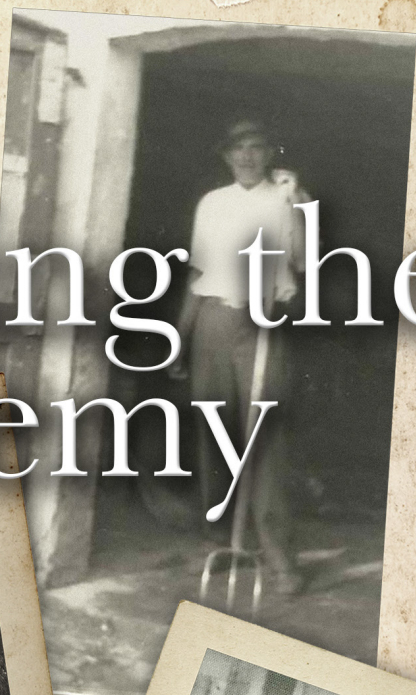


# Feeding the Enemy



J.R. Sharp



*Feeding the Enemy*

by J.R. Sharp

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# Feeding the Enemy

J.R. Sharp



VIRGINIA BEACH  
CAPE CHARLES

# Dedication

This book is dedicated to my mother (Maria Cartelli) and aunt (Loretta Cartelli). If they hadn't shared their stories of survival, this book would not have been possible.

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# Prologue

AS A CHILD LIVING in Italy, I remember sitting with my mother, aunts, uncles, and grandparents fascinated by the story of their survival. Their stories about World War II were remarkable. The majority of the stories surrounded what happened on the farm located on the outskirts of Cimpello. Cimpello is a small town located near the city of Pordenone in the northeast section of Italy about an hour from Venice.

The older I grew, the more vivid the stories started to become, and I understood why they talk so often about this period. The stories would become even more passionate when they would take out old photos and newspaper articles. Not all of the family and their friends survived, which would bring a lot of emotions into their storytelling.

I wrote this book based on their accounts of what happened during War World II. Most of the information in this book is based on at least two corroborating accounts and other research. Some accounts and dialogue are to some degree fictionalized due to the lack of information. All of the family names are true, but all other names and characters are fictional because of the lack of information during the writing of this book. All the events that occurred on the farm are non-fictional.

# Chapter 1

## *WOUNDED*

It was 1939 and the world was on the verge of war. Europe was already being conquered by the Germans, and in the Far East, Japan was making plans to be a world leader and had already invaded eastern China. America was on the sidelines after declaring neutrality and watching to see how things would unfold. Italy was also involved with its own world domination and was busy in Africa and the country of Ethiopia. The Axis Powers was formed, an alliance between Germany, Italy, and Japan during World War II.

Just as Adolf Hitler was leading Germany, a controlling Fascist leader named Benito Mussolini was leading Italy. “Il Duce” had adopted Adolf Hitler’s plans to expand German territories by acquiring all territories it considered German. The aim of invading Ethiopia was to boost Italian national prestige, which was wounded by Ethiopia’s defeat of Italian forces at the Battle of Adowa in the 19th century, which saved Ethiopia from Italian colonization. Another justification for the attack was an incident during December 1934 between Italian and Ethiopian troops at Wal-Wal Oasis, where two hundred Italian soldiers lost their lives. In addition, Mussolini saw it as an opportunity to provide land for unemployed Italians and also acquire more



mineral resources to fight off the Great Depression.

The war resulted in the military occupation of Ethiopia and its annexation into the newly created colony of Italian East Africa. After Italy joined the Axis, they attacked the British and Commonwealth Nations in June 1940 and pushed their way through Somaliland. It was during this period that most of the Italian wounded were shipped back to Italy. Among them was Gino Cartelli, an infantry soldier with 19 Infantry Division Venezia.

During the early stages of World War II, Germany's armed forces journeyed many times through the Italian countryside without any type of incidents with the locals. The German army worked very closely with the Italian Fascist and even had interpreters with them during most of their journeys.

In the later stages of the war, this all changed, and the German and Fascist-lead Italian forces became desperate for supplies and supporters. They started to collect metals at first but then confiscated food and other supplies from the local farmers and business owners. This was the same type of tactic used by the Germans on the Jews in Germany. In the northeast corner of Italy, it was especially difficult for the locals to hide their goods and family members due to their borders being surrounded by water and the country of Yugoslavia, which joined the Axis powers.

Local farmers were especially hit hard from most of these encounters with the military. They had to find inventive ways to hide their food and valuables. The Zucchet farm was such an example of how Italian farmers survived the war to end all wars.

\*\*\*

Gino Cartelli was part of the military occupation after the Italians defeated the Ethiopian's in the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. He was part of the expansion of services division to run electrical power to the outposts in Ethiopia. The work was hard and extremely dangerous. Not only did they have to deal with the local natives trying to kill them and sabotage their work, but also the landscape was very rough and dusty. The diseases that the troops were exposed to were a variety of illnesses that included tuberculosis, malaria, and other respiratory infections.

With limited medical supplies and very few medical doctors, the army faced a dismal future. The animals and insects in this country were also strange to the Italian troops with most never seeing elephants, giraffes, hyenas, or lions until their arrival in this distant land. Gino himself had been awakened numerous times by hyenas coming to his tent to see if there was anything to eat. Most of the troops were from Italy, so most had never left their small towns and villages, and now they were being pushed into this type of environment, which was also very mentally hard to adapt to, this strange part of the world some two thousand miles away from home.

During an autumn morning in 1939, Gino's unit was running electrical power when his infantry unit came under fire from local units. Gino was just leaving the shower area when they came under fire. He raced to his tent to take cover and get his rifle when he was suddenly inflicted with some type of pain that he felt in his chest area. The wound didn't stop this young fighter, and he continued to his tent to take cover. After a short period, the shots stopped and Gino was able to see what the pain was all about and noticed blood. A bullet had punctured his chest causing enough damage that he fell to his knees and eventually passed out from the pain.

This minor skirmish with the locals would only wound Gino, but it started his journey back to Italy and to his lovely future bride, Catherina Zucchet. His company continued to provide electrical power to their outposts, not knowing what the future held for the Western Italian Empire.

Like other wounded or disease-stricken Italian troops stationed in Ethiopia, Gino's journey back to the coastline was not pleasant. Animals or large trucks traveling through rough terrain with little or no protection from the elements transported the majority of soldiers. Most of the wounded died. Gino finally arrived in an Ethiopian port in late 1939, and he was loaded on the transport ship headed to Treviso, Italy. Gino survived the return journey, but his future looked bleak because he had lost one of his lungs during the journey and was sick with malaria.

When he arrived in Treviso, the weak Gino Cartelli could barely move. The removal of his lung was also causing the young man complications. The long shipboard voyage from Africa

through the Suez Canal and finally the coast of Italy had taken its toll on this young and brave infantry soldier. He drifted in and out of consciousness about the love he had left behind.

The farm that Catherina lived on was located about twenty kilometers from his hometown of Pordenone, which he had visited often before he joined the army. Catherina's parents were not pleased with her decision to be part of Gino's life, and he knew how they felt about him. He was going back to his love and wanted to prove to her parents that he could make her happy.

The hospital was understaffed and over its capacity with so many patients coming back from the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. All the patients were required to have family members present to take care of their war wounded, and Gino was fresh out of family members to help him recover from his injuries and disease-ridden body. During his first night in the hospital, he was in and out of consciousness and could barely make out the individuals attending to his needs. He woke up in the morning to see a priest on the left of his bed reading his last rights and a doctor on his right reading his chart. It was like a dream but better because for the first time in a long time he felt at peace and wasn't in fear of dying anymore. He could hear the doctor ask the priest if there were any family members to take care of this infantryman. The priest replied, "Just a young lady waiting outside in the hallway." Gino thought they were talking about the other individual next to him. The only young lady he knew was at the Zucchet farm some fifty kilometers away.

Catherina was sitting in the hallway waiting for the doctor and priest to finish with Gino. When they came out of the ward, she rose with shaky legs and felt nauseous. They walked past her and continued their rounds with no new news to give her about her loved one.

It was only two weeks earlier that she was sitting in the kitchen of the Zucchet farm main house that she was born and raised in talking politics with her father and mother. It was a Friday, her day to go to town for farm supplies, be with friends, and read the latest news about the occupation in Africa. Her father was very critical about all the expansion by the Fascist-led Italian government. The news about Germany upset him, too. In this part of the world, news was posted on the city town wall for

all to read. This was also the place to read about the soldiers who had died or were wounded in action.

During a clear fall morning, Catherina went into the barn to get her bicycle to ride to town. Her parents always reminded her that she needed to look presentable before going to town and that she always wear a scarf covering her hair. Once she knew her mother and father could not see her anymore, she removed the scarf to allow her hair to flow with the wind. The roads were either made of dirt or cobblestoned and filled with an occasional traveler. As she was riding her bike through the farmlands and getting closer to the town of Cimpello, she could see the Pro-Fascist German interpreters standing and talking with their Nazi counterparts. With cigarettes dangling from their mouths and hats pushed to the sides of their heads, they stopped what they were doing to look at the lone Italian bike rider. The interpreters, Marco and Francisco, were from the local area and knew this beautiful young lady. Francisco yelled at her as she passed, "There is news of Gino!"

Francisco was a local farmer's son that her father wanted her to be with but she only had eyes for Gino. She stopped pedaling for a minute and coasted because her stomach had dropped to her knees. As she approached the meeting and dance hall that she and Gino shared those intimate times with each other so long ago, her legs started to give out on her, and she could feel herself getting lightheaded. She remembered how he could dance the night away and never got tired of moving his feet. Gino was six feet tall and one of the most handsome men she had ever seen. Many women said he looked like Errol Flynn the Australian-American actor.

As she continued down the main road of Cimpello, she passed the local restaurant, bakery, and meat market. As she got closer to the square, she could see the crowd of local villagers reading the news on the walls of the town hall. She noticed two of her childhood friends, Maria and Loretta; both were standing to the right of the crowd whispering in each other's ears. Catherina approached the center and immediately dropped her bike and ran through the crowd to read the news about her only love, Gino. Maria and Loretta rushed to her side to comfort her while she read the news; Gino was listed as wounded and in

route to Treviso Hospital to recover from his wounds. The only way to get there was by train. The Italian government always requested family members to send help for the wounded because of the shortage of care providers at the hospitals. Maria asked Catherina, "What are you going to do? You know Gino's family won't send anybody to help him."

Gino was youngest of three brothers, and his father and mother did not travel. His father told him that if he left the family for a life in the military he was on his own. The father told his other sons the same thing as all three were fighting with the Royal Italian Army. Gino's father would not leave his home because of his business and his drinking issues.

Catherina looked at her two friends that she had known since birth and told them she wasn't sure what to do. Loretta said, "Catherina you must be with him. He is your one and only, and he needs your help." Catherina knew that she wanted to be with him, and it had been ten months since he left for Africa. But who would be helping on the farm if she left? Her father and mother were getting older and she had three brothers that where not much help. Her older brother, Chester, was fighting with Gino in Ethiopia. The middle brother, Bruno, was always sick and worked as a laborer for the railroad. Velasco was too young for farm chores. There was also Catherina's grandmother who lived upstairs in the small one-bedroom, second-floor room, and she was bedridden from polio.

Catherina's parents disliked Gino because he came from the wrong type of family. Her parents wanted her to marry another farm boy, Francisco the interpreter, but she wanted to be with the man that took her breath away, the man who always looked into her eyes like she was the only one in his universe. Gino had told her that when he finished his tour in the army they would be together for the rest of their lives. She needed to wait for him until he came back. Now he was back, but what type of wounds had he suffered? Catherina was full of mixed feelings as she grabbed her bike for the journey back home, forgetting the supplies and other tasks.

As she rode out of town, she could see Francisco talking with some of the young ladies that had questionable occupations. It looked like they were in some type of negotiation for favors,

stockings, or cigarettes. Francisco saw her coming and blocked her path. She was afraid of riding around him and stopped her bike. She put her fingers through her hair and smiled at him.

“Thank you for telling me about Gino.”

Francisco asked Catherina, “That is awful about Gino, are you going to do anything to help?” Catherina didn’t want to be rude because she knew he had a lot of power and was known to use it. He also could place hardship on her family.

Catherina looked at Francisco and smiled and said, “No, not really. Why should I care about a fool and his dreams?” Francisco could only smile and place his hand on the handlebars of her bike and then a hand around her waist. She didn’t move but quickly said, “Are you going to the rally tomorrow night?”

“Of course I am. My uncle will be back in town to speak to everyone, and I will be on the stage to support him, will you be there?”

“I will ask my father and mother if I can go, but they will only let me go if my brother Bruno is well enough to escort me. I must be going now; I must bathe my grandmother and help with dinner.”

Francisco’s smile vanished quickly with the thought of Catherina’s grandmother. He stepped back, which gave Catherina time to start pedaling her bike back to the farm. Francisco yelled out to Catherina, “See you on Saturday with Bruno!” Catherina turned around on her bike and flashed him an inviting smile that quickly vanished when she turned around. She continued riding her bike down the dirt roads back to the Zucchet farm.

As she made the left off the main road and onto the stone driveway of the farm, she quickly dismounted. She could see Bruno sitting in front of the main house smoking a cigarette and said to him, “I have news of Gino.” She ran with the bike to the barn and as quickly rushed back to the main house to talk with Bruno.

“Was there any news about Chester?” Bruno asked.

“No, but Gino was wounded and he is heading to Treviso to recover from his wounds and the government needs help at the hospital.”

“What are you going to do?” Bruno asked.

She explained that she wanted to go to Treviso and help with

Gino, but that she needed his help to get her parents support and money. Bruno looked at her and knew this was going to be a tough sell.

“We need to team up on this and see if we can get them to send you and not for you to ask them for their permission.”

Catherina thought this was a brilliant idea and kissed her older brother. Bruno got up from his chair very slowly and walked into the farmhouse with Catherina following him closely. Catherina noticed that he was getting weaker.

As they walked into the main kitchen their parents were sitting at the kitchen table talking about the upcoming winter and what was left to do before the cold set in. Pietro and Anna Zucchet always smiled at the first sight of their children no matter what was happening.

“Where are the supplies we needed, and what news do you bring?” Pietro asked.

Bruno, without missing a beat said, “Dad, most of the shops close early on Fridays when there is a rally on Saturday, Catherina just missed them before they closed.”

Pietro looked at his children. “We need to remember that next week. You can go tomorrow early in the morning to get our supplies. Any news today?”

Bruno again spoke up as the elder. “I really miss Chester around the house; he was always making everyone laugh and was always the strong one. Do you miss him, Mom?”

“Yes, oh my God, is there bad news about Chester, please tell me?” Anna asked.

Bruno responded, “No, there is no news about Chester, but there are other families not so lucky. We should always try and help those others not as fortunate as us, since we have so much compared to the other families here in Cimpello.”

“Son, I am very proud of you. Spoken like a true Zucchet.”

“Dad, I really miss Chester and Gino being here to go to the rallies with me. They would always bring excitement to the cause, and we always would meet afterwards for drinks and dancing.”

“It seems just like yesterday that they both left for Ethiopia with the crazy idea of expansion of this country,” Pietro said. “Hell, we can’t even feed our own people and we are out there



conquering other countries like this is the Roman Empire again.”

Bruno went on to explain that he saw Gino’s father the other day and that he looked good, but that he missed all of his sons and that he was having a tough time getting by without any help and that his farm and brokering business was suffering.

“Well I wish there was something we could do to help out the Cartelli family, but we are strapped ourselves and barely making a living as well,” Pietro said.

Bruno immediately captured the moment. “Dad, Gino was on the list of wounded soldiers and is on his way to Treviso to recover from his wounds.”

“Well that is unfortunate,” Pietro said. “But that is a good hospital. I spent a month there recovering from my stomach problems, remember that, Anna?”

Bruno explained that the government needed family members to help with the wounded but that the Cartelli’s had no one.

“No, Bruno, you are too weak and sick,” Pietro said. “Besides, you can’t be in a hospital because you will get everyone sick from God only knows what you have.”

“What about Catherina?” Bruno said. “She can go to take care of Gino?”

Anna took a step back from the table, waiting for the eruption from her husband. Pietro stood from the table, looked at his daughter, and preceded to the kitchen window, which overlooked the fields he had spent most of his life laboring over.

“Catherina, do you want to go help Gino?”

Catherina looked at her brother who was shaking his head up and down and said, “Yes, Father, I want to go because the Cartelli family needs our help. If the shoe was on the other foot, Gino would be helping our family.”

Pietro looked away from the window and stared at his wife. “Catherina, you can go and help with Gino, but Bruno you will escort her to Treviso. As soon as he is better, you will return and go back to your chores. This trip will do you wonders and help you realize how good you have it here in this house and farm.”

Pietro walked out of the house and Anna looked at her two children. “Well done you two.”

\* \* \*

The next morning Bruno and Catherina were in the kitchen having breakfast. Catherina went towards her mother as she was cooking and kissed her. "Thank you."

Her mother just smiled back and put her right hand on her daughter's cheek and said, "Be careful."

Earlier that morning Catherina was closing her suitcase when she saw a folded piece of paper on top of her clothes. It was an address in Treviso that her mother wrote down and some extra money. The address was a cousin of her mother. Catherina would stay at the cousin's house, which only had room for one. So Bruno would have to find his own lodging while in Treviso.

After breakfast Bruno and Catherina started their hour-long walk to the train station. Bruno was having problems keeping up with Catherina, but he just smiled at her knowing she was so excited about seeing Gino. He told her to go ahead and he would catch up, but she slowed down and waited for her brother.

There was a lot of commotion at the station. Pro-Fascist supporters were waiting for someone to arrive. Then it came to Catherina; they were waiting for Francisco's uncle. Bruno didn't want Francisco to see Catherina, so he told her to hide in the bathroom until the crowd was gone. As Bruno stepped up to purchase the tickets, he saw Francisco dressed in his uniform talking with one of the other supporters and immediately looked away for the fear of being seen. As he approached the counter, he heard Francisco call his name and wave for him to come over to him. Bruno bought two tickets for Treviso and put them in his pocket; he could hear the train coming and slowly walked towards Francisco.

"Bruno, are you going to Treviso to see Gino?" Bruno explained that he was going there to check up on Gino.

"So now the sick guy is a care taker and home maker," Francisco said smugly. "Tell Gino I said hi, but who is going to escort Catherina to the rally tonight, Velasco?" Bruno smiled at Francisco and explained that Catherina would not be making the rally tonight because she had other duties to attend to and that she didn't have an escort.

"Well I could escort her."

Just then Francisco heard his name called and both he and

Bruno could see his uncle coming towards them. Bruno saw his opportunity to leave and get Catherina.

The conductor was ringing the bell for passengers to board the train for departure to Treviso. Bruno saw Catherina and waved at her to get on the train in front of him. As she approached him, Bruno told her to keep her head down.

As the train rolled forward, Bruno could see Francisco staring at Bruno through the train window straight in the eyes with a disappointing look. Bruno felt relieved as the train rolled, fairly certain Francisco had not spotted Catherina. That relief quickly vanished when he saw Betty, one of Francisco's girlfriends. She was the one Catherina had seen Francisco with when she had rode her bike into town the previous day.

Betty was on her way to Treviso with the full intent to spend the money that she had earned just recently supporting the Pro-Fascist and Nazi campaign. Betty needed the latest fashions to ensure she always looked the part of the socialite.

The trip was only about two hours by train. Bruno explained to Catherina that once they determined Gino's condition he would return to Cimpello and make sure everything was good on the farm.

As the train arrived at Treviso, Bruno and Catherina noticed Betty getting off the train. He knew who she was and what she did and whom she would be talking with when she got back to Cimpello. She looked stunning with her blonde hair and light-blue dress with matching shoes and long legs. Bruno had gone to school with her and always thought she was good looking and dressed really nice. He told Catherina to go inside the main building and get directions to the house and that he would meet her outside the train station in about ten minutes. She gave him a puzzled look and complied.

As she entered the building, she quickly turned to look out the window to see what her brother was up to. Bruno walked up to Betty from behind, took his hat off, and said, "You know you always look so pretty whenever I see you. How do you do it?"

"What are you doing here, Bruno?" she said.

Bruno put his hat back on and smiled. "I am here on family business and need to see some relatives about next year's harvest and visit a sick friend. What brings you here?"

“Well, I need to update my dress collections and Cimpello shops are just so out of date. Where are you staying while you’re here?”

“I don’t know yet, do you have any suggestions?”

“I always stay at the Continental. It is close to shopping and the train station.”

“Well you shouldn’t go strolling the streets by yourself in this big city. What time should I come back to escort you around today?”

Betty always wanted to be with good-looking men and needed reassurance that she was still the prettiest girl in the region.

“Meet me in front of the Continental in about two hours; I should be ready to go by then.”

Bruno tipped his hat. “It’s a date, see you soon.”

“Who was that?” Catherina asked when her brother returned. “Isn’t she Francisco’s friend?”

“Don’t worry about it, let’s go find Gino.”

They walked along the main road of the city and turned down the side street towards the house address from the note that Anna had written to Catherina. They found the house just as they entered the side street. Bruno knocked on the door. After a minute or two a slightly heavysset woman answered. She was dressed in a traditional light-black dress with matching shoes, her hair was pulled up in a bun, and she was wearing a white apron. She instantly grabbed Bruno and Catherina and started to hug them. It was their mother’s cousin Patricia. She had not seen Bruno and Catherina in years.

“Oh my god, you both look great and all grown up. How was your trip?”

Patricia guided them into the town house and took a departing look around the street to see if there was anybody watching them. She lived in the town house with her husband and parents, but they didn’t have any children. Patricia shut the door and escorted them both to the kitchen.

“How is your mother doing”?

Bruno said that she was doing just fine and that the farm and their father were healthy and so was everyone on the farm. As Patricia glided around the kitchen, Bruno and Catherina finally

recognized her from family reunions at the farm. Patricia started a pot of coffee and asked Bruno if he knew of any places to stay at Treviso? Bruno replied that he had friends in the city and it wouldn't be a problem for him to find a place to stay.

"How do you both know Gino Cartelli?" Patricia asked.

Bruno said that Gino was best friends with their brother Chester and that his immediate family wasn't able to send anybody right away to take care of him. Catherina was looking out the window wide-eyed, nervously bouncing her knees.

"This is very nice of you to come and help your brother's best friend in his time of need," Patricia said. "Are you ready to see your room, Catherina?"

Catherina put her coffee down and made an up and down gesture with her head. Patricia grabbed Catherina's hand and led her down the hall and up a stairway to her room.

The room had a small bed and a nightstand with a small lamp. Catherina put her suitcase down next to the bed and started her way out of the room following Patricia down the stairs. When they returned to the kitchen, Bruno was outside smoking his after-coffee cigarette and looking at all the people walking by this side street on the main street. He thought to himself that there were a lot of people here and that he needed to escape rural Cimpello more often. The farm was no place for him, and he was getting older and needed to find something better for himself. He heard the door open and when he turned he could see Catherina coming down the stairs.

"Let's go to the hospital and see how Gino is doing."

\*\*\*

They arrived at the hospital after about a five-minute walk. Bruno was having a hard time staying up with Catherina and smiled when he noticed how quickly his sister was walking. He called out to her to wait for him; she turned and looked at Bruno and for the first time noticed that he wasn't in the best shape and that his color in his face wasn't normal. She asked him if he was feeling sick.

"No, I feel fine. You just walk very fast and I am not a fast walker; I walk slower like dad. Catherina I am not going into

the hospital. You know I haven't been feeling the best lately and don't want to make the sick any worse. You go in and come let me know how Gino is, and then we can decide what our next move will be to get him better."

Bruno waited by the main entrance. Catherina entered and noticed an information desk.

"Are you a member of the patient's family?" the information attendant asked.

"Yes, I am. I am Gino Cartelli's cousin from Cimpello, and I am here to take care of him. We saw that his name was on the wounded list in the square at home, and I am here at the request from the family to ensure his needs are met."

The attendant didn't even look at Catherina and started to check her list of patients.

"Private Gino Cartelli is on the second floor in the critical condition wing. You better hurry to see if you can do—"

Before the attendant could finish the sentence, Catherina went directly to the stairs leading to the second floor. As she entered the hallway, all she could see were doors on the left and right and an office in the middle. She hurried to the office where there was a lady asking for information about the location of her husband. Catherina got in line behind the lady and overheard the nurse tell the lady that she was sorry but her husband had passed away that morning from his wounds. Catherina would remember the widow's mournful bellow the rest of her life. Two nurses were helping the lady off the ground when one asked Catherina if she needed help.

"Would you like a glass of water? We are all so sorry about our soldiers that don't make it; they are all so brave and young. Are you here to see somebody?"

Catherina took a sip of water and finally looked at the helpful nurse. "Yes, I am here to take care of Gino Cartelli; he is my cousin."

"Let me look at my carts and see which ward he is in."

Catherina was shaking by now and felt like throwing up.

"Private Cartelli is in Ward 2A, bed 4 just down the hall to the left. Let me escort you so you can see him. We have chairs in the waiting room to the right, and after we see Private Cartelli, I will give you instructions on what will be required of you while

he recovers from his wounds.”

As they walked into the ward the nurse told Catherina about Gino’s wounds and illness.

“He’s very ill, so don’t be shocked when you see him,” the nurse cautioned.

In the room Catherina counted four soldiers when they entered. Each of the soldiers had a member of their family attending to their needs except for one next to the window. It was Gino. She waited for the nurse to leave and then rushed to his side and kissed his rough face.

Catherina looked at Gino for a minute and immediately noticed how awful he looked and noticed that he was unresponsive to her kiss. She kissed him again and left the room to find Bruno, who was leaning on the building smoking a cigarette and jingling coins in his pocket.

He was people watching, especially women in their skirts, high heels, and panty hose. He didn’t have a care in the world. Catherina approached Bruno, and he immediately could see in her eyes that it wasn’t looking good for Gino. She immediately ran into his arms for that strong hug that Bruno always gave her when things didn’t quite work out for her.

“So how bad is Gino?” asked Bruno.

“He looks awful. The nurse said he had a lung removed in Ethiopia, and he also has malaria. I don’t know how long it is going to take for him to recover from his wounds and the malaria, but you don’t need to stay here in Treviso while I take care of him and spend all of your money on places to stay. You should go back to Cimpello and help father on the farm. They will need your help soon before winter sets in, and you know that he doesn’t get around like he used to.”

Bruno thought for a minute. “Well if that is what you want, and I am sure everything will be fine. You will need to write home every day and let mom know how he is doing. I will catch the morning train back, and if you need me to come back call the general store in Cimpello and leave a message for me, and I will return that day. You should go back in the hospital and see if Gino needs anything.”

Catherina gave Bruno a big hug and kissed him then said goodbye to him and went back into the hospital to take care of



her love. Bruno looked at his watch and thought to himself that he had time for a quick coffee before his date with Betty at the Continental.

\* \* \*

Betty was looking at herself in the mirror that was hanging on the bathroom door, and she could tell that this was one of her better hair days and was ready to shop with her escort, Bruno. Although she was very jealous of Bruno's beautiful sister, she always thought that she was better looking than Catherina, and besides, she came from the farming side of the Cimpello and not the town side. Everyone knew that if you lived in the town you were better off than the farm folks—and more sophisticated. Even so, she liked Bruno who was very pleasant and handsome.

As Betty entered the elevator to go downstairs to meet Bruno, she thought about meeting Francisco's uncle the next day, which was the other reason for her being in Treviso. The thought of escorting a man twice her age wasn't pleasant. But she wanted to stay in good standing with the Pro-Fascist party, which took care of all her needs while she was in Treviso. This was a very nice arrangement and one that she wanted to continue and needed to make it during these tough times in Italy. The promises that Il Duce had made were not taking shape, and she was making it in her own way, even though most folks didn't agree with some of her choices. She was paid well and always put something away for her mother and father. The dream of becoming a countess was very strong and one that she really believed could happen if the Pro-Fascist movement took hold and she married Francisco. The rumor was that Francisco's uncle was a direct decedent of the royal family of Italy and that he would soon become the count of the Prodenone providence, which would encompass most of the northeast of Italy.

Betty entered the lobby from the elevator side and everyone immediately stopped what they were doing to look at the beauty of this woman. Bruno was sitting on the lobby couch smoking a cigarette. He stood when he saw her.

"Are you ready to go shopping for your new clothes?"

She smiled and kissed him on his cheek. "Yes, I am. Let's get going before the stores sell out of all their good dresses."

After three hours of shopping and walking, Bruno was exhausted but enchanted after spending most of the day with the beautiful Betty. As they arrived back at the Hotel Continental, Bruno looked at his watch. If he wanted to he could make the evening train back to Cimpello, but he would have to leave now.

Betty was leading the way and went directly to the elevator and told the elevator operator to take her to her floor. Bruno followed. As they reached her floor, Betty thanked the operator and walked towards her room.

"What a glorious day of shopping. We bought some very nice clothes for me, don't you think, Bruno?" As she reached for her key, Bruno again looked at his watch and then at Betty who was entering the room. She reached for her hat and threw the hat on the sitting chair and opened the window. Bruno looked at her behind and noticed how perfectly round it was. She turned around and leaned against the windowsill and looked at Bruno.

"You can put all the packages down beside my hat, and then come over here and look at the view, it is amazing." Bruno complied, took his hat off, and looked out the window with Betty at his side.

"Where are you staying tonight?" she asked.

"Well I haven't looked at any hotels yet, and there isn't any room at my friend's house. What do you think I should do?"

She put her right hand on his face and took his left hand and placed it around her waist. "I would let you stay here for the night but I have Francisco's uncle to pick up in the morning and take him around town. It wouldn't look right if I had you spend the night here, but we have time now to spend with each other."

She leaned in for the kiss she had been waiting for all day. Bruno responded with one of his famous kisses that the girls in Cimpello talked about at the dance hall. Bruno was enjoying the kiss and at the same time worried about Francisco finding out he had been with Betty. He broke from the kiss and looked into Betty's eyes.

"My dearest Betty, I would so much like to enjoy the rest of the afternoon with you here but I must catch the train back home this afternoon. My business here is complete, and I must help my father on the farm starting tomorrow before the ground gets too hard."

Betty's smile turned into a frown, and she thought to herself that mentioning Francisco was a mistake.

"My sweet Bruno, always thinking of other people before himself, that is why everyone loves you. If you must go home I understand, but if the train should pass you up or not come, I will be here trying on some of my dresses and practicing my poses."

"Betty, thanks for the offer, and I will surely be coming back if the train ride doesn't work out. You look amazing in all of your new clothes, but I must go now." Bruno leaned in for a goodbye kiss and made sure it was better than the first kiss he gave her. Betty could barely stand when he let her go; she felt weak in the knees and could barely catch her breath. When Betty opened her eyes, Bruno was gone, but not her urge for him. *There will be another time to make this happen*, she thought.

\* \* \*

When Bruno exited the elevator, he looked at his watch and noticed that he had enough time to go by cousin Patricia's house and tell her that he was leaving.

"Where is Catherina?" she asked.

"She is with Gino at the hospital. Patricia, please tell her that I am leaving this evening and going back to Cimpello on the next train."

"I will, and have a good trip back. Tell your mother I will write her a letter soon."

Bruno waved back and turned and made his way to the station as quickly as his legs would take him. As soon as he arrived he noticed the train pulling into the station. He quickly ran to the ticket office and got in line. Luckily, there were other passengers waiting for their tickets for this train going to Cimpello and other destinations on this route so the train conductor was holding the train until the ticket office sold the last ticket to Bruno.

As the train pulled away from the station, Bruno felt a sigh of relief from today's events and really wanted to get back to Cimpello and relax. This excursion took a lot out of him, and he noticed that his energy was low. He glanced out the window one more time and then fell asleep for a well-rested ride back to Cimpello and the farm life.

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It had been a week since Bruno left Treviso and Gino's condition hadn't changed. Catherina was becoming discouraged. Twice a priest had visited to give Gino last rights, and Catherina just couldn't believe that her love was ready to leave this earth. There was so much love that she could give to him. She promised that if he came out of this ordeal that she would be there for him for the rest of his life.

As the priest and doctor went past, Catherina got up and went back into the room to check on Gino. It was getting close to lunchtime and she wanted to make sure everything was ready for his meal. As she approached his bed, she noticed that the sunlight coming through the window was brighter than normal, and that his skin seemed to be more normal than the pale white that she was accustomed to this past week. The sheets were not wet and his eyes were steady and not moving rapidly back and forth either. As she approached, Gino suddenly moved his head towards the sunlight. Catherina grabbed his right hand and squeezed it, and he returned the gesture. She almost fainted from relief.

Catherina had not moved from that side of the bed for hours. She heard people talking and jumped nervously when she noticed that the priest was at the end of the bed.

"Oh, Father, I am sorry I didn't see you there, and you startled me for a moment."

"I am sorry if I startled you, my child. How is he doing this afternoon?"

"He seems to be getting his color back, and for the first time his sheets are dry, Father."

"Well that is good news. Private Cartelli has been one of our more difficult cases and hopefully this is a turn for the better. How long have you two been married?" asked the priest.

Catherina didn't want to say anything, but she couldn't lie to a priest, not with her strict Catholic upbringing. She remarked that they were not married and that she and Gino were very much in love and that they planned on getting married soon after this ordeal was finished.

"Let us pray for the full recovery of this brave soldier and that his bride-to-be gets her wish and that all that the Lord has to give is given to this wonderful couple that is before me here."

Catherina bowed her head and prayed with the priest for a few moments.

"I have to finish my rounds and will return later to see how he is doing. I will tell the doctor that he is doing better and see if he can come by and check on him, my child."

Catherina thanked the priest and just then the nurse walked in with some food and asked Catherina to see if Gino would eat. He did, but only small bites and without opening his eyes.

After the meal, the doctor entered and picked up Gino's chart and read for a little while and walked next to Gino and looked at his face. He checked his pulse and looked into his eyes, and then using his stethoscope listened to his heart. The nurse was standing next to the doctor waiting for the next set of orders.

"Let's see if this guy is going to make it. Nurse, go ahead and disconnect the IV and stop all medications. It is about time to see if we have broken the fever and see if this soldier's body can recover on its own." The nurse smiled and did as she was ordered, and for the first time since Catherina came to the hospital over a week ago, Gino wasn't hooked up to any type of IV or medication drip.

After a few hours the nurse returned and said, "Let's give this guy of yours a sponge bath and let you get home tonight." Catherina was sitting beside Gino's bed reading the Bible and shook her head in agreement. As the nurse put the small tub of water down on the table next to Gino's bed Catherina had already started to grab Gino from the back to turn him on his right side. Catherina grabbed the sponge and rinsed it in the tub and started to clean his back. Gino's body moved towards the nurse for the first time, and all of a sudden Catherina heard a voice.

"Who is getting my back wet? Where am I, and who is holding me on my side?"

Catherina dropped the sponge on the bed, took one step back, and put both of her hands over her mouth. The nurse was smiling and moving Gino back to his lying position.

"Catherina, am I lying on something wet? Is my bed wet?"

As he looked at her, he noticed a stream of tears coming from both eyes and her hands were over her mouth, covering the biggest smile that he had ever seen on her face.

"Well, young man, I guess you better roll over towards me

and let your bride grab that sponge from your back so you can finish your sponge bath.”

“I need to go to the bathroom. Which way is the bathroom?”

“It is down the hall, but are you sure you can walk to the bathroom?” asked the nurse.

“Just try and stop me,” Gino said with a smile. Catherina still hadn’t said a word or moved since she removed the sponge. The nurse made a gesture to Catherina to help Gino get up and help him walk to the bathroom. Catherina rushed to his side as he got up from the bed and stood for the first time in over a week. He was dizzy but steady, and he held on to Catherina as he made his way around the bed. Catherina put Gino’s right arm around her shoulder and started to walk with him towards the bathroom, which was down the hall in this hospital. The nurse handed Gino a cane to help him with his balance, but he declined.

“I don’t need a cane. I am fine and can make this walk to the bathroom with Catherina.” Catherina smiled at the nurse and started walking with Gino. For the first time she really noticed how thin he had gotten. He was always on the slim side, but now she could feel his bones surrounding his rib cage and his legs were very skinny. She needed to get him to start eating more and get his weight back up so he could recover from his wounds, surgery, and malaria.

## Chapter 2

### *FASCISTS EMERGE*

PIETRO WAS READING THE paper in the kitchen and thought of his eldest son, Chester, who was in Ethiopia fighting for the expansion of Italy. He also thought about Chester's best friend, Gino, lying in the hospital in Treviso being taken care of by his beautiful Catherina. His third thought was of his town of Cimpello and what it used to be like before all the changes. The open markets, stores to shop in, restaurants to eat at, social events, and the evening walks that everyone would show up for in the middle of town. Now the town seemed like it was more of a recruiting station and Fascist rally center. Gone were all the social events and many stores and the restaurants—with the exception of the coffee shops—and the country and the Fascist supporters of Mussolini controlled everything. At least he had his farm that they didn't control and he could provide for his family. *It would only be a matter of time before they controlled all the food in the country, including this farm and all of the other farms in this area*, he thought.

Bruno walked into the kitchen. "So, Dad, how is your day so far? Need any help today? I was thinking about going to the train station and seeing if they need any help this winter. We could always use the extra cash for the farm, and I am close to getting my motorcycle."



“Bruno, before you go to the train station I want you to go to the Martin, Manzon, and Pelliccia farms and talk with the fathers and tell them we are having a meeting here at the barn tomorrow night at seven o’clock to talk about winter crops. Tell them that they need to bring their wives as well and that we will be serving dessert and wine.”

“Dad, you never have meetings about winter crops. There are no winter crops. What is this all about?”

“Just tell them what I told you and no more. I will explain at the meeting. You need to be there as well. Tell nobody else about the meeting.” Bruno shook his head and told his dad that he would go to the other farmers and relay his message to them before he went to the train station to look for winter work.

Bruno left the kitchen and Pietro returned to looking at his empty fields and the pump that provided all the water his family needed. Pietro heard a noise of someone coming into the kitchen, and he thought it was either Valasco or his newest and last addition to his family, his sweet little Valarie. But it was Anna.

“Any news from Catherina about Gino?”

Anna looked at her husband and just shook her head from side to side.

“Do you want something to eat? I plan on going to town tomorrow and checking the mail, do you want me to call my cousin to see how things are going?”

“No, she is an adult now and has to start making decisions on her own. Besides, this trip will do her good and make her stronger as a woman and maybe someday as a mother. Where are Valasco and Valarie?”

“They are outside playing in the front yard,” Anna said.

“Tomorrow we are having a meeting with the other farmers in the barn to discuss the winter crops,” Pietro said. “We will need dessert and wine for all those who are coming. I sent Bruno to tell everyone to come, and he is going to the train station to look for work during the winter. I am still mad at him for not staying with his sister in Treviso, but in retrospect it was good for him to come back and help out around here. My body isn’t as strong as it used to be, my love.”

Anna smiled at her husband. She knew what the winter crop meeting was about. Things were changing very fast and

the farmers needed to stay ahead of what was coming or face a dismal future and life of poverty. Anna walked over to Pietro and gave him a hug, kissed him on his cheek, and went to the pantry to see about the dessert and wine for tomorrow's winter crop meeting.

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Bruno arrived at the train station about ten minutes before the office was closing. He told all the farmers about the meeting. The Pelliccia family always acted superior to everyone else in the area because their farm and barn were larger than the other farms and they had more animals. But they did respect the Zucchets because they produced more crops that were of better quality.

As he entered the office, he could feel the tension coming from the office employees. Bruno had worked at the train station the previous year, and it had a more pleasant atmosphere than this year. He stepped up to the front office window and asked if there were any openings for workers this winter. The employment lady wore a uniform just like Francisco's. Bruno knew this was another sign that the Fascists were taking control of everything in the country. The lady recognized Bruno.

"Mr. Zuchet, we are going to need people for winter work. Please fill out these forms for us."

"Madame, this is a lot of personal information about my family and where I live, but not too much about me. Are these the right forms?"

The lady looked at the forms that Bruno handed to her and she smiled back at him. "Young man, those are the right forms. Please fill them out completely to ensure we can contact you about when you can come to work."

Bruno took the forms and noticed that there were about four other young men that he recognized that were filling them out at the community table in the middle of the employment office. He walked over to the table and took a moment to think about how he would answer. The questions made him uncomfortable, but he decided that his family could always use the money for the farm and, perhaps, he could buy a motorcycle. He decided to leave out some personal information about the members of the family, stating that he simply didn't know the answer.

After about twenty minutes of filling out the forms, he turned them in.

"When will we start to work this year," he asked the woman at the window. "Last year it was about this time?"

She looked at the documents he filled out. "Come back next week and we will be posting out in the front bulletin board who was hired and where they will be working."

"Will the pay be the same as last year?"

The lady just smiled at Bruno and said that she didn't have that information for him and that they were closed now. As Bruno was leaving the employment office, he noticed some of the men who had just applied for work hanging out having cigarettes. He recognized Marko and Anthony from school.

"How is the farm life treating you, Bruno?" Marko asked.

Bruno lit his cigarette. "Great. We had a good year and are hoping to be planting in early spring. How is your father's butcher shop doing?"

"Well, not so good," Marko said. "We're giving meat away to the army and not getting paid on time. Credit doesn't pay the bills and the banks don't care that you are feeding the enemy or the army, they just want their money."

"Anthony, I thought you were going to go to Rome and go to college," asked Bruno.

"Well I went down to Rome and went to school for about two months and then dropped out. The girls and wine got me in trouble. I will try again next year."

*Damn, I didn't see that coming. Anthony was always so reserved and his parents were always so strict, Bruno thought. I guess that is what happens when both of your parents are teachers and they don't let you spread your wings out when you're young. You go hog wild when you get your chance.*

Just as Bruno was finishing his cigarette the wind started blowing and he could feel the winter. He placed his hands in his jacket and started to move his body up and down to stay warm.

"What was with all those questions on the applications?" Marko asked.

"That was nothing," Anthony said. "You should have seen all the paperwork I had to do when I was signing up for college in Rome. It took me two days to finish all the paperwork and now

look at me; I am standing in this breezeway freezing my ass off with you guys.”

All of the men started to laugh, and Bruno asked if Marko and Anthony wanted to go get some coffee. They all agreed to go with him to the coffee shop.

As they walked to La Perla Café they could hear commotion from the inside of the café. Bruno walked in first and stopped before Marko and Anthony could get all the way into the café. Francisco and some of his Fascist supporters were having a heated conversation with the owner of the café. Bruno noticed their uniforms right away. This wasn't a good time to get coffee, but the owner saw three potential customers and waved them into his café.

Francisco approached Bruno, who stood at the coffee bar with his two friends. Bruno could smell the starch on Francisco's uniform and his pungent cologne.

Francisco lit a cigarette and threw a match into an ashtray that was between him and Bruno. He took a deep draw.

“Bruno, my friend. What are you doing in town? Shouldn't you be on the farm working?”

“I was applying for winter work at the railroad station like I did last year, then I saw Marko and Anthony, now we are having espresso.”

Marko and Anthony both looked at Francisco nodding their heads in approval.

“So, when are you guys going to join the Fascist Party?” asked Francisco. “Finding work might be easier if you did.”

Marko looked towards the owner and he turned his head and gave him a look of disapproval.

“Why should we join your party?” Marko asked.

“Well, for one reason, we just took over all the public transportation in this part of the country, and now we are looking to control most of the businesses in all of the towns, like this one. Isn't that right, Charlie?”

Charlie didn't acknowledge Francisco and served the espressos to his three customers.

“What is the matter, Charlie, you don't have anything to say?”

“Oh, I have a lot to say, but not in front of my customers,” he replied.

“Well if that is how you get people to join your party you can count me out. It sounds like you are trying to bully the business owners into joining your crappy party.” Bruno noticed that Francisco’s face was turning red in color and he started to approach Marko.

“Francisco, if you come any closer to me, you are going to find yourself on the floor and that pretty uniform is going to be dirty,” replied Marko.

Anthony and Bruno started to laugh because they knew Marko wasn’t lying and could, in fact, hurt Francisco. Marko was in excellent shape and had thick arms. Bruno was laughing and noticed the other two supporters at the other end of the bar started to come to Francisco’s rescue. They both appeared to be carrying axe handles. As they got closer Bruno, Anthony, and Marko took a couple of steps away from that bar and waited for the confrontation to start. Marko grabbed a barstool. Francisco raised his arms.

“Gentlemen, there is no reason for us to get into this situation over politics.” He turned and made a gesture to his supporters to stop their approach.

“I agree,” said Charlie, who was holding a shotgun in his arms and pointing it at Francisco’s supporters. Bruno noticed that Francisco’s face turned white from fear and that his legs were shaking.

“Charlie, there is no need for that gun. We were just leaving your nice establishment and will talk to you later about what we were discussing before your customers showed up,” Francisco said.

“Don’t bother coming back; my answer will not change so don’t waste your time.”

As the Fascist members left the bar, the boys returned to their coffee and Charlie returned the shotgun back under the bar.

“It is only a matter of time before they control the whole country and we all have to wear those uniforms,” Charlie said.

Bruno looked at Marko and Anthony and wondered what would have happened if they got into a confrontation with them again. *Things are not changing for the better as promised by Mussolini and the Fascist party*, thought Bruno. He knew now why his father was having his meeting and what it was all about.

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Pietro walked into the main house of the farm after working in the barn. He wanted to make sure that the barn was as clean as it could be, but it was a barn with horses, three cows, one bull, a couple of goats, and lots of chickens. He had moved the hay around to ensure there was a meeting area in the middle of the barn. The cows and bull were moved to the outer edge of the barn and the goats were moved outside. Pietro hated the goats but they produced milk and made the occasional good meal, plus, they kept the grass short.

"Anna, are we ready for the meeting tonight?" Pietro asked.

"Yes we are, and I checked the mail today and nothing from Catherina or anybody else," replied Anna. Velasco walked into the main room and Pietro looked at his third son.

"You are getting so big. How old are you now?"

"I am seven dad and getting stronger every day."

"Your mother and I need you to watch Valerie tonight while we entertain the neighbors in the barn. You need to keep her in the house and busy while we entertain our guests, do you understand me?"

"Yes, Papa, no problem," replied Valasco.

Pietro thought to himself that both his elder sons were going to leave soon and Valasco would be next in line to help him attend the farm. It was the routine of the family to teach all the boys how to farm, but with the future of Italy so uncertain Pietro didn't know how much longer he could keep the farm going.

Pietro had saved all the money he could over the years, but with winter setting in and the uncertainty of the country he had to make changes, or they would not survive the future. He was going to need the support of other farmers. Could he convince them that there was a need to start hiding assets and crops? It was only a matter of time before Fascists started to take from the farmers like they did during World War I.

Pietro was in the infantry during World War I and he remembered coming home and his father sharing stories of what the Germans did to this farm and what he did to survive. Italy was not at war yet, but ever since Italy joined the Axis Powers, it was getting the cold shoulder from most of the other

countries in Europe. Pietro knew this from reading the papers and having long discussions with the other farmers. This included the businessmen in Cimpello during the weekly auction house gatherings. Hitler was making his move to spread his power in Europe, and Italy was doing the same in Ethiopia.

“Anna, how much wine do we have? You know that the Pelliccia’s love to drink wine and they don’t stop drinking until it is time to go.” He put his hands around his wife and started to look into her eyes, and she looked deeply back into his. They kissed each other quickly and just as fast let go of each other because there were children running around the house.

“There is enough wine for all to have and dessert as well. Did you clean up the barn?”

“Of course I did, my love, only the best for you,” answered Pietro.

“You know you two should hug more often,” said Bruno, who was standing in the kitchen entrance, unnoticed by his mother and father. Pietro looked at Bruno and told him to shut up and quit being so disrespectful to his parents. He smiled at his father and was finishing his apple when he told his father he needed to talk to him about what happened in town yesterday.

“Let’s go outside and talk, I don’t want to upset your mother.”

Both men exited the main house through the door leading to the white cobblestone driveway. The main water pump with an attached washbasin provided all the fresh water the family needed. There was a bench that Pietro made decades ago that was located next to the house right underneath the main room window. The bench was still in great shape after so many winters and hot summers. It was here that Pietro and his sons had their long conversations about politics and any other topics that interested them. They sat down on the bench and Bruno lit a cigarette while his father smoked his pipe. Pietro listened to his son while smoking his pipe and moving his left hand up and down his suspenders.

“Bruno, we need to limit our time in town, my son. Only go there for business and leave. No more socializing or loitering in Cimpello or you will find yourself being taken away without anybody knowing what happened to you. Francisco and his family are in deep with the party and we need to stay clear of

them and any other member of the Fascist Party. They will come after this family and the farm. If they have taken over the train station and all of the public transportation, it is just amount of time before the businesses are taken over. Just like they did in War World I, and most of the businesses did not fair very well and eventually closed their doors. Then there were lines for food and services that never came.”

Pietro paused and looked at his son. “You probably need to watch yourself if you get that job at the train station. We could use the money but I would rather you be here at the farm.”

Bruno nodded at his father, and they both looked out to the fields and the sun setting in the west. Anna, who was listening from the window, walked away from the main room window clutching her hands in her apron and trying not to cry. *What is happening to Cimpello and Italy?* she thought. *Why can't we just live to live and not try to kill each other?* She headed for the kitchen to finish getting all the food and wine ready for the evenings meeting.

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Pietro was checking on his feed for the cows when he heard the first family arrive; it was Greg and Martina Martin. Of all the families that lived in this area, Greg and Martina were their best friends and could always be counted on for support and comfort. Next came John and Mary Manzon by bikes, and finally, the Anthony and Gilda Pelliccia family by truck, accompanied by Anthony's strong-willed mother, Loretta.

Pietro didn't dislike any of his neighbors, but he tended to like some better than others. He often wondered why the Pelliccia's always dressed so nice and looked like they were going to church; even Anthony looked nice working in his fields.

Anna greeted all the wives and ladies at the entrance of their barn and took whatever desserts that they brought and set them down next to hers in the center of the barn where the wine was being poured by Bruno. There were seats available for all, but most of the men preferred to stand and talk. They all shared stories about their families, kids, grandkids, and the newest farming innovations while they sipped wine and ate Anna's



*torta margherita*, the perfect Italian pound cake for the cold weather, and other desserts brought to the Zucchet Farm. After about a half hour Anthony Pelliccia finally spoke up.

“Pietro, now that we are all here what is on your mind?”

Pietro got up from his chair and stepped towards his wife and took a sip of his wine and put his right arm around her waist for support. Bruno stopped what he was doing at the wine table and walked towards his father to show his support. Pietro finally spoke.

“Some of you remember what happened to this area during the last war and how hard this area was hit from loitering from the army and other groups. We lost a lot of farmers during that period and only a few of us survived those very tough times. Well, my friends, I remember too vividly coming back from the war and seeing the devastation and how hard it was for my family to get our farm back to where it is today. I don’t want the same thing happening again and feel that if we band together as one we all will survive what is ahead of us. If we go our separate ways it will be harder for us to survive.”

After Pietro spoke, there was silence in the room for at least a couple of minutes. All you could hear were the animals moving, the wind outside, and the occasional movement outside of birds, owls, or bats. Anthony was the first to speak.

“Pietro, the last time I checked, we were not at war and this year’s crop was the best it has been in years, and all of our farms made excellent profits from the auction house.”

“I have to agree with Anthony,” remarked John.

Pietro looked at Greg and waited for him to speak up. Greg didn’t say anything and just looked at Pietro with his deep green eyes and knew what Pietro was going to say next and would support his longtime friend in this endeavor. Pietro put his glass down and started his speech that he had practiced all day.

“Anthony, you are absolutely correct, but for how long will this country not be at war? Some of us have sons and friends of our families overseas right now doing nothing but trying to expand our countries territory; this is not the Roman Empire anymore. Why is this country in Ethiopia and Albania? What about the Germans and Hitler? They have already invaded Poland and will not stop there. This is the same thing they did over thirty years

ago, and what happened then? It is just a matter of time before they come for our crops, cattle, and whatever else they need so they can keep on conquering. We have already seen the Germans on the streets, and what about the Pro-Fascist movement here? They have already taken the public transportation system and have started taking the businesses away from their owners in the name of Mussolini. Who will be paying us next year? We need to stay one step ahead of them or we will never be able to survive what the future is of this territory or country.”

For the second time that evening there was silence in the barn. This time it was a very sober one and it was felt by each of the families. They all knew this was coming but didn't want to believe this was going to happen again. Then Loretta spoke up.

“You're being ridiculous, Pietro. We have assurance that this will not happen to us by the Fascist Party. Without the farmers this country will fold and nobody will survive the year without food.”

Anthony looked at his mother and wife and back at Pietro. “I have to agree with my mother, Pietro; this will not be happening again. We had the Party at our house just the other week and they assured us that we would be taken care of during this transition of our country.”

Pietro looked at Anthony and thought, *How can this guy be the best farmer in the territory and be so gullible?*

“Bruno, please share your story of what happened at the café yesterday with our friends,” Pietro said.

After Bruno finished his story, all the families looked at each other with disbelief.

“Are you sure they had axe handles and were trying to shake him down?” Anthony asked Bruno.

“Yes, this was not a simple argument, and I know what I saw and heard.”

“When was the last time any of us has been in town for the evening walks?” Pietro said.

There was a long pause and everyone just looked at the ground for answers. “That is my point. We are all hoping this goes away and everything goes back to the way it was, but it hasn't and it is getting worse. We need to start now or we will be sorry.”

Finally Greg spoke up. "What do you want us to do, Pietro?"

Without missing a beat, Pietro responded, "We need to start storing more feed, hay, food, metal, wood, and anything else that we will need in the future. All the farms have strengths and weaknesses, if we band together and built on each other's strengths then all of us will survive this uncertain future. Here is a good example, for some reason Greg's crops mature before any one of us, and my crops always are the last to come to production. Let's all share equally with each other and we all will help who doesn't have that great a crop or who is getting loitered more than the rest of us. All of us need to grow something different every year like corn, lettuce, cabbage, carrots, potatoes, or something that we can all use. Then the next year we change the fields again, so we always stay ahead of what group is loitering from us and store for the winter. Each of you need to find places in your farms to hide food, metal, wood, and whatever you are going to need, and you must keep these places secret from all those who will do you harm."

Pietro was done speaking and felt exhausted after he was done and hoped everyone was on board. He was sure that if they did not band together they would all probably be doomed. Without even waiting for anybody to answer, Greg spoke up.

"Count the Martin's in."

"The Manzon's are in as well," John said.

They all turned and looked at the Pelliccia family. Anthony looked at his wife and then his mother and said, "I don't agree with what was said in here and believe that all of you are overreacting to this situation that happened in town." Anthony's mother smiled because she knew her son was the smartest in the bunch. Anthony's wife, Gilda, was good friends with Anna and looked at her with fear in her eyes because she knew in her heart that Pietro was right.

"Well, Anthony," said Pietro, "I am sorry you feel that way—"

Anthony interrupted. "I am not done yet, Pietro, let me finish speaking before you take my wine away and send us home. Like I said, I believe everyone in here is overreacting to this situation, but my father, God rest his soul, did tell me often about the hard times that fell on this area back in the last war. We too took a long time to get back to profit and now are doing very well. I

want to continue this and will join you in this endeavor of yours, Pietro. I would rather be prepared than be loitered into poverty.”

Anthony raised his glass. “So here is to Pietro’s plan and the future of all of our farms!”

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