult taskmaster and a destroyer of dreams. What the Roman Emperor Constantine had initiated in the fourth century was a copy of the Roman Catholic church, but in a new city, Constantinople. It flourished, it was magnificent, it was a transfer of Latin, Roman Catholic Faith and energy to a new world. It became not only a dominant faith, Byzantine Orthodoxy, but it formed and combined with the Byzantine Empire. As it flourished, it gradually became Greek in language, culture, and thought. These were the seeds of its greatness, lasting for eleven hundred years. There were also events leading to its fall. Four hundred years before the final destruction of the Byzantine Empire by the Ottoman Turks, there had been a break between the Byzantine Orthodox faith and the Roman Catholic church, a split that would never completely heal. This split was aggravated more than two hundred years before the fall of Constantinople when it was sacked by ravaging Roman Catholic Crusaders. For around the last seven hundred years of its existence, the Byzantine Empire had been besieged by Muslim invaders, who gradually chipped away at the far reaches of the Empire, until only Constantinople and a few other small areas were left. Byzantium became but a memory in those who escaped or were enslaved by the Turks, or a faded image in the minds of those who heard tales of this once great civilization.

The Byzantine Empire was indeed Greek in language and culture and was now lost; however, Byzantium must not be confused with Greece, the land which gave so much to Italy and continued to do so throughout the centuries.

The second or third generations after Sophia, and Maria would not have any personal experience of life in Constantinople. Their Greekness, their language, and their culture would be subsumed by future generations of Italians, until these marks would only be kept alive by some relative's memory, a story, passive words devoid of feeling, to be told every once in a while, decreasing in frequency with each passing year.

Sophia, Maria, Basil, Father, Michael, and Nicholas would find stability in Italy. They would all adapt well to their new land. The major factor underpinning their stability was their faith, their religion. The almost universal similarities between the Greek-based Orthodox faith and the Latin-based Catholic faith made this transition possible. And for the peasants, it was their faith that kept them working the fields day after day, year after year, kept them from losing hope when they saw their children dying from disease, when starvation crept in, when they saw the same lives for their children and grandchildren.

With few exceptions, events for the new arrivals in Montaguto were going well. They were soon a part of daily village life there. Maria's son was born in December of 1453. She named him Demetrios, after her husband. Often, when she would look at Demetrios, the gamut of emotions from depression to elation would grip her. As she spent time nursing Demetrios, Maria's mind would drift across the sea to Constantinople. She would reminisce about her two children who had been murdered. As was typical in Constantinople, her son Theophanes had been given some toys to play with when he was three. Teresa remembered the little leather ball that he played with. He would spend an hour just

throwing it or kicking it and chasing after it. His excitement and happiness were at their peak when he would throw the ball against the wall and try to catch it. He could not catch it, but would squeal with joy each time the ball rebounded off of the wall. Her daughter Helena was more sedate. She would play with her two favorite dolls and would recreate weddings with them. When asked what the names of her dolls were, Helena would sometimes respond, "This is me and that is papa". At other times, she would make up imaginary friends. Helena was so serious about these imaginary friends and would go into elaborate detail about their good points and bad points. Just remembering the serious look on Helena's face as she elaborated on these friends always made Maria laugh. But then, as always, it would happen. She would realize that they were no more. The memories would always be there of two small children, would always be there to brighten her day momentarily, but the reality that they were gone forever would bring on her tears. Sadly, Demetrios was an unintentional vision of the past and the murder of her loved ones, but he was also the future, security in her old age, and hopefully the father of her grandchildren.

Several months after Demetrios's birth, Maria went back to her sewing repairs and looking after children. This was a welcome relief for some of the women since it freed them up to tend to the animals, prepare meals, and complete myriad tasks that were difficult to do with children around. The fondness that the children had for Maria and her reputation for caring for them endeared her to the mothers. Some of the older children would ask Maria why she talked so funny. She would laugh and tell them that she came from a place far away, where Italian

was not spoken much. Then, she would tell them stories about Constantinople. They were fascinated by her stories of this mythical land and the strange languages spoken there; Maria would always describe a few objects in Greek words to the delight of the children. She would tell them about the exploits of the seamen who would bring in exotic goods from places even farther away, the magnificent churches and palaces, and the Emperor. It is in the fertile minds of children that stories of far-away places carry meanings way beyond the words used. Always after her stories, the older children would keep asking questions about ships, Constantinople, Emperors, and other things, never satisfied with asking only one question. With all of the work that Maria was doing, especially with the children, she withdrew into herself less and less. The years would pass with few problems and she would see Demetrios grow up and become one of the regulars in the village. However, years later, an unforeseen event would occur involving him that would revive dormant animosities.

Sophia gave birth to the first of her three children, Anna, in September, 1455. Her second, Giacomo, was born two years later, and her third and last, Elisabeta, in 1458. Daniele's three children with his first wife got along well with the three new children and with Maria's son. Getting along was not something always done voluntarily – it was a necessity due to cramped living quarters, the requirement for everyone to work in order to eat, especially at harvest time, and the non-existent alternative living arrangements in the village.

Fitting in so well with life in Montaguto meant that Basil was soon considered marriageable by the locals. It was normal for parents to try and organize marriages for

their children, but Basil had no parents. His dilemma was that he had no father to act as an intercessor in approaching the family of a young, marriageable girl and getting his permission to have his son meet with the daughter. But it was unheard of for a young man to approach a father. Fortunately, some of the older men working with Basil recognized this problem. They discussed it amongst themselves and concluded that the only solution was to approach Basil directly. As with Daniele and Sophia, the normal courting ritual had to be modified because of Basil's unique and tragic experience. Two men in particular who worked with Basil started thinking that, with his reputation for hard work, ability to get along with his fellow workers, and willingness to help others, he would make a good husband for their daughter. Giovanni and Ricardo approached Basil directly, on separate occasions and broached the subject of marriage. One day during a break from work, Giovanni spoke with Basil, "You know that it's important for a man to have children. They provide some security for the days when a man can't work the fields and his wife cannot tend the animals. Basil, you'll be in that position some day but God willing, not for many years. What would you do if you couldn't work now? You have no children, and no family to take care of you. I have a daughter, a lovely girl, who is like her mother. She's a good cook and has taken care of the animals since she was a little girl. A man would be lucky to have her for a wife. Her mother has given me four children and none of them have died, so my daughter would no doubt give you many healthy children. If things were normal, I would be saying this to your parents and having them arrange a meeting with me and my wife. But, you're alone, so I'm giving you permission to meet my

daughter. Come to my house on Sunday after Mass and you can meet her". Even though Basil was a foreigner, he understood immediately that it would be a huge insult to reject this invitation. Intentional insults to villagers here could have serious repercussions, such as community-wide vendettas. Diplomacy could get one out of some requests, but not out of such a direct invitation by a father to meet his daughter. "Yes, thank you Giovanni. I'll come after Mass. I'm honored that you've singled me out, with so many other men in our village who deserve the honor of meeting your daughter".

Basil arrived at Giovanni's house on Sunday, as agreed. There were half a dozen relatives there in addition to Giovanni and his wife Beatrice. Basil spoke with Giovanni and Beatrice, and after enduring an eternity of Beatrice's uninterrupted, effusive praising of her daughter, he finally met with Diana. As with Sophia and Daniele, the custom had to be altered. Everyone knew that Basil had no parents, had suffered at the hands of the Turks in Greece, had made his way to Italy by stealth, learned the language, and made the choice to settle in their village. They thus attributed to him a degree of maturity generally reserved for older men and bent the courtship rules somewhat. The couple took a walk through the village, with Diana's family strolling side by side or close behind. There was the expected initial embarrassing silence between Basil and Diana and it seemed to stretch on forever. Finally, Basil broke the silence. "Do you know where Greece is? I'm from there". There was no verbal response, just a slight negative nodding of her head. Basil's question was intended to elicit a response, but it failed miserably. More painful silence, step after step after step, more desperate

attempts to think of something to start a conversation. “I saw your brother tending sheep a few days ago. What’s his name?” “Roberto.” “Roberto eh, he seemed to know what he was doing”. This elicited giggling from Diana and puzzled Basil. “What’s funny? Tell me so I can laugh too”. “The way you say Roberto isn’t normal. You don’t trill the name. It sounds funny to me. I hope you’re not mad”. Basil started laughing. “The men in the fields often joke with me about my speech, just as you’ve done. I’m not mad. In my town in Greece, many ships would come in, so I heard men from other countries who could speak my language, but not properly. They sounded funny to us, just as I sound to you. So, if I teach everyone here to speak Italian like me, there would be nothing to laugh at. What do you think, should I do that”? He looked at Diana, but she didn’t laugh at first, thinking that he was being serious. Then, she realized he was joking and started to laugh. They were now beyond the initial phase of forced conversation with planned opening gambits and were conversing as normally as could be expected, given the coterie of chaperones behind and alongside them. Their laughing and looking at each other were tempered by the watchful eyes of the family. Giovanni and Beatrice noticed what was going on and were pleased. Perhaps this initial encounter would lead to marriage – the decision would be Giovanni’s, Beatrice’s, and Basil’s. After arriving back at the house, Basil said goodbye to everyone and then pulled Giovanni aside. “I would like to come and meet Diana again next week”. “Good. We’ll look forward to it. See, I told you my daughter was a lovely girl”.

The following week, Ricardo approached Basil and told him about his daughter. “Come to my house and meet her after Mass this Sunday”. Basil knew that he had to choose

his words carefully. “Ricardo, I met Giovanni’s daughter last Sunday and will be seeing her again this Sunday. It wouldn’t be honorable for me to see your daughter under the circumstances”. Ricardo mulled over Basil’s response and although disappointed, said that it would indeed not be proper to see both young women. Ricardo knew that there was a possibility that Basil could end up marrying Diana. He would now discuss his eligible daughter with the parents of other eligible young men.

As the weeks passed, Basil and Diana saw each other several more times, always under supervision. By the way they often stole glances at each other, it was apparent that they were becoming fond of each other. This was noticed by the parents and relatives and they knew that such signs of burgeoning infatuation were not the most important reasons for marriage. Finally, Basil told Giovanni, as with the authority of a parent, that he wanted to marry Diana. He had not based his decision solely on being fond of Diana, but on practical matters, much as parents would. Giovanni assented. They were married in May 1455. Sadly and contrary to his father-in-law Giovanni’s assurance and prognostication, two of their five children would die early. Their first child was born a year later but died shortly after birth. Diseases taking the lives of children seemed to come in waves and this was a period of many deaths in Montaguto. Their second child died in 1457, also just after birth. Their third child, Antonella, fourth child Renzo, and fifth child Stefano all survived.

Donatella gave birth to her fourth child, Antonia, in 1456. With the new baby and other chores, her machinations of revenge against Maria and Sophia abated out of necessity, not desire. The birth was welcomed by

both Donatella and her husband, Amadeo Castiello. This was a blessing from God since their only other girl had died after birth. Several weeks after the birth, Donatella was back doing her normal chores. The harvest season was approaching, so Amadeo told his wife to arrange to let Maria watch the children so that Donatella could help with the harvest. She was furious and vented her rage towards him, a rage that she had been able to suppress in the past, for it was not a wife's duty to scream at her husband. "I will not let my children be watched by a whore. Who knows what she'll teach them? And when our little girl is old enough to be watched by that whore, who knows what sinful things she will put in our daughter's mind. These are my children too and I don't want that filthy woman touching my children". Her unexpected outburst angered Amadeo. "Fine. Then you'll have to do your work here in the house and watch the children and help with the harvest. You're a spiteful woman. You could make things easier on yourself. Maria isn't a whore and has done a good job of watching other children. Your hatred has to stop".

He stormed out of the house and went to the fields to work. Donatella had never seen her husband so angry. Then it dawned on her that he was defending this whore for one reason only; he had slept with her. She was distraught but would have to confront him. That evening, she did so, but not in her normal accusatory manner. Rather, she suggested that anyone who would defend such a woman might have succumbed to being seduced. Amadeo was furious since he had never even thought about having a sexual liaison with Maria. He rushed out of the house, went to the church, and pleaded with Father Torrio to come with him. He then went to Daniele's house

and begged Maria to come with him. “Why? What’s wrong?” “Maria, please, I need your help – just come with me to my house. You and Father are the only ones who can help me”. He marched back to his house, with Father and Maria following behind. Amadeo confronted Donatella with facts. “Father, you’ve given me communion every Sunday, is that true”? Yes, every Sunday”. “Can I receive communion if I’ve committed a serious sin”? “No, of course not”. “Maria, my wife has accused me of sleeping with you. We both know that this is a lie. Tell her that it’s a lie”. Maria was shocked at such an accusation from Donatella. Tearfully, she said that Amadeo had never slept with her, nor made any such overtures. “Father, is it a serious sin to lie, to accuse another of something that isn’t true”? Yes, of course – you already know that”. “I know Father, but my wife needs to hear it from you. She’s been spreading these lies, first about Maria and now about me. And even though she’s done this, she still receives communion every week. Isn’t that a sin also Father”? “That’s a serious sin. Our blessed St. Paul told us so. Therefore anyone who eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily is answerable for the body and blood of the Lord”. “Then Father, Donatella needs to confess to you and ask for forgiveness. Maria can go back home now, I’ll go outside and you, Donatella, can confess to Father”. Donatella was stunned. Amadeo went outside, but within a few minutes, he came back in quietly. Donatella was sitting next to Father, with her arms crossed and crying. Tears are shed for joy and sadness, but tears of sadness mask whether the sadness is due to a contrite heart or to being caught; Amadeo couldn't know which. He spoke softly to her. “Donatella, before you confess, you have to know that your lies,

rumors, and hatred are poisoning our village. You're destroying our family. Maria and Sophia have shown everyone that they're good women. They don't deserve a hateful woman like you and neither do I. You're starting to look like a fool to everyone. I'm not going to look like a fool. I'm going to go and get Maria and we will tell everyone in the village that you've accused us of sleeping together and both of us will say that you are a liar. Then, you will really look like a fool". With that, Amadeo walked slowly out of the house. Donatella had no options, no escape. She would have no victory now, not even a Pyrrhic victory. "Donatella, we've had this discussion before. I can't forgive your sins if you're not sincere. I'm going to leave now and go back to the church. I'll expect you shortly for confession. That'll give you time to think. Don't come if you're not sincere. You may fool me, you may fool others, but you won't fool God."

Repentance, a contrite heart, a desire to atone for sins, mistakes, and hurting others can be sincere or can be due solely to being overwhelmed by a temporary emotion that has overtaken the moment. Donatella wept for several minutes and eventually realized that there were no options. She went to the church and made her confession to Father.

Settling in Italy

A man is known for many qualities, both good and bad. His strength will overcome tribulation, no matter how great, his weakness will shame him and allow inimical forces, no matter how small, to advance. His anger, when righteous, will serve as a clarion call to others, but when yoked with a desire for vengeance, will consume him and all who come under his sway. His thoughts, when directed

towards others, will be as a saving grace to all, but when directed only inward towards himself, can destroy him and will leave others floundering with no direction. So, a man's qualities have both good and bad influences on others.

A woman is known for many qualities, both good and bad. Her quiet strength will be as a safe anchor to all in her home, her weakness will be as a rudderless ship to all in her home. Her love will allow all under her care safe passage to adulthood, her vengeance and pettiness will consume her time and will be repaid to her by her children and others avoiding her. Her understated reasoning will help her husband avoid acting on his vengeance, but her unbridled emotion, devoid of reasoning, can influence her husband to act out of anger. So, a woman's qualities have both good and bad influences on others.

But there is another being, neither man nor woman, that exists, that has many qualities both good and bad. This being, or rather these beings, have many names – village, city, town, country etc. As with men and women, a place has influences over others. So it was with Montaguto. It is a human character trait to notice another's appearance first and thus form an initial impression, whether good or bad. Montaguto's first appearance was one of beauty, set atop a mountain, higher than its surroundings, able to see all below it, with a self-knowledge that it was more beautiful than all that was below it but with a self-deception based on ignorance of other, more beautiful places. But this tendency to haughtiness was well tempered by its climate – time wasted basking in its self-absorption and narcissism was periodically shattered by the howling winds that appeared

out of nowhere, the driving rain that accompanied the winds, and the sometimes merciless summer sun that withered crops, and purchased hunger and misery for the coming winter. These humbling traits affecting Montaguto brought it back to its senses, chastened. And the winds and rain and sun, having humbled Montaguto, would, out of love, sometimes forget their anger and show their concern, making the air pure and providing plenty of water for drinking and crops; and at other times show their anger again by killing crops, creating floods and damaging the land and trees. The verdant hills teemed with life, the potential for crops and sustenance for animals; but the steepness of Montaguto, rising from the Cervaro river far below, was a curse for Montaguto, imposed upon those who worked the land. This meant that men had to work hard to grow food on limited flat land. So, Montaguto, with its personality, influenced its inhabitants; it made them grudgingly welcoming to strangers but not effusive in their hospitality, for there was little surplus to sustain others who would not work hard; not overly optimistic but hopeful, aware of nature's fury; willing to do a favor for others, but vengeful when the favor was not returned threefold or returned by a perceived insult; strong in their faith but willing to be superstitious when prayers were not answered immediately; amicable towards fellow workers of the land but able to show restrained hostility towards those who did not have to get their hands dirty in the fields; hard-working but able to relax on Sundays. And finally, Montaguto made all who lived there aware that there was a limited amount of land that would sustain them and a good portion of that land belonged to the Baron of Montaguto

Montaguto was at the Southern boundary of the Apennine mountains, perched about twenty-five hundred feet above sea level. It was twenty-seven miles west of Foggia and seventy-eight miles east of Naples, thus not quite equidistant between the Adriatic and Mediterranean seas. The bottom or Southern part of the land gradually sloped down to the Cervaro River. Many were the times when the Montagutesi witnessed travelers, merchants, and soldiers traversing the road between Foggia and Naples, at its foot, just before the Cervaro River. Children would stop what they were doing and wonder where the people were going and fantasize about far-away places, staring intently at the travelers, until their parents would shout and bring them out of their fantasies and make them get back to work. There would be few people leaving this land for many centuries. It was not as though it was a prison, with its inhabitants forced to remain under threat of death, as slaves; rather, the other villages were all the same, with men and women being tied to the land both through custom and emotion. It was indeed possible to travel the road to Naples, where work could be found. But to leave one's family destitute, with no one to work the land for them, was unthinkable. Of course, single men could go to Naples, not having to worry about wives or children, but then who would care for their elderly and infirm parents? No, the ties to the land were much stronger than the lure of Naples, with its many pleasurable diversions, and hidden vices designed to separate the unsuspecting from their money, goods, and sometimes their lives. The people were often warned by the priests about the lure of the sins of Naples, sins that were very tempting but could ruin a man physically and spiritually. In the fifteenth century, Naples had to deal

with murder and smuggling. Gambling in all forms, cards, dice, and betting on the outcome of events, was widespread and coupled with prostitution, led to criminal gangs organizing and controlling these vices. Getting to Naples could also be dangerous since bandits could attack travelers and rob them of everything, or hold them for ransom if perceived important or rich. Hence, the advice throughout the land was only to travel to Naples with a group.

But what did Naples have to do with Montaguto and its inhabitants? Naples, Southern Italy, and Sicily were all under the control of the Aragonese Kings of Spain. It was Alfonso V who conquered the area in the fifteenth century. Montaguto had belonged to the Spanish Aragon King since the thirteenth century but was contested periodically by the Angevins of France. As with many villages in Southern Italy and Sicily, Montaguto could be bought, sold, or passed down to a son, daughter, or other family member. Montaguto was in fact sold many times. It was a commodity to be done with at the whim of the owner. Its inhabitants, the serfs, were part of the land and thus indirectly part of the sale.

The Albanian delegation that had left Basil, Maria, and Sophia in Montaguto had concluded their business with King Alfonso in Naples in 1453 and returned to Albania. However, events would force their return to Naples in 1460. King Alfonso V of Naples died in 1458. Two years later, the Angevins of France started creating trouble in Southern Italy for King Alfonso's illegitimate son, King Ferdinand II. The Angevins had allies in Italy; Prince Orsini of Taranto had united with the Angevin forces and together, they were preparing for battle against Ferdinand to oust him and take control of the Kingdom of Naples.

Ferdinand received the Albanians in Naples and an agreement was reached to provide military aid from the trusted ally of his father, Skanderbeg. An emissary was sent back to Albania to bring Skanderbeg and his troops to Italy. He landed in Apulia with a force of three thousand Albanian soldiers. These elite fighters were able to defeat the combined Angevin and Italian forces at Barletta and Trani in August of 1461 and thus preserve Ferdinand and Aragonese power over the region. In previous battles, Alfonso had been so grateful for Albanian troops who put down a rebellion in Southern Italy, that he gave some of them land and made one of them an official of a town in Calabria. Likewise, Ferdinand also rewarded the Albanian troops. With the Angevins and their ally routed, the Albanian delegation left Naples and headed back to Albania. Included in this group was Jonuz, who had been with the Albanians that had provided safe passage for Maria, Sophia, and Basil several years prior. They decided to stop in Montaguto and see these three old friends.

By the end of hostilities involving King Ferdinand II and the Angevin French in 1461, Antonio Cortez had been Baron of Montaguto for several years and as such, was the overseer of the area. Appointed by one of King Alfonso's councils, Antonio was the progeny of a Spanish father and Italian mother; hence, in keeping with Royal Aragonese protocol, it could be argued clearly that the title-holder of Montaguto was Italian. It was important to place some Italians in various positions, especially in those positions where there were regular dealings with Italian peasants. Conversely, many of the more important Royal councils and offices in Naples and throughout the Kingdom were staffed by Spaniards.

One of the problems for the King was to generate sufficient income to pay for the necessities of maintaining a realm. To that end, various tax laws had been passed: all grain harvested could only be ground in mills owned or controlled by the King, for a set fee; all goods and/or services brought into the village from other villages or towns were taxed; a percentage of all crops harvested or animals sold, was paid to the baron as a tax; no lodgers could be put up in private dwellings and charged fees, etc. Cortez was always looking for ways to increase income for the Aragonese crown via taxes; he knew, rightly, that more income sent to Naples meant more prestige and salary for himself. He had done a good job of increasing revenue for the crown and could concentrate on enhancing his own wealth and satisfying his wants.

In late August of 1461, Cortez had his emissary go and ask Maria, Sophia, and Basil to come to his baronial palace for a meeting of utmost importance. Such meetings were never harbingers of good news, so the three arrived at the palace somewhat distressed. Antonio met them in his study and invited them to sit down. Aware that they would probably be apprehensive, he initiated their encounter with charm, something he was very adept at using to his advantage. Charm emanating from the mouth but not the heart serves as a salve, smoothly preparing the way for well-planned threats. "Ah, what a pleasure it is to see all of our Byzantine friends. I have heard nothing but good words about every one of you. We need more hard workers like you and citizens who obey our laws, as you have all tried your best to do since you first arrived in Montaguto. I hear that all of you and your families are doing well, and can assure you that our benevolent King Ferdinand would echo my words, were he able to be here.

However, I have noticed that there are some laws that you have not obeyed. Now, don't worry about being thrown in jail, for there was no way you could have known that you were transgressing some of our laws. You see, by Royal decree, no one can put up lodgers in their private homes and charge fees, or make additions to dwellings without royal consent or my consent – these are plainly against the law. There are a few places for lodgers to stay, but they are under the control of the King. So, for years, you have at one time or another, all been lodgers in effect, and have thus deprived the governments of Alfonso and Ferdinand required fees". Basil could not hold his tongue. "But wait, we were never charged money for our lodging in all of this time. We worked from the beginning". "Yes, I know that Daniele never charged you money (Baron Cortez emphasized money heavily) for your lodging, and I know that you, Basil, have built your own dwelling for your growing family. However, money is not the only thing that constitutes a fee. Ask yourselves, all of you, did you eat? Did you sleep? Did you not repay Daniele for these services with your work? And you Basil, in addition to the new dwelling that you built, did you not build additions onto Daniele's house before your marriage, when you lodged with him? Did you pay taxes on those dwellings? Basil, it is a law that all things imported into Montaguto from outside, must be taxed. You are from outside and your work is the fruit of us allowing you to be here, but you have not paid the tax for being imported. All of you have in effect deprived the crown of taxes in one way or another. I have calculated about how much each one of you owes in taxes and will prepare the exact amounts in a few weeks. I am willing to be lenient and will only require a payment of seventy-five percent of what you all

owe. And I must add, I do this discounting at my peril, because of my fondness for all of you. You will have a month to pay the taxes after you get the official notice. I can further show my leniency by allowing you to pay your debt with money or produce, animals, eggs, etc. Now, go back to your work, and when you have all come to an agreement as to how to pay, feel free to approach one of my agents at any time and let him know". The three arose from their chairs stunned, and started back to their dwellings. "Oh, just a minute Maria, please, I forgot something that pertains to you. The rest of you can go now, thank you". Maria sat back down, figuring that she would have to be taxed extra because of her sewing. "It's a shame that honest people get in trouble like you and your friends have. I know that the tax I am asking is a heavy burden, but what can I do? It is the law, after all, and I'm sure that you would not like to see me disobey the law. However, it has occurred to me that there is something that can be done to remedy this situation and you are really the only one who can do it". Maria was completely confused now. It was obvious that her sewing and the little she received from it was not the issue. "You, Maria, can resolve this by, how shall I say it, by romantic payment. I would be willing to forgo what you owe, and depending on your frequency and ardor, could foresee the possibility, and I emphasize the possibility, of me canceling the legal debts of Sophia and Basil as well". Antonio, an extremely handsome man, did his best to appear amorous, yet restrained, as he put his hand on Maria's shoulder. He slowly slid his hand onto her breast. He waited for a response from Maria, sure that this ignorant, foreign peasant woman would succumb to a powerful, handsome man with so much authority. How

could she possibly resist – just give her a few minutes to let things sink in. Maria sat for a minute and then slowly arose, pushing the Baron’s hand aside. She looked Baron Cortez directly in the eye and said in a very measured voice, “I have seen my children and husband murdered. There is nothing that you can do to me. I will not sleep with you tonight or any night. Somehow, with God’s help, we will find a way to pay your taxes”. She then walked back to her dwelling.

Maria, Sophia, and Basil went to speak with Father and told him what had transpired, including the sordid details involving the Baron. He suggested that the people in the town be made aware of what had happened. Soon, everyone had heard, but no solutions were forthcoming, such was the timidity of the villagers regarding any confrontation with Baron Cortez. Although peasants had the right to place a grievance before one of Alfonso’s councils in Naples, who would take the word of a poor foreign woman over that of a distinguished and profitable Baron? Weeks went by with no solution. Finally, as luck would have it, Jonuz and the Albanian delegation that had visited King Ferdinand prior to Skanderbeg’s recent victory against the Angevin/Italian alliance, stopped in Montaguto. Jonuz wanted to see his old friends. It was a happy meeting initially until all of the details came out about the meeting with Cortez. Maria said, “I don’t know what we will do, but I’ve put my faith in God that He’ll guide us to a solution. If not, we’ll be criminals. Cortez won’t put us in jail, but Basil and I will be forced to leave Montaguto if we don’t pay”. Sophia corrected her, “No, I will also have to leave. Cortez has had a word with my husband and Daniele is being held responsible for my part of the debt”. The Albanians said nothing for several

minutes. Finally, Jonuz said in his reassuring way, “Maria, yes, sometimes God willing, help will arrive. But sometimes men find solutions that praying will not resolve directly. We must go now, but don’t worry. Hopefully, we’ll come this way again and see our good friends. Compliments to all of you on your Italian”. With that, the Albanians were off, on their way to Foggia, Manfredonia, and thence back to Albania.

The day after the Albanians had left Montaguto, Baron Cortez was found by travelers on their way to Naples, beaten half to death and semiconscious, by the Cervaro river. His right arm had been broken and several teeth knocked out. He eventually recovered and continued as the Baron of Montaguto. The debts ostensibly owed by Maria, Sophia, and Basil were never collected nor mentioned again by him. God may indeed work in mysterious ways, but sometimes man must resolve problems more directly.

Demetrios grew up as part of Daniele and Sophia’s family. He looked up to Daniele, almost as a father. As the years passed, he started working in the fields with Daniele and his sons and proved to be a hard worker. Typically, the parents of the young men and women in the village would start planning, ever so subtly, to try and organize marriages. Daniele and Amadeo, Donatella’s husband, had been good friends since their youth. One Sunday, they were talking about their children and the subject of organizing marriages came up. Marriage arrangements were time-consuming tasks. Whether it was idle thought, a result of the jocular nature of both men, or due to the consumption of wine, Amadeo started laughing and said, “Sometimes, I think what would happen if we arranged a marriage between Demetrios and my daughter. Can you

imagine how Donatella would react”? Both men broke out laughing, imagining Donatella’s anger, seeing her face go red, veins enlarging in her neck, eyes protruding and then her voice exploding in a torrent of profanity. Then, their laughter subsided and there was a sudden silence, a silence eventually broken not by words, but by them looking into each other’s eyes and sharing the same thought simultaneously. Both men were comfortable speaking about delicate matters to each other, without fear of eliciting anger. Daniele queried, “Is that such a bad idea? Demetrios is a good lad and a hard worker and your daughter is a lovely young woman. They have known each other since they were children and were friends - when Donatella wasn’t looking. We’re looking out for the best for the children. Organizing marriage between them wouldn’t be done to antagonize Donatella”. Amadeo remained silent. As he stared into the distance, his head was nodding in agreement, almost imperceptibly. Then he spoke, “They’ve known each other since childhood, so there’s no risk of them not liking each other. You speak to Maria and Demetrios. I’ll speak to my daughter first. I’m sure she’ll be in favor. When we meet next week, if everyone agrees, then I’ll speak with Donatella. This is a chance of making five people happy, and one angry. The futures of the children and our village are much more important than Donatella’s anger. So, from my house, it’ll be my decision and my daughter’s, not Donatella’s”.

Daniele explained to Maria what he and Amadeo had discussed. Maria was very apprehensive, due solely to the reaction that it would elicit from Donatella, who had proven to be very vindictive. Even before Maria and Sophia had arrived in Montaguto, she had earned a deserved reputation as a rumor monger, vengeful and

unable to control her temper. “Maria, it’s the future of the children and Montaguto that are important, not how Donatella will react. Good marriages arranged by parents guarantee that. Do you have any objections to Amadeo’s daughter being your son’s wife”? “No, not at all”. “Then let’s see what your son says about this when he comes back for supper”. That evening, conversation at dinner was stilted, sporadic, and banal, an indication to Demetrios that something was wrong. Finally, Daniele spoke to Demetrios, “You’re now old enough to be considering marriage. I’ve spoken with Amadeo and we think it would be good if you and his daughter Antonia were to be married. What do you think”? Demetrios was fond of Antonia. He smiled and said, “Yes, I would like that. But Antonia’s mother would never approve”. He laughed, “She would chase me through the village with a knife”. “No, it won’t be her decision, but her father Amadeo’s. So, Amadeo and I will arrange for you two to meet next Sunday. It’ll have to be here, not at Amadeo’s house. That’ll prevent Donatella from ruining things.” Once again, as in the case of Sophia and Daniele and Basil and Diana, the courtship and marriage custom had to be altered, due to circumstances. It would not have been possible for Maria to approach Donatella and suggest that Demetrios and Diana might make a good marriage. Amadeo thus took over his wife’s role in the match-making process. A marriage that would ensure village stability, a marriage designed to unite two families, to produce children for the future continuity of Montaguto – these were the concerns of Amadeo, Daniele, and Maria. Donatella was irrelevant. Her concerns were spite, vengeance, and destruction, foundations guaranteed to wreak havoc upon any village. Leaving Donatella out of

the match-making role was not a choice, but a necessity recognized by her husband. In any event, it was the husband's decision that was final.

After Mass on Sunday morning, Amadeo told his other children to spend the rest of the day with their friends. He then took Antonia and Donatella back to their house. Once there, he told Donatella to sit down. His terse tone told her that something was amiss. "Donatella, I've spoken several times now with my old friend Daniele. We agree that our daughter Antonia and Demetrios should consider marriage. Antonia and Demetrios are happy with the idea. Antonia and I are now going to Daniele's house and our daughter and Demetrios will spend the afternoon under our supervision. Unless I see you smile and say that you're happy for the two of them, then you can stay here alone with your anger". Upon hearing this, it was obvious that Donatella's anger was rising. "Fine, you're not welcome to come with us. Because of your anger and disrupting life here in the village with your on-and-off telling lies, you can't enter Daniele's house". With that, he took Antonia and went to Daniele's house. The excitement and anticipation of Maria and Amadeo, the initial shyness and inkling of affection between Antonia and Demetrios as they sat amongst family members, were as inimical to the raging storm in Donatella's house as the difference between hades and heaven.

Several months after their initial meeting, Antonia and Demetrios were married. Donatella had no choice but to attend the wedding, for not attending the wedding of her only daughter would have made her an outcast amongst the women. Their first child, Debora, was born in 1474. Donatella was now a grandmother for the fourth time. But this was the first grandchild of her daughter, a daughter

who had married the son of someone she despised. Hate, being born of an irrational mind, can easily be transferred to the offspring of the hated person and so justified. After the birth of her granddaughter Debora, Donatella spent many days morose, often crying bitterly. She could not bring herself to go to Demetrios and Antonia's house and see her granddaughter, aware that Maria might be present. Neither could she countenance Demetrios coming to her house. Bitterness and crying were Donatella's companions.

Six months after Debora's birth, on a blustery Sunday after Mass, Donatella approached Maria cautiously. "Please, come into the church with me". Maria was afraid that another outburst was forthcoming and started to walk away. "Maria, please, it's very important. Come into the church with me". Maria turned around and reluctantly went back into the now-empty church. "Maybe it's too late, but I want to tell you that I'm sorry for all that I've done to you. I want us to be friends and share the joy that having a granddaughter should bring". Her words were spoken slowly, empty of the haughtiness that had been the gist of her previous conversations about or with Maria. She was unable to look up at Maria when she spoke. Donatella turned around and started to walk out of the church. She stopped, faced Maria again, and said, "Oh, I forgot. Here is a little doll I made from bits of cloth and straw. Please give it to our granddaughter. And if you can, come to my house sometime." Maria was overwhelmed and had to fight back tears. After a few seconds, she raced out of the church and caught up with Donatella. "No, you come to Demetrios' house today and give our granddaughter Debora this lovely doll yourself.

I'll make sure that Sophia and Basil are there. Everyone will be pleased to see you.”

Donatella did not live to see the birth of her daughter's second child eighteen months later, but was able to spend the remaining few months of her life happy and reconciled with everyone.

“All bitterness, fury, anger, shouting, and reviling must be removed from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ.” Ephesians 4:31-32

It would be easy to ascribe the sudden deaths of infants and children as tragedies, except those tragedies, as occurred often in Montaguto, were just accepted without question. They were a part of life, of God's will, of fortuna or fate. Tragedies, like the loss of a child, diseases, grinding poverty, poor harvests, and the winter hunger that would follow, were all beyond the control of anyone. Fortuna alone determined how much pain, suffering, and sadness one would have to endure in his life. All one could do was throw up his hands and say, that it was fortuna, it was God's will, that this happened. In 1457, Luigi and Angela, two of Daniele's three children by his first wife died within a few months of each other in one of the sporadic death waves that plagued Montaguto. His oldest son Marco was spared. Another of his children with Sophia, Elisabeta, died months after birth in 1458. Although villagers may have put it down to fortuna or God's will, the doctors of the time knew that the immediate, precipitating cause of these infants dying was undoubtedly the influence of an imbalance of one or more

of the four humors – black bile, yellow bile, blood or phlegm. Beliefs die hard, especially when based on ignorance, and ignorance of disease was rife at this time. It would not be known for centuries that the admixture of human feces in water that was drunk, sometimes led to an outbreak of cholera, and cholera could be a killer.

This killer visited the house of Daniele and Sophia. They watched as Luigi started having diarrhea, thinking that it would pass. It continued unabated for days. Unable to sleep early one morning, Sophia arose to look at Luigi. Suddenly, she screamed, “Danielle, come quick”. Danielle awoke, aware that it was too early in the morning for the start of work. Still half asleep, he shuffled slowly over to where Luigi was. What he saw was grotesque. His eight-year-old son no longer looked like a normal child. His eyes had sunk back into their sockets and there was a bluish hue to his face. But it was his skin – it resembled the skin of an old man, not of an eight-year-old boy. It was wrinkled. They tried talking to Luigi, repeatedly asking him if he was all right. He was unable to respond. He just lay there, his breathing becoming more difficult with each passing minute. Luigi did not survive the rising of the sun. No more could have been done, since prayers had been said and the doctor had indeed corrected Luigi’s humors with herbs. It was fortuna, fate, God’s will. Sadly for Sophia and Danielle, they witnessed the exact same scenario several months later as Angela, Daniele’s daughter, died of cholera.

Although the years had passed and memory had blunted the tragedy of losing children, Daniele’s sadness was somewhat mitigated by the joy of seeing his oldest son and two remaining children by Sophia, marry and have children of their own. He also felt the pride of a father

as he saw Basil and Demetrios do well – Montaguto would be blessed by their presence and he had played a major role in their lives. When he passed away in 1478 at the old age of sixty-six, he died, secure in the knowledge that Sophia would be well cared for by their two remaining children and his surviving son by his first wife. Sophia died two years later.

Maria died in 1482, but lived to see the birth of two grandchildren. They were a joy and she enjoyed looking after them, as she had with other children many years prior. She had taught Demetrios to speak some Greek as he was growing up and taught a few words of Greek to the grandchildren. However bright a shining star may be at night, it is eclipsed at sunrise. The passing of importance had arrived for knowledge of Byzantium and Constantinople; with Maria's death, there were no more witnesses in Montaguto to the magnificence of Constantinople's past. As the Byzantine Empire entered its last few years, many of its scholars fled to Italy and other countries in Western Europe. Their preservation of ancient works and manuscripts made a significant contribution to Western European civilization.

In 1484, travelers passing by Montaguto on their way to Naples, told of the attack and subjugation of the city of Otranto in Southern Italy, by Ottoman Turks. This put fear back into Basil. In his early fifties by now, he had very recently started to become erratic in his thinking and speech. The incident at Otranto convinced him that the Turks were going to continue working their way up into Italy and eventually reach Montaguto. He was sure that the main reason for their advance was to capture him. He became very suspicious and had to be convinced by others to go do his work in the fields. His memory of what

the Turkish soldiers' uniforms looked like was still vivid and he would often look down from the fields to the road below, watching for a marching column of uniformed soldiers heading up to Montaguto. Basil could not be convinced that there was no danger to him. One night, he left his house quietly and, with the aid of a full moon, was able to make his way to the Naples – Foggia road below. Seeing four men traveling on the road, he ran up to them and in a voice full of irrational rantings and exhaustion, begged them to help him fight the Turks whom he was convinced were on the road close behind, marching towards Montaguto. "You are a lone madman and a fool". Basil stopped and stared at the man who had spoken. He could not believe it, but the man was wearing the hat of a Turkish soldier. This enraged Basil and he snatched it from the man's head, convinced that these men were spies for the Turks. As it turns out, these men had beaten up one of the Turkish soldiers in Otranto and stolen his possessions, including his hat. "You are truly crazy. Let's see how you fight against us." With that, they attacked Basil in a fury. One of them buried his knife up to the hilt in Basil's stomach. Immediately, fear overtook them and they fled so that no one would see what they had done – the full moon was not friendly to their heinous crime. Basil bled profusely and died quickly. His attackers were so intent on fleeing that they did not rob him, nor retrieve the hat that Basil had grabbed. He was found dead the next day, by the side of the road, with the hat still in his hand. Like irony in a Greek tragedy, the reality of the Turkish soldiers far from Montaguto could not kill Basil, but the hallucination of them being close, led to his death.

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CHAPTER 3 – EGO, FORGIVENESS, REDEMPTION

By the late 1460s, Michele Riccio had become a very influential member of King Ferdinand's Sommaria Council, which had the responsibility of auditing the Royal treasury. He was also a member of the Court of Appeals, and as a Doctor of Law, was considered to be one of the most knowledgeable members of the legal profession in the King's realm. This mid-Renaissance period was also a time in which there was an explosion in the development of art, sculpture, and architecture. This development of the arts was heavily promoted by the papacy; Pope Sixtus IV was an enthusiastic patron of artists and scholars. It was through his efforts that the Sistine Chapel was constructed. He also supported the work of other artists. Also at this time, political power in Italy was balanced in approximately five states, one of which was Naples. Michele was a Neapolitan, another advantage for a man trying to advance his career in the King's court. There were other Neapolitans in Ferdinand's administration, but Michele's advantages outweighed the others.

However, there was one characteristic of a true Neapolitan that was not advantageous for Michele. As the leopard cannot change its spots, neither was Michele able to discard Neapolitan bonds of blood ties, ties which in Michele's case, had no direct association with the King's affairs. It first started as a rumor, emanating as a foul wind sweeping through the city. As with such winds, it was thought that it would eventually disappear and thus be forgotten. But a rumor that leads the way to something tangible and visible, will not go away. Tomasso Riccio, a

first cousin of Michele, had used his influential family name to impress a certain young lady and as sometimes happens, had seduced her. Unfortunately for the two lovers, a child had resulted; a baby boy was born in 1467. The young lady's parents were quite influential, so this matter was not going to be brushed aside, since they were very capable of using their contacts with King Ferdinand and with the Archbishop of Naples, to protect the Riccio family name. In addition, if it became widely known that their daughter had given birth to an illegitimate baby, it would then prove to be very difficult to find a suitable husband for her. It was thus accepted that money had to be procured to assuage the anger of the lady's parents, the cousin had to be removed from Naples, and the child had to be put into an orphanage. All of these were done surreptitiously, and the incident never became widely known in Naples, so no harm came to the Riccio name. The young woman, Angelina, was eventually married, with her faux honor intact. People were told falsely that Michele's cousin had decided to serve in the military 'somewhere in Northern Italy' and the child was placed in an orphanage in Ariano Irpino, some sixty miles east of Naples and twenty miles west of Montaguto. Michele Riccio arranged for his shamed cousin to be given a low-level administrative job in Ariano Irpino. Tomasso was ordered to never return to Naples and never contact Michele again. He was also told to be grateful to God that his life had been spared by paying off the irate father, for honor was not something to be trifled with, especially when it involved someone who could easily have afforded to purchase Tomasso's death.

A man's conscience begets remorse which can be a barrier that can prevent him from continuing to act on his

whims, on self-indulgences, and fleeting desires, sometimes permanently, but more often, temporarily. Such was the case with Tomasso. He felt some remorse over his actions and soon grudgingly accepted his responsibility for the child he had fathered. When he first visited the orphanage, he told the Mother Superior that the child should be named Federico Riccio. Tomasso visited Federico several times and after a year, married and took the child home to be raised there. He would be raised with four other children, born to Tomasso and his wife over the following six years. Sadly, Tomasso was unable to completely overcome his guilty conscience and loss of status; the guilty conscience being an unwanted and burdensome rider on the back of the loss of status. As the years passed, he would vacillate between hard work, being a good husband and father, and drunkenness. Wine would make him go into fits of self-pity, lamenting the influence and wealth he had lost in Naples, or, as he preferred to tell others, been stripped unjustly from him. As he aged, his self-pity worsened and he would tell people how important he had been in Naples and would demand that others pay the homage due to him being a Riccio. Federico and the other children were saddened to see their father increasingly drunk and deteriorating so rapidly. Federico made his mind up to leave and in 1487, without telling his family, he snuck away to Montaguto to start a new life.

A big and strong young man, he was easily able to find work in the fields. With the importance of land, it would initially seem counter-intuitive that any newcomers would be welcomed in Montaguto, let alone be able to find work. However, as per the times, death often reared its ugly head during periods of human vulnerability,

especially at birth and during childhood. Disease, starvation, accidents, and bad weather all combined periodically to curtail population growth. In a macabre way, they also created work opportunities for the few people who migrated to Montaguto or any of the other isolated mountain towns in the region.

Preliminary queries from the Montagutesi were easily answered by Federico; 'where are you from, do you know so and so in Ariano, 'do you have any relatives here in Montaguto?' However, 'tell me about your family in Ariano' was always answered by 'I had no brothers or sisters and my parents died a few years ago'. Federico did not want to discuss his family problems, so this answer always ended the conversation about family, but not the painful recollections, one of which he reflected upon over and over. As a boy of thirteen, Federico's father had told him that his wife was not his real mother. Tomasso said that his real mother, Angelina, had died after giving birth and that he was then forced to leave Naples; he would never specify the reason why he had to leave. When Federico would ask why, his father would just shake his head and pretend to be on the verge of tears. That was the cue for Federico not to pursue the matter any further. So, this version satisfied Federico's adolescent curiosity.

When his father's drunken bouts worsened several years later, Federico would finally hear the true story. Drunkenness magnifies self-pity, makes the drunkard look foolish, and embarrasses the family. However, it sometimes lifts the veil covering lies and lets the truth slip out, albeit unintentionally. On a raw, windy winter's evening, Federico, then twenty, went looking for his father and found him sitting at a table in an empty tavern. He was very drunk and thus oblivious to his son's presence.

A particularly strong sense of self-pity had engulfed him that day, a sense of self-pity in direct proportion to the amount of wine he had already consumed. “I was an important man, with money and position. That bastard of a cousin Michele made me leave my good life due to the trollop that I slept with. She thought that she was so important and after our night together, would have nothing more to do with me. That bitch ruined my life. She was the mother of my son Federico. If he hadn’t been born, I would have had an easy life. But I’m a decent man and performed my responsibility by raising him”. Tomasso then looked at the innkeeper and seeking confirmation, said, “You know that I’m an honorable man. Did I deserve this? You tell me, tell me the truth – you can be honest with me”. The innkeeper could only nod yes and hope that his sign of assent would end Tomasso’s latest rant, so he could close the tavern and go to his home in back of the tavern. Tomasso was encouraged by the innkeeper’s yes and with his self-importance now rising, said, “I should go back to Naples and end the life of those two miserable dogs, my cousin Michele and that Angelina. Ha, isn’t that great - that gutter-dwelling slut would have to be named after a little angel. Her name should be Diabolina, little devil”. Drunkenness also increases one’s sense of being witty, clever, or humorous, at least to one’s self; to others, their perception of the drunk as a fool is usually confirmed. However, rarely, drunken wit succeeds, as it did in this case. The innkeeper could not help but chuckle at this comment and as luck, not his luck, but Tomasso’s luck would have it, he saw the innkeeper chuckle. This only emboldened him to continue his rant. “No, no wait – I won’t take Angelina’s life. I’ll bring Federico with me and hand him back and tell her

that this is the burden you left me with all these years, now you can have him back". More laughter this time from Tomasso, a raucous, self-satisfying laugh at his perceived brilliant wit. Federico had heard enough. He left the tavern, devastated by what he had just listened to. He now knew that he was legally a bastard, but more devastating, he had heard his father say that he, Federico, was largely responsible for his father's failings in life. His father raised him out of a sense of duty, not love. These latter comments that he had just heard explained why he had always sensed that his father clearly favored the children he had had with his wife. They were looked at as a joy, while he was merely a burden. He knew that he had to leave Ariano Irpino and get away from his family. Escape to Montaguto seemed the easiest solution. Once he slipped away, he never tried to contact his family. Since he had not told them he was leaving, they would never find out where he had fled to. In fact, they never made any queries as to his whereabouts. Physical work on the land in Montaguto suited Federico and enabled him to put his family history in the back of his mind. He was tired after the day's work and that tiredness allowed him to sleep well and temporarily forget about the sad life he had left behind.

This routine was satisfying to Federico for about a year. Then, he started tiring of it. What had once been an elixir, enabling him to forget his family life, was now becoming drudgery. He was not sure if he could continue working in the fields for the rest of his life. There had to be some other destiny for him. One morning, he wandered into the church and noticed the Bible chained to one of the columns; chaining was done because even in a small village like Montaguto, Bibles, handwritten with beautiful

illustrations, could be stolen and sold for a good profit. Of course, a good profit for a peasant would be but a trifling sum for a baron or administrator. Federico's father, having been an administrator, had taught him to read. The Bible was opened and he started reading the page,

“Accept whatever happens to you; in periods of humiliation be patient. For in fire gold is tested and the chosen are tested in the crucible of humiliation”. Sirach 2:4-6.

As he was pondering this, a voice called out, “You, what are you doing, planning on stealing our Bible, eh? Planning on selling it somewhere? I recognize you – you're the man from Ariano Irpino. Our Bible would fetch a good price there from one of those cutthroats that you no doubt deal with”. It was one of the Baron's agents. He approached Federico and continued his accusation. “That page you're looking at has no pictures on it so don't tell me you were looking at the pictures. You need to leave before I get the police to arrest you”. “I'm sorry sir, but I was reading this page and had no intention of stealing this Bible”. This brought forth sarcastic laughter from the agent. “So you were reading eh? Well my bumpkin scholar, dressed in your elegant finery for picking zucchini and slopping pigs, tell me what this says”. He placed his fingers next to several of the lines. Without hesitation, Federico responded, “It says,

‘Do not be a hypocrite before others: over your lips keep watch. Do not exalt yourself lest you fall and bring dishonor to yourself’. Sirach 1:29-30

The agent was astounded. “So, how is it that a peasant can read so well?” “My father taught me to read at an early age”. “So who was your father and why are you not working as some sort of administrator?” Federico was very hesitant. “I’m sorry, I’ll go back to work now”. “No, no wait. I want you to come with me. Someone who can read so well could be of help here. We would not have to request an outsider to come if we have a man here who can read. Do you understand numbers also?” “Yes, my father dealt with numbers and taught me that as well.”

The agent insisted on bringing Federico to the Baron’s palace to show him that he could read and thus might be useful. As they entered through the front door, Federico was frantically trying to think how he could avoid mentioning his father’s name. “Why have you brought this man here? Is there some sort of crime or does he have a grievance against one of the other peasants?” “No, none of that your excellency. This man reads very well and says that his father taught him. I witnessed him reading from the Bible in the church. He also says that he knows numbers. Such a man could be very useful to us. We wouldn’t have to request Naples to send us another one of those arrogant Spanish-Italian mongrels”. The Baron, Luigi Cortez, was entitled to be angry at this characterization, but only revealed a slight pique of irritation. “May I remind you my dear Lorenzo, that my father Antonio Cortez was one of those, as you so diplomatically put it, arrogant Spanish/Italian mongrels”? Baron Cortez then directed his attention toward Federico. “So, you read well, is that correct”? “I read, yes, but you can determine if I read well or not”. “Very well. Let’s see if you can read this page”. The Baron handed a letter to Federico that he had just received from

Naples. He was able to read it easily, with no hesitations. The Baron then scribbled some numbers on paper and told Federico to add the first four numbers and subtract the last two. Federico performed that task easily. The Baron was pleased but puzzled. “Why are you working in the fields? You should be an administrator. Who was your father”?

Again, Federico was reluctant to give details about his family. “Your Excellency, he would not tell me about his father”. Intrigued, Cortez pressed him further, “There is obviously something that you don’t want to tell us. I can assure you that, barring you having committed a major crime, nothing will happen to you if you tell us about your father. Why not start by telling me your name”? Federico finally realized that it was useless to try and hide his family connections any longer. The Baron, with his contacts, could easily find out who his family was in Ariano Irpino. “I’m Federico Riccio, sir”. “And you were born in Ariano, is that right”? “No, I was born in Naples, but moved to Ariano”. “So, who was your father”? “Tomasso Riccio”. “Years ago, my father told me of a Michele Riccio, a well-known legal expert from Naples. Surely you’re not related to him”? “He was a cousin of my father”.

One question followed another and Federico answered all of them. He also opened up about his family troubles, his illegitimate birth, and the stigma associated with it. It was cathartic for him. Everyone remained silent for a while. Then, Baron Cortez started laughing. “Federico, don’t feel bad about being a bastard. I can assure you that if all bastards were banished from all kingdoms in Italy and Europe, we would probably have very few royals left to rule over us.

In fact, our beloved King Ferdinand is a member of that, um, um illegitimate category. Now, please don't repeat that to anyone outside of this room. Royals ruling in many countries are fine Kings and Princes, but can often be real royal bastards. Now, I want you to go home and return in a week. We are going to find an administrative position for you temporarily. If you do well during the first month, then the position will become permanent. If not, you can go back to your work in the fields. I have a feeling that you are going to do well. Goodbye for now”.

The following week, Federico reported to the Baron. New clothes were given to him and he was assigned the simple task of reviewing numbers about recent taxes paid. He completed that and was gradually given more complicated tasks, eventually including some letter writing. By the end of the month, he had impressed Baron Cortez sufficiently and was given a permanent position. It came with a regular salary and a small permanent dwelling close to the Baron. Federico's life had changed dramatically in just one month. He was becoming aware of the advantages of not only doing good work, but also currying favor with the Baron by flattery, volunteering to do extra work, cooperation with other administrators, and not gossiping about the Baron or the King. His instinct about gossip was accurate. Gossip was intentionally started by someone liaising with the Baron. The purpose was to see if anyone else would join in the gossip. That was a loyalty test and Federico was not going to fail it by ensnaring himself in the gossip trap.

Federico's life with the other peasants was also changing. With his improved status, he became obsessive about never going back to his former peasant life. The

other administrators that he worked with all came from good family backgrounds, more accomplished, influential, and wealthier than his. He felt the sting of inferiority whenever the others would discuss their families or which important persons they would be meeting with, or where they had recently traveled. He was determined to overcome the perceived stigma of being associated with the peasants and having been a lowly manual laborer in the fields. Advancing his status with his fellow administrators would not be helped by telling tales of how many pounds of grain he had harvested or how many chickens he had killed or how many sheep he had skinned and disemboweled, or how many bales of straw were needed to make a proper manure pile. Yes, distancing himself from peasant's work was important, but not sufficient for enhancing his standing. He needed some kind of advantage to stand out amongst the other administrators, all of them also vying intensely to improve their positions and salaries. As luck would have it, he overheard a conversation the Baron had had with several administrators. "Our revenue isn't down, but if there were some way to augment it slightly, say by two percent, it would look good in Naples and could result in more perks for all of us. Go away and try to come up with some ideas, uh, no ideas that will cause the peasants to revolt, like raising taxes on food or raising milling fees". Federico had always been a keen observer and, thinking back on his time working with the peasants, he remembered having to have all the grain that was produced and all of the crops harvested and weighed. It was the weight of everything that was the basis of the tax that had to be paid to the baron and thence to the realm in Naples. And suddenly he saw the solution to the Baron's request. The

enticement of upward mobility had periodically been in direct competition with his conscience, and the former was now victorious. Federico slept confidently that night.

Early the next morning, he requested an audience with the Baron. “Your Excellency, please forgive me, but I couldn’t help overhearing you discuss how to increase revenue yesterday. I wasn’t eavesdropping, but your voice carried. I have a suggestion. All taxes derived from grain, crops, eggs, cheese, etc., are based on the weight of these products. For example, if a peasant harvests one hundred pounds of grain, ten percent or ten pounds is taken as a direct tax for Naples. Now, what if that same peasant harvests one hundred pounds of grain, but our scale registers it as one hundred three pounds of grain? Then the tax would be 10.3 pounds of grain, not ten pounds. This would theoretically be a gain of three percent for the crown. Now you only mentioned an increase of two percent. My plan brings us a bit more initially and so one percent of it can be used to give back to the peasants as a gift – I will explain later”. Federico was careful to emphasize ‘my plan’. “All that has to be done is to recalibrate the scales. The peasants will never know, so there will be no revolt. Trust me, I worked with them for a year. They are indeed God’s creatures, but God intended them to be in the fields and us to be overseeing them. The increase in taxes will help the King improve services in our village, which will endear him more to the people. So in effect, we are aiding in enhancing the King’s reputation and more importantly, doing God’s will. Now it’s true that there will be three pounds of grain less per hundred pounds that we keep. However, I’ve noticed wasteful sowing practices. I’m sure that more than three percent of grain used for planting is wasted by hand-spreading

the grain for planting. I often saw this method resulting in the clumping of grain in one bit of earth and no grain being spread in another bit of earth. By using a mesh device, spreading of seed would be more even and waste would be minimized". Federico had thought things out very carefully – speak fast, move from one point to the next, praise the King, obfuscate morality, and tie the proposed action in with doing God's will. Baron Cortez was astounded by this plan and said nothing. He sat down and stared out of the window for several minutes. "Your Excellency, are you alright"? "What? Yes, yes I'm fine. I just needed a few minutes to digest all that you've said". "But there is a little more to my plan. May I continue"? The Baron nodded yes. "We'll gather all of the peasants in the village square and make an announcement. Now, I know from working with them that public announcements are never good news. They will be expecting an increase in taxes. But what we will tell them is that, because of the King's and your Excellency's love of his people, taxes this year will be lowered by 1 percent. That will create euphoria, increase their loyalty, and strongly motivate them to work harder, and produce more since they'll be under the illusion that they are paying fewer taxes, and will thus be able to put a bit more onto their tables. And we will still gain two percent, just what you were hoping for."

After several minutes of silence, Baron Cortez stood up slowly and stared at Federico. "I want you to go back to work now". Federico was crushed. It was apparent to him that his plan was not acceptable. He knew that he had just incurred the wrath of the Baron, a man known for hiding his anger. Federico went back to work, knowing that this could be his last day. He dreaded the thought of

going back to a peasant's life. Unable to concentrate on his work, he told his fellow administrators that he was not feeling well and was going home. Early that evening, Federico was summoned to the Baron's palace. This was most certainly the end of his career. While waiting, the thought of offering a groveling apology entered his mind. It might stay the Baron's anger. After being summoned into the private library, Baron Cortez asked him to sit down. "Federico, you are now guaranteed a position in this administration for life. I've already spoken to my master of weights and your entire plan will be implemented as soon as possible. If you have any more ideas in the future, my door is always open".

Federico knew from working with the peasants on the land that men with clean hands were generally not well-liked. This meant that such men earned their living, not by working hard and getting their hands dirty, but by working the peasants hard, i.e. they were administrators in charge of managing the land and thus managing how the land was worked. Now that he was a man with clean hands, he was determined to maintain a good relationship with the peasants, men whom he had worked with and knew well. Federico made every effort to listen to their complaints and remedy any problems that they brought up. Because of this, Federico was one of the few managers that the peasants trusted and would confide in. However, the reasoning for his apparent sympathy with the peasants was brutally simple and gainsaid any idea of altruism; 'By stealth, take three coins from them. By magnanimity, donate a gift of one coin back to them. Always ensure that the gifts you give to the peasants do not exceed what you have clandestinely stolen from them. They will be forever grateful. Finally, do not become

greedy. Better to purloin a little over many years, not raise any alarms, and not get caught than to take much over a few years, and get caught’.

As luck would have it, the next several years provided near-perfect weather, so the harvests increased considerably. In addition, the new method of sowing seeds that Federico had suggested was more efficient, thus contributing to improved harvests. His ruse worked. Federico was an ascending star, totally loyal to Baron Cortez and to the King, brilliant in planning and implementing, and clever at avoiding detection. The only things now lacking in Federico’s life were a wife and family. A marriage was suggested between Federico and the daughter of one of the older administrators. It had all of the indicators of success – a new star in administration and diplomacy, power, influence, the beginnings of wealth, and two attractive people. The first meeting between Federico and Gabrielle went exceptionally well. They conversed easily and appeared like a perfect couple. Several months later, they were married amidst much local fanfare. Federico and Gabrielle looked forward to raising a family and passing wealth and prestige on to their children. Their first few months were a whirlwind of activities organized by Baron Cortez and his associates. When he suggested that Federico go to the court in Naples to represent Montaguto, Federico was against the idea, due to his past history. The Baron assuaged his fears about going back to Naples. “Federico, I know from agents in Naples that your father’s cousin Michele Riccio, moved to France a while ago and your mother married a Spaniard and returned with him to Aragon. Your past is truly in the past. No one in Naples will know anything. You’ll do a good job of representing Montaguto, so go to

Naples with no fears". With some trepidation, Federico agreed to go, accompanied by his wife. The latter part of the fifteenth century could not have been more advantageous for Federico and Gabriele; art and architecture were flourishing and Naples was a powerful and influential part of Italy. The influential couple from Montaguto met some of the most important and powerful Royal counselors and Church prelates. Federico was most impressive and Gabrielle was charming. Both of them had been prepped on politics, both locally and throughout Europe; hence conversation came easily.

Following the trip to Naples, word was sent discreetly to Baron Cortez that Federico would be a most influential agent for Montaguto's benefit and that he should be the one sent to Naples for the upcoming conference with King Ferdinand and his chief counselors. The Baron told Federico about his opportunity, and at his suggestion, Federico learned some Spanish. That would not have been necessary, but it would further impress the court and would thus be another advantage for currying King Ferdinand's favor. Federico did so and as anticipated, the court was impressed not only with him and his wife but also with the increase in tax revenue from Montaguto. It was a village that up till now, had had very little influence in Naples, so an increase in revenue made the King's counselors take notice. As long as that continued, the court knew that the Baron was a very adept administrator and was happy to let him manage affairs unhindered.

Upon their return to Montaguto, Federico and Gabrielle planned on starting a family. Sadly, their first child, a boy, died shortly after birth in late June 1491. In the same week, in one of the peasant's huts, another birth took place. This birth had been difficult, but the baby boy

born was fine, and so was the mother. With the pain of childbirth over and the sight of a healthy baby, there should have been a sense of happiness in Teresa, the new mother. However, the possibility of happiness was mitigated by another reality – Teresa was not married. Months prior to the birth, when her pregnancy became obvious, she refused to mention who the father was and continued to maintain her silence. In her mind, bringing temporary shame to her peasant family was a small price to pay for maintaining the anonymity of the father. Teresa was a keen observer of village life and knew from the few previous cases like hers that there would be rumors, snide remarks, and social isolation for a while, but that would all subside within a year and life would be back to normal. Besides, accusing a particular man of fathering a child usually resulted in him denying it. In addition, the accused man could easily get two or three men from the village or a neighboring village, to declare under oath that they had also slept with the woman and paid to do so. The local court would then be obliged to declare that the accusation of fatherhood could not be proven and the man acquitted. Then, she would have a reputation for life as a loose woman or even worse, a prostitute, not to mention enemies from the family of the accused. But Teresa, always alert to the possibility of improving her situation and that of her child, would bide her time and would soon take advantage of an unforeseen opportunity involving a man beaten down by life.

Robert's life had spiraled downward, from the possibility of a military career to working as a laborer in the fields of Montaguto. As a young officer in the Angevin army, he had been sent from Anjou, France, to join forces with enemies of King Ferdinand in 1488. Militarily,

history was repeating itself and Robert would be one of the victims. Years earlier, Angevin troops from France had joined the Prince of Taranto, Giovanni Orsini, to fight against King Ferdinand and try to regain Southern Italy for France. Ferdinand was the illegitimate son of King Alfonso and heir to the Spanish Aragonese throne that ruled Naples, Southern Italy, and Sicily. The Angevins had ruled Naples and Southern Italy periodically during the thirteenth century, the entire fourteenth century, and part of the fifteenth century, until defeated by King Alfonso V, in June 1442. By late 1460, the Angevins' plan to try to regain their lost kingdom was ready. King Ferdinand, through his many contacts, spies, and royal intrigue, became aware of this threat and requested help from Skanderbeg, the old friend of his father, Alfonso. After Skanderbeg's Albanian forces arrived in Italy, they thoroughly routed the Angevins at Barletta and Trani in 1461. For now, Ferdinand's Aragonese throne was safe. It was a humiliating defeat for the Angevins. Robert's incompetence on the battlefield in this latest attempt to unseat a Spanish King contributed to his fall from power. After the military debacle, Robert could not face returning to Anjou, France. With such a glaring failure on his record, he would have no military career now. More devastating to him would be having to live with his failure amongst his relatives, fellow countrymen, and officers. He never returned to Anjou or France, but, after the lost battles, wandered from town to town until coming to Montaguto.

It was not unusual for an Angevin to settle in this area of the Kingdom. In 1300, the Angevin King Charles II invaded the town of Lucera, near Montaguto. His army killed, enslaved, and exiled the large Muslim population

that had been forcibly relocated there some seventy-six years earlier. They were replaced by Christians, many of whom were Angevin soldiers or citizens of Anjou in France.

Robert worked in the fields in Montaguto and lived a quiet life. It could not be said that it was a quiet life of contentment, but rather of a man having given up, of having lost his confidence, of wanting to be left alone, of desiring to put in his time on this wretched earth and then letting God judge him, hopefully mercifully. Once settled in Montaguto, he would occasionally get drunk but rarely become belligerent. His history was known by everyone in the village. Even though he had been an enemy soldier fighting against the villagers' King, there was no animosity shown him; rather, he was pitied. A distant affection and sympathy, not animosity, were surely the offspring of pity, and these were what were shown to Robert. He would not use his French surname and was given the surname of Anzivino by the Montagutese officials. This was an Italian corruption of Angevin. He was thirty-three years old when Teresa's son was born.

Circumstances were perfect, the right person was in place, the plan had been honed to near perfection and worked out clandestinely, and the necessary allies and scapegoats had been found. "We want to speak to the village council – today". Teresa's father and Father Torrio were not about to be rebuffed. "Why, what matter is so important"? "My daughter Teresa is now willing to name the father of her baby boy and we want this low-life to come forward and take full responsibility for what he's done". The two men were admitted into the office of the village council. Teresa's father excused himself, went and

collected Teresa, and brought her back into the council room. In tears, she told her story, "I was just walking back to our house early in the evening. It was late September last year. I noticed Robert walking towards me. He was such a kind and gentle person, no one would ever fear him. Well, he suddenly grabbed me and forced me behind one of the buildings and raped me. There was no one around to help me and he kept my mouth covered with his hand, so I couldn't scream. As it turned out, I became pregnant with his child. I was so ashamed and frightened that I couldn't tell anyone. After enduring six months of silence and fear, Father Torrio prayed for me and convinced me that I must tell the truth. If I don't, who knows what this wretched man might do to other women in our village"? In a few brief minutes, Teresa had managed to change herself from someone who had been the object of ridicule, with a tarnished reputation, into a victim who had been raped. She was very, very convincing.

"Robert Anzivino, what do you have to say regarding the charge of rape against you"? Robert was very shaken up and denied it, but his demeanor was not that of an innocent man who would be strongly and emotionally denying a false charge; hence there was suspicion amongst the village council that Teresa was telling the truth. For some unknown reason, Baron Cortez had decided to let the village council hear the charges without him being present. However, neither he nor the village council had the authority to judge such serious cases as murder or rape. They could only determine if there was enough evidence to send the accused to Naples for a trial. They decided to do that since Robert had no evidence to present in favor of his innocence. As mentioned, there had

been pity and sympathy for him, but pity and sympathy were not strong enough ties to enable this foreigner to get two or three other men to lie and say that they had also slept with Teresa. Additionally, Robert was not the sort of man who would even try to do that. After being informed, the Royal court at Naples agreed to hear the case and set a date for the trial. Robert was kept under house arrest until he would have to leave for the trial in Naples. While under arrest, he had been allowed to send a note to a former soldier acquaintance in the neighboring town of Orsara di Puglia, six miles away.

Three weeks before Robert was due to be tried in Naples, an official from Orsara di Puglia met with the Montaguto officials. “Gentlemen, I send you greetings from all of our officials in Orsara. I was given a note that this Robert had sent to a soldier living in our village. I believe you are holding him in custody, pending his rape trial. I have an official document that shows that Robert Mercier, as he was born, now known here as Robert Anzivino, was drunk and belligerent and caused a great deal of damage to a tavern in Orsara. In addition, he struck two men hard enough to cause them to lose consciousness. He was convicted and jailed from July 29, 1490, until January 29, 1491. You can work out dates. This may or may not help him, but that is for you to decide. He was definitely in jail in Orsara during these dates, as evidenced by this document. I bid you all goodbye and must now return to Orsara”.

The council members then went and obtained church baptism records showing that Teresa’s baby had been born late in June of 1491. That meant that her pregnancy had to have started in mid to late September or early October of 1490. The jail dates precluded Robert from

being the father. "What are we to do? This Teresa is lying, and we are keeping an innocent man in jail. Two things are for sure. Robert needs to be released and we must send an emissary to Naples to cancel the trial. The emissary will have to leave shortly in order to arrive before the trial date. At least Naples will be happy since they won't have the burden of another trial". After pondering their choices, another official said, "I have an idea. First, we must go and tell Robert that he's innocent. Today is Thursday. Let's keep him in jail until just after Mass on Sunday. Then we'll take him to the public square and announce his innocence to all gathered. We'll also say that not only is he innocent, but the charge made against him has been proven to be a lie. Maybe that will force the truth out of Teresa, or force the real father to confess". Everyone agreed. When they told Robert, he was overjoyed and agreed to remain in jail until Sunday.

"See, just like I told you – everything is working out well. Robert will go on trial in a few weeks and probably be found guilty and my reputation will be cleared. He will spend a little time in jail and never have the courage to come back here – who wants a convicted rapist in their village? I won't ever reveal your identity, as long as you continue to pay for raising my child, sorry OUR child". Teresa, having just finished speaking to the father of her son, was very pleased with herself for perfecting her plan. He knew that secret payments for fathering a child with a peasant woman were considerably less than paying for fathering an illegitimate child with a wealthy woman. Thus, it would not be a burden for him to pay a peasant's ransom. But how had he let this happen? The chasm between classes was so great and it was known that it was foolhardy to carry on with a woman from the peasant

class. Well, it was done. At least this child would not be left discreetly at the doorstep of a convent and would be raised in a semblance of a normal family. Hopefully, the peasant parents of some dolt of a young man would arrange to have their son marry Teresa. Then, a brilliant idea burst forth - if he augmented the dowry of Teresa, that would make it very, very attractive for said dolt to marry Teresa. In fact, with a dowry unheard of for peasants, she would no doubt have many suitors vying for her hand in marriage. She could always say that Robert sent her money, due to remorse for what he had done. That way, no one would know where the dowry came from. Everything would work out and everyone would believe that Robert had fathered the little boy. The real father's secret would be safe with this plan.

And then came Sunday. Before practically the entire village, Robert's release was announced. "A terrible miscarriage of justice has been avoided. Not only is Robert Anzivino innocent of rape, but the charge against him was a complete lie". No further words were needed. What was left unsaid resonated in every ear, louder than the church bells ringing in the background - Teresa had lied and intentionally tried to convict an innocent man and now everyone in Montaguto knew of her deception. How ironic that the Epistle reading for Mass that week, given less than an hour prior, was from Romans 1:18

"The wrath of God is indeed being revealed from heaven against every impiety and wickedness of those who suppress the truth by their wickedness".

Robert walked slowly through the crowd, weeping. He had borne the calumny leveled against him with dignity

and would now go back to his previous way of life, unchanged except for the conversion of the villagers' pity and sympathy into admiration and recognition of him as a man of real courage. Surviving this ordeal finally allowed him to overcome his sense of failure due to the lost battles years ago. With Robert cleared, rumors circulated about who the father was. It was well known that Baron Cortez had given a generous amount of money to a convent in Ariano Irpino, a convent that had an attached orphanage. He had also been overly generous to the two other women in Montaguto who had recently borne illegitimate children, and it was so strange that the Baron absented himself at a hearing for a major crime like rape. There were no doubts in the minds of some that the Baron's guilty conscience had driven him to make these donations, since he no doubt fathered these children. These rumors got back to the Baron. He knew that he had to quell them. Early one evening, as Teresa was walking towards her house, an agent of the Baron approached her and said that he wanted to speak with her right away, at his residence. When they arrived, Baron Cortez had Teresa come into his private study and asked her to sit down. After dismissing the agent, he said, "Teresa, there are rumors that I am the father of your child. You and I know that this is false, so please tell me who is the father". Teresa refused the glass of wine offered to her, a gesture not ordinarily given to a peasant, but one designed by Cortez to encourage cooperation and honesty. Teresa, ever alert to her surroundings, immediately perceived a problem and quickly conceived a plan of action. The Baron's reputation could indeed soon be in trouble. She saw an opening and was going to capitalize on it. "Why you are, of course. At least that's what I'll tell everyone.

You won't go on trial, given your authority, but you won't be able to prove that you aren't the father and the publicity will hurt you more than me. If you could contribute regularly to my child's upbringing, I would remain silent". Cortez, for the first time in years, was unable to hide his anger and bellowed, "You liar. You know very well that I am not the father. I've never had anything to do with you. You won't get away with this". Then he threw the wine in his glass into her face. Teresa jumped up, angry but more certain than ever that she would extort money from him. "Ha, it's Federico who's the father, but no one will ever, ever know that. It's you that the rumors will convict. You'll pay for my silence, more than Federico pays and there is nothing you can do about it". Cortez, his anger rising, bellowed, "I'll repeat what you just told me about Federico and you'll look the fool and liar that you are". Haughtily, Teresa responded, "And you have no witnesses that I told you Federico is the father. You've invited this poor peasant girl to your residence at an evening hour and offered me a glass of wine, no doubt to seduce me later - how will you explain that? I'm right, eh? No one will believe your denial". Baron Cortez composed himself and sat down slowly. He said nothing, just sat there for a while, tapping his fingers on the armrest. "Well, I'm going back home now. You won't only pay for my silence, but also for ruining my blouse with your wine". "Just a minute Teresa, sit back down." Teresa did so, a look of haughtiness and gloating on her face, sure in the knowledge that she had won. Cortez then yelled, "Please, come out". Then, two of his agents and Teresa's father emerged from behind and under the huge desk in the corner. Teresa's father strode over to her,

grabbed her by the arm, and practically dragged her home. The incident was now over.

The following day, Baron Cortez summoned Federico into his study and recounted the events of the previous evening. "You're the father of Teresa's boy, we know that now". "Yes, and I'm giving her money. She and the little boy will not want for anything. I've decided that the best thing for Teresa is to give her a large dowry. That will make it attractive for a young man to marry her". Money has a way of trying to turn negative behaviors into positive ones, or covering them up. Federico would look after the welfare of his child and when he became an adolescent, let him know that he was the father. The boy, named Ricardo, would retain the Riccio name when he was grown. The large dowry for Teresa was indeed a very attractive inducement for some man to marry her. Teresa was humiliated in her own eyes, but in the actions of others, she became an outcast, not to be trusted, not to be believed, for months afterward. Gradually, her standing in the village did improve and she did change with the help of Father Torrio, at least judged by outward appearances, no doubt due to the convenience of her visible penance due to her prevarication.

However, she had not thought through all of the ramifications of her tryst with Federico. Honor was a very important aspect of life in Montaguto. When a man's honor was insulted, a vendetta against the offender could result. Teresa's father, Gianluca, and family were deeply insulted, but they could not, or rather would not, try to get back at Federico, who had fathered Teresa's child. Having heard first-hand his daughter's intentional lie and her attempt to blackmail the Baron, he had no illusions that she was merely an innocent peasant woman,

seduced by Federico. He was sure that Teresa had probably played a part in seducing Federico. This was not an idea that just arose in his mind due to Teresa's infidelity. It was not uncommon for some men in the village to harbor just a hint of suspicion that their wives could be unfaithful; hence, women were watched carefully and did not talk with or walk with men who were not their fathers, sons, husbands, brothers, or close cousins. The restrictions on young, unmarried women were even more stringent. The duty of ensuring minimal contact with non-family males was largely the responsibility of a young woman's brothers. So, after much thought, Gianluca summoned his sons. "You three have largely been responsible for bringing dishonor on our family. How often was Teresa left unchaperoned due to your negligence? That's why this has happened". The boys would not dare answer, for they knew what was coming. They were guilty. One did not argue with his father, even though one was bigger and stronger. Gianluca thrashed all three of them. Their whimpering apologies didn't calm Gianluca's anger. Finally, their trial and punishment were over - hopefully. The brothers went outside away from their house and slept in the field that night so that their father wouldn't give them more punishment.

But a loss of family honor was not the only problem resulting from Teresa's indiscretion. Despite the large dowry that Federico had discretely provided for Teresa, no parents of any potential suitor had even contacted Gianluca and his wife regarding marrying Teresa. Although most people started talking and interacting with Teresa again after several months, there was still that undercurrent of snide remarks spoken furtively, and stifled giggles when she walked to the fields or to get

water. Gianluca knew that if someone did not marry Teresa, he would be saddled with a spinster in his house until his death, a spinster who had a child that he, Gianluca, would also be responsible for a number of years. In addition, upon his death, his oldest son would be required to take Teresa in, saddling him with a spinster in the house. There was even more shame piled upon his family's loss of honor; to have a young, pretty daughter that no one would marry, due to her past behavior. As time passed, Gianluca was trying hard to hide his anger towards Teresa. There was now another mouth to feed in his house. He came home one night after working and was going to beat her, such was his anger. However, his wife stepped between them and begged Gianluca not to hit her, "What is done is done. We can't make things go away and pretend that this never happened. Don't beat her, her baby needs his mother to care for him". Gianluca stepped back away from Teresa. He turned away from her and Teresa and her mother knew that there would be no beating.

There was little work now. Time was available, so the following week, Gianluca walked to Orsara di Puglia, six miles from Montaguto. There, he met with Peppe the fortune-teller, a man widely known in the mountain towns near Montaguto. "Can you help me? My family has been dishonored by my daughter. She has had a baby with some man and isn't married. We are greatly shamed and now, no one will marry her. I'll be saddled with a spinster if something isn't done". Peppe knew full well the consequences of a loss of honor – and of having to care for a spinster. "Fortuna or someone, has cast a malocchio, an evil eye curse upon you. If that curse is not broken....." Peppe broke off his sentence, lifted his

hands, shrugged his shoulders, and just shook his head. Gianluca knew that such a curse could be with him and his family for life, such was the nature of curses. Not only that, but the curse could possibly transfer to his sons – all because of the rash actions of his daughter. Peppe looked around furtively, motioned Gianluca to come closer to him and said in a very low whisper, “I can break the curse, but it will cost money. I have to eat also. The priest in Montaguto must not know. Priests can actually cause my breaking of the curse to be canceled, so, don’t tell anyone. You’ll know, I will know and the spirit that breaks the curse on you will know. No good can come from letting anyone else know until the curse is broken. Then you can tell everyone that I’m a competent magician and the broken curse will be proof. Your daughter will be married, I know already from the spirit that contacts me. See? Already the spirits want to help you and you haven’t even paid anything”. Peppe sat back in his chair and stared straight ahead. Gianluca paid Peppe and the promised curse incantation was duly performed.

Several days after Gianluca returned to Montaguto, Father Torrio came to his house. “Gianluca, good to see you. I have a favor to ask of you. I would like you to have your wife, Teresa, and your sons here tomorrow evening. I will come by with a man who wants to speak to all of you”. “Father, what about”? “Just tell me if you can arrange to have your family here. You will know everything tomorrow evening”. “Yes, come by tomorrow. We’ll all be here”. Gianluca was sure that his paying to have a curse broken was the reason for Father and some mystery man wanting to come to his house. At dinner, Gianluca told his family that Father Torrio and another man were coming to their house the following evening to

speaking to the entire family, so everyone had to be there. The following evening, Father arrived at Gianluca's house with Robert Anzivino. They entered and were invited to sit down. Teresa was very uncomfortable seeing Robert. She got out of her chair and started towards the door. Father jumped up and blocked the way. "Teresa, please sit down. You need to hear what Robert has to say". Robert arose from his chair slowly. "First, I give my thanks to Gianluca. You didn't have to arrange for your family to be here and you could have refused to allow me to enter your house. You are an honest man and one to be respected". Such words were as a soothing ointment to Gianluca's damaged honor. "I've spent much time considering what to say to you. Father has prayed for me and with me and helped me get the courage to come here. With your permission Gianluca, I would like to address your daughter directly". With these last words, Gianluca's entire family feared that there would now be a litany of abuse and highlights of Teresa's sins. Gianluca had been very upset by his daughter's actions, but she was still his daughter and no one was going to come into his house and denigrate any of his family members. "Robert, you've gotten your justice. You've just tried to trick me with a flattering statement about my honor and now you're going to insult my daughter. I won't have you belittle anyone of my children in my own house. We've suffered enough. Leave now or you'll get a beating worse than my disobedient sons got". With that, Gianluca snatched a walking stick hanging from the wall. "Gianluca, I won't have one of my parishioners do violence in my presence. For God's sake, sit down and listen to what Robert has to say. You keep talking about your honor having been violated. What about his? You owe this man the opening of your ears and

mind and the shutting of your mouth - all of you do. Sit down and put that weapon away". Father Torrio had eased the tension sufficiently. There would now be no more impediments to Robert getting everything off of his mind. "Teresa, there could be many ways to say this, but I'll try and say it simply. I forgive you for lying. I forgive you for the time I spent in jail. It's easy to hate someone who has damaged another's reputation. It is forgiveness that is harder. Hate is what consumes one's soul and forgiveness saves one's soul. Father's pointing out to me how often Jesus forgave is what convinced me to come here and heal any wounds, wounds in my heart and yours. Father also asked me to read something to all of you from the Scriptures."

"For the judgment is merciless to one who has not shown mercy". James 2:13.

Not a word was said by anyone for several minutes. Teresa sat staring into space, unable to fathom why Robert forgave her. She had not crawled to him, begging forgiveness, so why would he forgive her? The limitations of one mind often cannot fathom the reasoning of another mind. One's conscience can be a brutal taskmaster. It can make a man treat his own actions and sins much harsher than those of another, even if those of another are directed towards him. Robert was finally able to forgive himself for his military debacle all those years ago. The self-recrimination, feeling of unworthiness, self-loathing that had accompanied him for decades, had now vanished, having been slowly eroded away by time, reasoning and prayer. Having finally forgiven himself, it was a far easier step to forgive Teresa.

“Gianluca, that’s all I have to say to Teresa. Thank you for letting me speak. I would now like to speak to you and your wife alone. Could you ask your children to go out of the house for a while? Father, could you also go out and take Teresa and her brothers to the church? I’ll come and let you know when we’re done”. Finally, Robert was alone with Teresa’s parents. “Gianluca, I’ll get right to the point. I’m prepared to marry Teresa. I’m not a young man, so feel it’s proper for me to ask you directly. Besides, it might take a while for my parents to come here from their graves in France and negotiate a marriage with both of you”. It took a few seconds, but Gianluca and his wife finally chuckled at Robert’s joke. However, the smile on their faces soon evaporated as they tried to understand this strange, foreign man and his rationale for wanting to marry a woman who had had him imprisoned falsely, for a crime he did not commit. “I occasionally hear some of the men make snide remarks in the open, about Teresa. She now has a boy to raise and if she were married, no one would dare make such remarks about a married woman. The entire village now knows that Federico is the boy’s father and also knows that he’s been very good about paying for his upbringing. However, a boy needs a father to be present every day and teach him the important things in life, so that he will grow up and help this village. I can do that. Late in my life, I’ve come to the decision that marriage is best for me. So, marrying Teresa would be good for her, her reputation, her son, me, and your damaged family honor. Now, I’m aware of the large dowry of money that goes along with Teresa’s marriage, but I can tell you that I don’t need that. I’ve been speaking with Federico and he has suggested that there could be a job for me in the Village administration. So, I wouldn’t

have to work in the fields and would be able to provide a good life for Teresa and her son – and, hopefully, any children that we might have". Gianluca, confused, said, "Robert, I don't know how to respond to you. Could you go outside and let us talk this over"? After Robert left, Gianluca's wife started speaking. He listened for a few minutes but then interrupted her. "Look, we have no choice. No one else is going to marry Teresa. I don't want to have a spinster living with us, a spinster with a child that I'll have to be a father to; that's two more mouths to feed. Robert is the solution to everything. Teresa can now be a respectable, married woman. Her son will have a father and our honor will be restored. She will marry Robert". His wife sat still, then started shaking her head yes. "Let's get her to come back here now and speak with her. You're her father and have the authority, but be kind". Still confused, Teresa came back to the house. "Teresa, we're your parents and want the best for you. It's time for you to be married. This will be a shock to you, but Robert wants you to be his wife". I'm your father and can make you marry him, but your mother and I want to know how you feel. This is a very strange day indeed, for all of us". Teresa just sat still, not saying anything. Finally, Gianluca's wife whispered to him, "Let's get Robert in here and let him talk to Teresa. He's been persuasive so far". "Good idea". Gianluca went outside and spoke with Robert. "We want you to come back in and speak to Teresa about marrying her. She hasn't responded to us. You're persuasive, so make her see the advantages for everyone like you did with us". Robert repeated everything he had said to Teresa's parents. "I'll go now, but will come back tomorrow to hear your decision". Robert started to leave, but then went over to

where Teresa was sitting, took her hand and said, "Courage and prayer will help you make the right decision". Taking the hand of a young woman he was not married to was unheard of. This normally would have been an affront to Gianluca. However, weighed against the affront caused by Teresa's actions, Gianluca reasoned that this was now unimportant.

Self-interest can be the enemy of conscience, but once in a while by pure coincidence, a decision made based on self-interest coincides with what a good conscience would have led the person to decide. Teresa agreed to marry Robert. Her limited vision of things saw a way out of her fallen status in the village and a way of protecting her family's honor. The fact that Robert, Teresa's son, her parents, and family honor would also benefit, were not the criteria upon which she based her decision. Had conscience ruled the day, Teresa would have made the same decision for reasons more altruistic than selfish.

Gianluca was more relieved than content that his daughter would be getting married. He also was very certain that Peppe the fortune-teller had worked a miracle for him and his family's honor. However, he did not know that Robert had been entertaining the idea of forgiving Teresa and asking for her to marry him well before Peppe's incantation. Whether Peppe actually believed that his incantations worked is not known, but undue credit is something that Peppe always accepted willingly. However, Peppe's advice to Gianluca to avoid telling Father Torrio about paying for an incantation was good. Father would have been irate and read Deuteronomy 18:10-12 to him,

“Let there not be found among you anyone who practices divination, or is a soothsayer, augur or sorcerer, or who casts spells, consults ghosts and spirits, or seeks oracles from the dead. Anyone who does such things is an abomination to the Lord.”

“So, Robert, the news is all over the village. You and Teresa will be getting married soon. It’ll be a strange relationship between us – you raising the son that I fathered, and marrying the woman I had a brief tryst with. I’m happy for you, for all of you, really, no jealousy. You’re an honorable man and a man of courage. I don’t know anyone else who would have done this. So, you’ll be the perfect person to work in the village administration. It’s all arranged. After your marriage, you will start”. With Baron Cortez’s permission, Federico had invited Robert into the Baron’s study. He poured two glasses of wine and they spoke for several hours, unaware of the time slipping by. “Cortez is pleased to have you work for him. I’ve put in the good word for you, not that your reputation needed any embellishing. Ah, enough about work matters. It’s all set for you. Isn’t it strange, I was born under the same circumstances as my son Ricardo – a brief romantic tryst, and there I was, not anticipated. Sadly, as I grew up, I also discovered that I wasn’t really wanted. That has haunted me all of my life, and what did I do but father a child, just as I was fathered? I’ve tried to do my best for Ricardo, but with a wife and a son, it’s hard to give much time to him. Now, I understand how hard it was for my father to raise me in a house with four other children he and his wife had. Well, one thing he did that I’m very grateful for was teaching me to read, write and do numbers. Robert, I can’t insist, but Ricardo must also be

taught to read, write and do numbers. He'll have a great chance to do well in life with those tools. If not, he'll have to work the fields as a peasant for his entire life. Look at yourself, an honorable and respected man who will be working under the Baron soon. But where would you be with your honor and respect if you couldn't read or write"? It was a rhetorical question, with an obvious answer that only required a nodding of the head from Robert. "Ah, we learn things too late in life. I never saw my parents or half-brothers and sisters after I left Ariano Irpino. That isn't what I want for Ricardo. So, I'll keep helping out with his expenses. Just let me visit him once in a while, please let me dd....." Federico started sobbing and couldn't finish his sentence. The loss of his first child with his wife, the isolation and lack of love growing up, and the knowledge and close proximity of his illegitimate child had all finally closed in on him. He composed himself and told Robert about these things and how God's will or fortuna had conspired to make his life so sad. "Federico, you'll have other children and you can always see Ricardo. He'll be a lucky boy, having two fathers who are now good friends. You can't let anything keep you in such a bad state of mind. When Teresa and I are married, I'll talk to her and make sure that you are welcome when you visit Ricardo. Now I must go and you, no more wine for today".

Shortly after Robert and Teresa were married, an unexpected opportunity presented itself to Federico. An important meeting was to be held at the court of King Ferdinand in Naples and a representative from Montaguto was requested. Baron Cortez was in no doubt that Federico and Gabrielle should attend since they had successfully represented Montaguto twice before and impressed everyone at King Ferdinand's court, including

the king himself. The meeting was to be held in 1493 and Federico agreed to go. As the time for the meeting approached, he became very confident and looked forward to attending. Prior to leaving, he met with Cortez. "Federico, this is a real opportunity to obtain privileges and money for Montaguto – the invitation states specifically that there's a matter of importance directly involving Montaguto. No doubt, all of the extra tax revenue that we've sent to Naples over the last few years, thanks to your brilliant plan, is going to be re-paid to us in one way or another". "As always Excellency, Gabrielle and I will do our best for our beloved Montaguto. We're off tomorrow". Federico would feel like his old self once at court and looked forward to the balls and dinners at which he would once again use charm to win the day, meet with important people, be witty in conversation, and impress with his Spanish.

"Ah, Federico, I am Cesare Montoya, a counselor for King Ferdinand. Please, I need to meet with you right away. Let's go to my office". This was not the protocol expected. "Please, sit down. I'll get right to the point – you'll have to excuse me because I'm so busy today; dinners and a big gala dance to prepare for next week, invitations to go over. You have no idea how irate some people get when they are not invited. So much to do. As you know, Montaguto has been in the hands of King Ferdinand, and before that, it was with his beloved father, Alfonso, for many years. In effect, it has been in the royal family. Your charming village was actually a wedding present for Ferdinand. Well, due to financial and personal reasons that I'm not at liberty to go into with you, as of this year, ownership of Montaguto has now passed out of the direct hands of the royal family. It's been given to the

brothers Agostino and Giovanni Adorno, by our gracious royals. Again, I'm not at liberty to go into all of the details. What this means is that there will no longer be direct intervention by King Ferdinand's family or whoever succeeds him to the Aragonese throne. All matters relating to Montaguto will now be handled directly by the Adornos or whomever they appoint as their baron or agent, and barring a murder or other major crime, direct representation of agents from Montaguto at court here in Naples will no longer be required. I wish you good luck in the future and hope that you will have a safe journey back to Montaguto. Goodbye". With that, Montoya turned about face and quickly exited, leaving Federico sitting alone. The terse meeting and brusque goodbye would be the only contact he would have with any court official while in Naples.

Piece by painful piece, the dark picture for Montaguto was becoming evident in the minutes that Federico spent sitting alone. Federico was now irrelevant. There would be no more dinners, no dances, no audiences on which to spread his and Gabrielle's charm, and no more invitations to royal meetings. Past charm, past impressions made by Federico and Gabrielle, upon the important people attached to the royal court, were merely moments of entertainment for Ferdinand's administrators – a charming couple who could entertain and endear, but a charming couple who could bring no power, no influence to Naples. Montaguto's prestige and importance had merely been figments of the fertile imaginations of ruling barons and ambitious men who pictured themselves as being able to influence Naples and the royal court there. For the Baron, Federico, and the other administrators, Montaguto would now become in reality what it had been

seen all along by Naples – a backwater, small village, high on a hill, like other similar villages, quite distant from Naples, relevant only as far as generating income for the Kingdom of Ferdinand. Despite the dreams of several deluded barons and administrators, Montaguto never was, nor could be, a major influence in Naples, as were Palermo, Spain, and Rome. Baron Cortez would still be Baron, but only because he was able to keep taxes coming in and avoid major problems with peasant complaints or crimes. The journey back to Montaguto was spent mostly in silence.

When Baron Cortez had been appraised of what had happened in Naples, there were no more grandiose plans made. Their world now consisted only of what lay between the Southern Apennine mountain tail and the Cervaro river. To them, everything had been lost, they were irrelevant, there would be no fond memories of past glories to dwell upon or future glories to come. A lament from the Psalms mirrored their gloom;

“By the rivers of Babylon there we sat weeping when we remembered Zion lost.” Psalm 137:1

Even with this change in the status of Montaguto, nothing would improve for the peasants of Montaguto. They would still be tied to the land, still have to work hard to scrape out a meager living, still have to contend with periodic diseases, and still have to pay heavy taxes to both the state and church. They would still be required to make repairs in the village and on Baron Cortez’s estate.

They lived in squalid conditions and, despite all of this, the peasants were expected to maintain their loyalty to the distant King of Naples and Sicily. Who their direct

master was in Montaguto, how important he was or wasn't in Naples was irrelevant, for there was little hope of changes happening in their lives.

Federico and his wife had four more children. Their second one, also a boy, was stillborn in 1493. The third child, a girl born in 1494, succumbed to cholera at the age of three. The fourth child, a boy, was stillborn in 1495. Finally, their fifth child, a boy, Sebastiano, was born in 1497 and survived. These were difficult years for Federico and his wife. The losses of the other four children were devastating, but they accepted their fate. Despite the deaths of four of their five children, Federico and his wife would live to see their grandchildren born. Painful as it was for Gabrielle, she accepted Federico's concern and care for Ricardo, his child with Teresa.

The discrepancy in weights that Federico had initiated was corrected in 1512. The Kingdom of Naples started enforcing laws regarding weights and measures strictly, so all scales throughout the realm were re-calibrated correctly.

Baron Cortez lived until 1514, but resigned his position in 1497. His oldest son Leonardo was expected to assume his role as Baron of Montaguto, but Montaguto was now owned by the Adorno brothers and they appointed their own Baron when Cortez resigned. Cortez spent his later years reading and reflecting on his accomplishments as Baron. He had increased his charitable donations and did help the village of Montaguto considerably, despite the dishonest altering of scales for weighing produce. During the last few months of his life, he became withdrawn and spent most of his time reading. After his death, his widow found a worn

page that he had written, copied from Ecclesiastes 1:14-18 that mirrored his growing sadness as he aged:

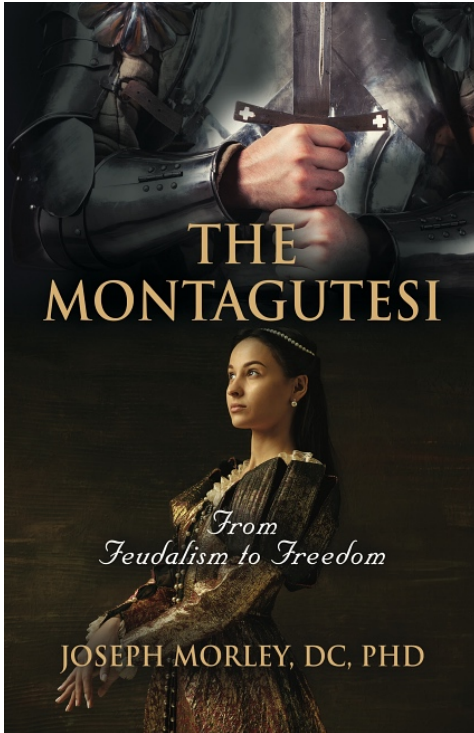
“I have seen all things that are done under the sun and behold, all is vanity and a chase after the wind. Though I said to myself, “See, I have greatly increased my wisdom beyond all who were before me in Jerusalem and my mind has broad experience of wisdom and knowledge”. Yet when I applied my mind to know wisdom and knowledge, madness and folly, I learned that this also is a chase after the wind, for in much wisdom there is much sorrow; whoever increases knowledge increases grief”.

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United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. The New American Bible.
Catholic Bible Publishers, Wichita, Kansas, 1970



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