

Vengeance Is Sacred



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Peter Healy

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Vengeance Is Sacred
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Dedication

***To my grandmother, Maria, and to my grandfather, Paolo . . .
thank you both for raising me in your home and hearts.***

***And to my bride, Carol, who gave me her youth and everything
else . . . I'll see you in the morning.***

Memoriam

Let heartfelt gratitude, shared admiration, and silent prayer be forever bestowed upon the unfortunate victims of the Triangle Waist Company fire in New York City, on March 25, 1911 . . . May their legacy dwell in the annals of history and their spirit serve us well in our golden endeavors of equality and fair treatment for all.

This book is a work of fiction, and although it is based on historical events and information, the author has employed certain liberties for drama and interest. Names, places, and/or incidents are modified, refashioned, or used fictitiously to accommodate the story, or are products of the author's imagination. Beyond any known factual references, the resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Chapter 1

Italy, 1901

The Calefati family had come from a long line of farmers, who practiced their farming craft in the hills of Italy in a small, mountain village named San Vito. Their farm was quaintly nestled on the western slope of the Apennines Mountains, fifty miles from the great Italian seaport of Naples. The Calefatis were terrace farmers, a special, clever breed that cut even levels of land into the sloping and hilly terrain to make way for their crops. Their hard work was a passion and the beloved land was their livelihood.

“Come Paolo, let us seek water up on the North Hill,” said Grandpa, while gently nudging Paolo awake from a deep sleep. “We will be planting there in the season and we need a source for water.”

When Paolo realized what was happening, he stretched the sleep from his body and his eyes opened wide, glowing with joy. This ability of Grandpa’s to dowse for water amazed him. He flew out of bed and dressed as quickly as possible, his excitement mounting until he felt he would burst with anticipation.

“Get me a good branch of hazel,” said the man with the wizened eyes that would not betray his age. Antonio was hunchbacked from decades of working the soil, but was still strong and able.

Paolo was out of the house in no time. He searched in the lower grove, looking for the choicest of branches to please his old grandfather. He soon returned gasping for breath and carrying his prize. The three-foot branch was nearly a perfect “Y” shape.

“You didn’t cut or break the bough, did you?” Grandpa asked with a playful look on his face.

“No, Grandpa! I remember well what you have taught me,” answered Paolo, almost indignantly.

“Good, it is not natural for the limbs to be cut. We must follow the ways of nature if we are to ask for her secrets.”

“It was hanging loose. I only had to climb a short way to reach it.”

Grandpa inspected the branch and his hard stare warmed into a great smile. “Ah, then this is a fine pick you have for me today! Let us go and start our task.”

Paolo placed Grandpa’s old straw hat on his head backwards and they laughed lightly. Then, they shuffled off toward the North Hill with Grandpa clutching Paolo’s hand. Paolo was beaming every step of the way. They hiked their way upward until the rising hill soon leveled off, forming a sizable glen.

Grandpa stopped abruptly. “We’ll start here. Step in front between my arms and stand on my feet. Then, lean back firmly against my body. You must feel every part of me so we can unite together and connect with nature. We must act as one if we are to accomplish our deed. Now, grab my forearms and think hard about the water we seek.”

Paolo did as he was instructed and grasped the lean, strong arms of his grandfather tightly. Grandpa felt they were now ready and started to walk. At first, his legs were shaking and his feet hurt from Paolo’s weight, but still he managed to shuffle forward. He hoped Paolo didn’t hear his muffled grunts as he strained his aged body.

It wasn’t long before Grandpa’s legs felt like they were made of cement and each heavy step sapped more of his strength. Finally he closed his eyes, focused, and reached deep within his depths to tap his extraordinary abilities. Then, using his “way,” he was able to separate body and spirit to foster his vigor. Immediately his exertion ended and his strength mounted. It was as though he was coupled with an electric charge that filled his body with a potent energy. Paolo let out a cry of surprise as the pair suddenly spurted ahead and began traipsing about the countryside at a brisk pace. It was an unusual sight and appeared as though the twosome was clumsily marching in cadence.

Thus they surged onward, searching the parched field in an irregular pattern as the light mountain breeze cooled their warm, sweaty faces. Paolo glanced back at Grandpa and saw the stress in the old man’s face as he concentrated on his mission. He wondered where Grandpa found the strength to bear him for so long.

But as they continued to scour the rolling landscape for the hidden treasure the early sun began to take its toll. Soon Grandpa’s clothes became saturated with sweat, his back began to hunch, and his arms dipped . . . yet he somehow managed to continue. Paolo never remembered it taking this long before, but still nothing seemed to be happening.

“Grandpa,” called Paolo, “stop and rest. Please!”

Grandpa heard, but nevertheless ignored the worried youngster and instead enhanced his determination. He focused his sensitivities and channeled all his special qualities until he manifested a powerful receptive field. Grandpa grimaced from the demands of his undertaking.

Paolo instantly felt an added force lace through the old man's tense body, but he was unaware that now a powerful aura was created around them. It was a beautiful, pulsating field of warm, glowing colors. A tight smile crossed Grandpa's face as he increased his stride and searched his core for a hydrokinetic connection.

Together they forged forward lashing through the low shrubs and high grass without regard for the thrashing their legs received from the briars and thickets. But it was all without incident. Paolo could feel the strain in Grandpa's muscles and began to smell the unmistakable odor of old age in his soaked clothing. It reminded Paolo of the musty odor of wet straw.

As they continued their ramble, Paolo knew the old man was exhausted. *How much more could Grandpa endure?* he thought. He was just about to jump away from Grandpa to halt the search when he felt a sensation in his arms. It was a hot, agitating feeling that traversed right down into the bough of hazel. Amazingly, the branch seemed to glimmer with a pulsating luster. Paolo couldn't tell if it was the reflection of the bright sun, his imagination, or if it was really beginning to shine. Then the radiant force intensified and Paolo felt it flow throughout his whole body. His muscles twitched, lights burst before him, and his mouth went dry as he united with Grandpa in a mystical harmony.

Suddenly, they both felt a sharp pull and the branch yanked hard to the right. Paolo gasped aloud and held on tightly as they turned in unison. At last they had a direction to follow and tramped forward at a swift pace. Soon, they were actually being pulled by some unknown, guiding force. The energy seemed to grow stronger as the branch writhed and buffeted within Grandpa's grip.

Paolo saw that they were being drawn toward a sparsely covered hollow in the short distance. Then he began to hear a low humming sound like a tuning fork. It was a low-pitched, pleasing sound that swelled into a beautiful resonance. Grandpa's arms vibrated and Paolo couldn't let go if he wanted to. It was as if the branch was magnetized and they were made of metal. Grandpa, Paolo, and the branch were now completely locked together and fused into an amplified divining rod.

From nowhere, Paolo smelled the sweet fragrance of lilacs, though there were no such bushes to be found. He had no time to try to understand, for the

force was now transporting them at a frightful rate toward the hollow. With the increased speed, Grandpa couldn't keep up the pace and their feet separated and began dragging, leaving scuffs and furrows in the dirt. Paolo wondered what was propelling them.

Then, right in the middle of the hollow, the branch bucked and twisted violently. They fought to control it, but the vector abruptly shot to the ground with great power. The impact sent both Grandpa and Paolo crashing to the earth with a thud. Paolo landed hard and rolled to a stop as the dry, dusty earth clouded about him. He struggled to his feet and spied Grandpa sprawled on the ground in a disheveled pile with his hat smashed beneath him. Grandpa was lying quite still and an uneasy feeling flooded Paolo. He darted to the old man. "Grandpa, are you okay?"

Grandpa was covered in dirt and gasping for breath. His face was pale and tears were rolling down his face, leaving streaks on his grimy cheeks. Finally, he managed an answer to quell Paolo's fear. "*Si, si*, Paolo, I am fine . . . just tired. Now, go for the others."

"But, Grandpa are you sure you're not hurt?"

Grandpa broke into a fit of coughs and Paolo knelt beside him, patting his back in comfort. "Paolo, please, don't worry! Go and fetch your father and Uncle Carlos. Quick now, you must hurry!"

To Paolo's relief, Grandpa finally managed to get to his knees and he took the opportunity to dash toward home.

"Don't forget to bring the tools . . . and some *acquata*!" Grandpa called out weakly after him.

The *acquata* was the last of the grapes and stems in the wine press that were mixed with water, sugar, and Amanita before being stored in wooden barrels to ferment. After straining, it made for a specially blended drink that would better quench a thirst in the fields and quickly rejuvenate a worker. It was an energy drink with the sweet, smacking taste of a dark, red wine.

Paolo ran like the wind, leaping and bounding through the terraces like a mountain goat. He didn't look up until he pushed in the weathered door of the old farmhouse and cried out the news.

"We found water," he gasped, "up by the North Ridge. Grandpa says to come quickly with tools and *acquata*!"

Paolo's father, Thomaso, and Uncle Carlos smiled together. That's just where they needed another water supply. It would help for the expansion of the crops they were planning. They talked excitedly as they rushed to the large barn to collect the tools and supplies they needed to dig a well.

“Paolo,” said Carlos, “run ahead with the *acquata* and see to Grandpa. We will be there shortly.”

Paolo was off and running, cradling the *acquata* jug in his arms like it was a baby. When he arrived, Grandpa was sitting on the ground in the middle of a circle he had drawn with the branch of hazel. He looked frazzled, but was happy with his effort and the reward.

“*Quando*, Grandpa?” cried out Paolo as he uncorked the jug, and handed it to the old man.

Grandpa didn’t answer. He first took a healthy swig of the special wine mixture, which promptly revived the color in his lined face. He dabbed his lips with his sleeve and looked proudly at Paolo with a weak smile. He then took another gulp from the jug and inhaled deeply so he could feel the warmth of the satisfying wine throughout his body.

“A great source, Paolo, pure and plentiful,” he said, while wiping the sweat from his brow and pointing to the six-foot circle he had drawn around him. “When they dig the well, it will last many years.”

Paolo sat next to the old man and hugged him affectionately. He felt an uncanny insignificance, as if he was almost unworthy of sharing this astonishing achievement. He was struggling with these feelings when his father and Uncle Carlos arrived. They were pulling a cart loaded with a wheelbarrow, picks, shovels, and wood planking. And, although they were sweaty and short-winded, they were still anxious to begin their work. Uncle Carlos untied the tools while Thomaso assisted his father to stand.

“Papa, are you okay?” asked Thomaso with concern. “You look drained.”

“*Sì*, I am alright,” answered Grandpa in a shaky voice. “I’m just worn from my efforts. It’s nothing that a good woman couldn’t cure . . . if you know what I mean!” He winked at his son, but there was no twinkle in his eye. It was just as well Thomaso didn’t notice.

Then, father and son shared a warm moment together as Thomaso steadied Grandpa and embraced him dearly. “You are tried and true to your ways, Papa,” he whispered with just a hint of envy.

“How deep before the water, Papa?” asked Carlos as he picked up his father’s flattened hat.

“Three meters, dig the hole wide enough to build a well of rocks and mortar,” answered Grandpa. Then he added, “It will not run dry until we are all but forgotten . . . so you can bury my hat at the bottom.”

Carlos gave his father a puzzled look, but it was Thomaso that answered. “Paolo, take Grandpa to the house, he’s fatigued. Then return with the five-gallon bucket and help us dig. Bring the auger and the hoist, too.”

Carlos and Thomaso carefully assisted Grandpa as he draped his arm around Paolo's shoulder for support. "Papa, should we just send Paolo for Oggi and the wagon so you can ride?" asked Carlos.

"No, no, the walk will do me good. There is no reason to worry. Begin the digging. The earth will remember me soon enough . . . dust to dust, right?"

Thomaso stared at his father. "What . . . what was that?"

"Nothing, nothing, I'm just weary. I will rest once I'm home," replied Grandpa, as he and Paolo started walking. After a short distance, Grandpa stopped and looked back over his shoulder. He took a long, loving look at his two sons, smiled, and then continued stepping toward home. Paolo could still feel Grandpa trembling as he guided him along the narrow footpath. He sturdied himself to provide more support.

"Oh Paolo, I grow too old for such things!" Grandpa said. "Therefore . . . you will replace my searching ways soon enough, right?"

Paolo heard it, but did not answer, so Grandpa repeated, "You will replace my searching ways soon enough, yes, Paolo?"

Paolo stopped dead in his tracks. "What, what?" he cried out.

"I know you heard, Paolo. It is you who will take my place as the Mountain Deva!" answered Grandpa in a firm voice.

Paolo could not believe his ears. He had no such ways. He was just a thirteen-year-old boy and didn't want such an enormous responsibility. Furthermore, he was unworthy of such an important gift.

Paolo stammered as his eyes welled with hot tears. "Grandpa, I, I cannot, I don't know any--"

"Paolo, worry not. Your senses will be deeper and your seeking will be greater than mine," Grandpa prophesized. "Believe me, you will be a force to be reckoned with."

Paolo felt the blood drain from his head and thought he would faint, but the stark feeling of alarm kept him conscious. *Would he have to finally face his fears?*

"Grandpa, no, no, I can't! I am not the one. I'm not you!" Paolo protested loudly. He started crying as panic set in and his arms flailed wildly into the air as if he could chase his dilemma away. Nausea built in his stomach and his knees grew weak. The feeling of disbelief was overwhelming and he began to sob as only children could.

Grandpa comforted Paolo by embracing the bewildered youngster. He hummed unconsciously and Paolo realized it was the same pleasing sound of the tuning fork that he had heard when they were dowsing. Paolo let out a huge sigh and clutched Grandpa tightly for comfort. The love shared between

the old man and the boy was classic and Paolo somehow understood there would be an everlasting bond between them. *Is it the Deva that will unite them forever?*

Paolo's tears subsided as he searched within. He had always harbored a tangled secret that dwelled deep in the back of his mind. Often it served as a haunting, driving source of intricacies and complexities that would leave him mystified and confounded.

Paolo grew quiet. *Would he concede to another hush of denial or was this the occasion to confront his doubts?*

"Come, let us sit," said Grandpa kindly.

He led Paolo by the arm and they sat on a large, flat rock, beneath the shade of one of the oldest trees on the mountaintop farm. The streaking sunlight filtered through the swaying branches and created long, dancing shadows while the majestic Apennines Mountains shimmered in all their glorious regalia behind them.

"Paolo," he said softly, "this 'way of mine' was once just a spark like it is within you." Grandpa paused, gesturing with his hands as he stared at the anguished face of the confused boy. "You know of this spark, true!" He nudged Paolo's shoulder. "Is this not true, Paolo?" he asked, as if it were not really a question at all. There was a serious look on Grandpa's face and Paolo knew he had to be honest.

Paolo's eyes dropped and he stared at the ground. He slowly nodded his head and meekly mumbled, "Well, yes, Grandpa."

Did he admit to such a thing . . . had he finally released his secret? Paolo thought in distress.

Grandpa immediately jumped to his feet, for he was beside himself with joy. He always felt Paolo was the heir to the Deva, but his admittance still generated a wave of relief.

Grandpa grabbed Paolo by the shoulders. "I knew it was such . . . you have always been surrounded by the Deva. I saw it in your aura!"

However, despite Grandpa's enthusiasm, Paolo did not feel reassured about all this.

Grandpa looked up to the sky and studied the rows of staggered clouds drifting above the valley, as if he was thanking heaven. He then began speaking in a wise, kindly voice. "Simply put, Paolo, this spark you possess is the Deva. It will magnify and multiply as you grow older, filling you with a powerful glow. This glow radiates willfully with the forces of nature and the spirits of plants. And, because of that, you will know and understand more than others." Grandpa stared into Paolo's eyes and continued. "You see, these

deeper perceptions will make everything seem uncomplicated and very often you will be left wondering why others cannot recognize what is so obvious. You'll see simplicity . . . and they'll see miracles. Plus, there are revelations that are hidden within the auras of all living things. And that information will become a source for your benefit, to be used and applied freely. This Deva energy can be controlled by you, however, there are also surprises. Sometimes it just happens, and other times it doesn't happen at all. But, I swear to you, when it does occur, you will commune with nature by sharing the joys of her secrets and the beauty of her ways. You will be witness to everything from within, and that my child, is most certainly a remarkable view of life."

Paolo curled tightly inside the protective arms of his grandfather. His chest was still heaving from the affect of his previous sobs. He was calmer now, but still very much upset. Paolo remained quiet, preoccupied with trying to comprehend what was just explained to him. He was still confused but also enlightened. Many times he had experienced strange and inexplicable sounds, smells, and feelings. He often dreamed of spirits, witnessed transformations, and saw visions of wonder. Other times, he had memories of things he had never done. Matters more remembered than learned. Knowledge he somehow just knew.

"Grandpa," Paolo began, "the cool breeze of late morning, is it just for you and me?"

Grandpa smiled and gave a slight laugh. "Today it is my child . . . yes, today it is."

Harbored by the shade of the great tree, Paolo stood beside his grandfather, and together they let the cool, lispig wind rush past their warm bodies. The leaves on the tree above rustled gently.

"Grandpa, will I manage as you have?"

"Yes Paolo, you will do more than manage. Your Deva forces will be stronger and your ways will be more able than mine were." Paolo did not notice the past tense. Grandpa always spoke awkwardly.

Grandpa continued. "That is the nature of the glowing. My grandfather before me and his grandfather before him each had this way, along with each grandfather before them for as far back as can be traced. Each Deva becomes stronger than the one they follow. Each one knows what the others have learned. Every other generation becomes the courier of this way. And, when using their inner energy, each Deva becomes closer to the mysteries and sources of nature and human intricacies. Now it is your turn! Take what is yours and carry it well, my child. Your heritage is your path. It will not be denied!"

Grandpa had tears in his eyes as he held tightly to Paolo's hand. His mind was at peace and he was filled with a beautiful serenity. Then he closed his eyes and concentrated deeply to connect with his remarkable attributions. Paolo immediately felt an energy flow through his body. It was as if he was being filled with an imminent power.

What was happening?

Grandpa then unbuttoned his shirt, let it fall to the ground, and directed Paolo to do the same. Grandpa's bare torso showed his dark, wrinkled skin and the white hairs on his chest, but was that a mark beneath Grandpa's right arm?

A birthmark, thought Paolo, but I have never seen it before.

It had a certain shape to it, a definite form . . . it was almost a symbol. The mark was the image of the "Mandala." It was a crescent-shaped figure that was three inches in length. Paolo stared at the lilac-colored mark intently. He studied the clearly defined edges, flawless symmetry, and harmonic balance. His eyes couldn't turn away from its simplistic beauty. Grandpa knew Paolo was wholly engrossed with the figure that was soon to be his and waited for him to understand.

Paolo continued to watch as the Mandala slowly faded from Grandpa. Then, under his right arm, something suddenly began to manifest. At first, his skin just felt warm. But soon, bright illuminated colors started radiating outward until they became two glowing circles that began to intersect. Paolo gazed in wonder as the halos carefully passed through each other, forming all the systematic shapes of the crescent from beginning to end; concave, curved, hooked, falcate, rounded, arched, bowed, and convex. Finally, the shining rings morphed into a perfect crescent image and the figure became solidly emblazoned beneath the junction of his arm. It was then that Paolo felt a completion to himself. It was a totality that dispelled all of his inadequacies and uncertainties.

Paolo quickly realized that the crescent he and Grandpa exchanged represented a lot more than an endless bond with each other. There was a grander scale to the Deva experience. It was a new awareness of the celestial bodies, Mother Earth, and the continuous cycles of nature and her seasons. Now, he had a connection to these wondrous phenomena. They were his to share and every progression would radiate within.

Paolo also noticed that the horns of Grandpa's crescent were in the waning stage, while the horns of his crescent were in the waxing stage. *One ends, whereas the other begins*, reflected Paolo. The Latin word for crescent means "increasingly," and Paolo felt the energy building inside, filling him

with power and control. He felt an unbridled strength from the summation of his new wisdom. He stared at the crescent beneath his arm until it slowly dissipated. He knew it would remain with him for the rest of his days.

Finally, Grandpa led Paolo from the shade into the direct sunlight and heat of high noon. The sun penetrated their bodies as if focused only on them. It warmed them and became their inner energy. They grasped hands and soon became locked in an exchange of spirits, transcending time and space. Paolo could feel the strength of his grandfather enter his body with a jolt. An aura of bright, blissful, sparkling colors surrounded them as the wonderful sounds and sights of nature exploded in his mind. Everything was now racing as the transfer of forces continued. Paolo received the energy of his grandfather wholeheartedly. It was the energy of feelings, and character, and knowledge, and understanding, and memories, and dreams, and futures. It was an exhilarating experience and Paolo felt light and lifted. He was unaware that Grandpa and he were several feet off the ground, levitated by the impact of the powers he accepted.

In turn, Grandpa felt the innocent peace that only the shining hope of children can offer. The draining of his powers became an overwhelming feeling of fulfillment and reward. It was a euphoric achievement. Grandpa had passed his torch and knew the legacy of the Deva would continue in the Calefati bloodline for the future.

Finally, they were one within each other. When all was complete they unlocked their clasped hands and smiled lovingly at each other . . . then turned and continued their ramble home along the ridge of the North Hill. The worn path prompted Grandpa to recall his youth and he reflected on his wondrous life in his mountain home as he walked.

Paolo was no longer shaken by this event -- instead, he was fortified. He was now armed with confidence and knowledge. He understood what was already meant to be.

“Grandpa, the Amanita, will I be able to prepare the--?”

“Paolo, never doubt! You will see it and you will know. Follow from the inside. The Amanita is yours to command. You will understand and you will be more than able. Enough now! It is done, and without uncertainty. Remember that always!”

Paolo felt a bit ashamed. He would never disbelieve again. He brushed aside his hesitations and sought the Deva deep inside his being. He knew people were in awe of Grandpa and eventually they would feel the same about him.

Let it come to me, then let it rise from within, Paolo thought.

They trekked on together through the realm of nature and Paolo could feel a new kinship to his environment. Everything was now filled with mutual respect and reciprocation. For Paolo, it was a gracious welcome into a new world of symbiosis.

“Grandpa, it will soon rain . . . more like a storm,” Paolo said.

“Ah ha, *nino*, you knew before me,” exclaimed Grandpa, as he hugged the boy in triumph. “Alas, bring me home. I now need my rest.”

As the boy directed Grandpa homeward he knew how much truth there was in those words. At that moment, Paolo felt that he was someone else. Someone, who was much more than a boy. Somehow, within the events of the day, he had left his innocent youth behind and suddenly had grown up. Paolo denied himself no longer. He welcomed the Deva into his soul and promised himself that he would let it guide his life forthwith.

They soon reached the farmhouse and Paolo assisted Grandpa through the low doorway and escorted him down the hallway to his bedroom. The bright stucco walls somehow seemed dull and washed of their white color. Paolo thought he saw figures within the afternoon shadows, or perhaps, his mind was playing tricks. Maybe it was illusions from the Deva, or maybe it was nothing at all.

Paolo seated Grandpa gently on the bed and removed his shoes while Grandpa quietly hummed a touching melody. It sounded so beautiful that it almost seemed mystical. He then glanced at the picture of Grandpa and Grandma on the bureau. Grandma had died many years ago and Paolo did not remember her. But the Deva immediately provided Paolo with some of the moments of the life Grandpa had shared with his beloved wife.

Paolo was fascinated, as his mind vividly recalled the couple sharing the events of their life together: courting, marriage, and the births of their two sons. Paolo witnessed it all as if he was an invisible observer during these occurrences. Memories were just filling his mind and racing everywhere. With the memories came the flood of emotions that Grandpa felt as each event unfolded. Then, came Grandma’s death and Paolo felt the agony of Grandpa’s loss as his wife of fifty-two years passed on. Paolo’s heart ached and tears filled his eyes as he understood how Grandpa’s love for the only woman he ever knew was pure and everlasting . . . even after she was gone.

Paolo was almost relieved when the visions stopped and his mind slowly returned to normal. *Wow, this Deva thing was absolutely amazing*, thought Paolo. It was as if the measuring of instance and distance was combined with all the energies of timelessness and channeled into a transcendental process that lifted the Deva beyond the ordinary levels of worldly experiences by

magnifying the human sensitivities. Paolo laughed to himself . . . *he didn't even know how he was able to conceptualize such a thought.*

"Paolo, please bring me a clean shirt," said Grandpa.

Paolo jumped. Being so deep in thought, he'd almost forgotten about Grandpa. He did as he was told and brought a shirt over to Grandpa and helped him change. Again he noticed the Mandala mark beneath Grandpa's arm. It was only slightly visible and pulsating weakly, as if it was about to extinguish. Grandpa looked about the room and then laid back quietly to take his rest. There was a peaceful air about him that seemed to fill the bedroom.

Grandpa let out a gentle sigh and whispered, "I love you, Paolo."

"I know, Grandpa. The Deva lets me see right into your heart. I love you too," answered Paolo tenderly, as he wiped a tear from his cheek.

"Paolo--" Grandpa called out with a smile, "*Viva la Deva!*" He then closed his eyes tightly and immediately went into a deep sleep. *Was it a trance or something more?*

Paolo sat on the side of the bed and hummed as he gazed lovingly at Grandpa. He held the old man's hand tightly and stared at his aged face for what seemed a long time.

Then he began weeping quietly. He cherished Grandpa with all his heart and would be forever grateful that he had been bestowed with something as precious and sacred as the Deva. Paolo understood that it was Grandpa's greatest gift.

Finally, with tears blinding his eyes, Paolo hugged the old man and kissed him good-bye. He raced out of the bedroom and through the house, then leaped off the porch and headed for the barn. The rain had started, just as he had predicted, and was pelting him heavily as he ran from the menacing, wet wind toward the large open doorway. Paolo entered and waited for his eyes to adjust to the sudden dimness. He groped for the beam where the lantern hung from a nail.

Shouts from outside startled him. He peered through an open knothole in the wall planking to see his father and uncle racing toward the protection of the farmhouse, vehemently cursing the sudden storm that had caught them away from shelter. Paolo just stared emptily and smiled at the amusing sight but did not beckon to his elders. He knew he needed some time to himself and wanted to be alone. So much had happened and he had changed so much in so short a time. He also knew something else . . . and it weighted his heart like nothing before.

Paolo grasped the lantern and lit it with the nearby matches. The whole barn came alive with the soft, flickering glow of the orange flame. A color of

amber was cast throughout the large room. Shadows were awakened and became emphasized and distorted from the swinging motion of the lantern as Paolo walked to the rear of the building. He slowly descended the stairs leading to the subterranean room where the Amanita mushrooms were cultivated.

The lantern bathed the neat rows of planters in a golden light. There were ten rows of shelves, fifty feet in length, stacked five tiers high, each containing long, flat planters filled with golden mushrooms. They were the dreaded Amanita mushroom, the most toxic mushroom found worldwide, responsible for ninety-five percent of the fatalities resulting from mushroom poisoning. Eating the umbrella of the mushroom, called the "death cap," accounts for fifty percent of the casualties. The most potent toxin present in these mushrooms is alpha-amanitin. This complex amino acid combines freely with the body carbons of anyone who ingests it and causes system failures in seven to ten days. Paolo stopped briefly, for he was amazed. He didn't know how he suddenly knew such comprehensive information.

In the rear of the huge room were a stove with firewood, some large kettles, and a pump for water. The shelves were filled with jars and canisters of natural, organic additives such as herbs, spices, dried vegetables, oils, leaves, roots, and minerals. There were also assorted Amanita solutions and immersions used for cooking, blending, or diluting. The area looked like a laboratory. It was here the mushrooms were rendered harmless by the wisdom of the Mountain Deva. Only through his traditions, insights, and perceptions could detoxification be accomplished. Paolo now knew it was not a recipe to be followed and repeated, but rather a method of connecting to the poisonous elements of the Amanita, and then using the Deva wisdom to eliminate them.

So, that is why the process required the auspices of a Deva, thought Paolo. Each time the Mountain Deva would cleanse the Amanita, the process would be different. It depended on a multiple of variables from strain, to size, to season, to potency, to quantities, to analysis, to knowledge, to aura. Thus, only the Deva would know how to remedy the Amanita to a useful state.

The Calefatis grew the mushrooms with great care. They prepared beds of rich, moist soil in the subterranean planters. Proper temperatures and the correct amount of light hastened the germination process until the mushrooms were ready to harvest. Before processing, the seeds were meticulously separated from the mushroom caps. From all the countless hours of performing such labor, Paolo knew that it was a deliberate and tiresome task. After being gathered, the seeds were dried, stored, and preserved until ready for planting. The mushrooms themselves, once free of their seeds, were saved

in large barrels where they were treated by the Deva and prepared for their intended use. This on-going process was repeated throughout the year for a continuous supply of the Amanita.

Ever since Paolo could remember, he'd watched Grandpa treat the Amanita. The Deva could use the mushrooms to make food additives, medicines, antiseptics, sleep aids, balms, ointments, potions, cosmetics, dyes, insecticide, lubricants, soap, glue, and laxatives. Other special uses included fertility, conception, or birth control. The possibilities were endless. But, the main purpose on the farm was the making of the secret fertilizer which was responsible for the plentiful bounty, enormous size, and quality taste of the Calefati produce. The Amanita compensated for the relatively small size of the mountain farm by magically enriching the soil and stimulating rapid, sustained growth for the crops.

The Devas had practiced the uses of the Amanita for generations, but always continued learning and experimenting with the mushrooms to further unlock their secrets. They were careful, moderate, and respectful of the mystery they possessed and now it would be up to Paolo to continue such diligence.

Paolo picked up one of the larger mushrooms and held it near the lantern. Looking at the mushroom closely, he realized how much he never noticed about the fungi before. He stared at the neat rows of seeds on the underside of the mushroom cap. Nestled in their protective pockets, the seedlings made an elaborate design. But now, Paolo could see the total geometric pattern and the mathematical relationships involved. Even the distinct proportion of three-to-two-to-one was now obvious. That was nature's "golden proportion" which exists throughout the natural world and offers beauty to the most simple of creations.

Still holding the mushroom, Paolo returned to the barn and went to the far corner where extra bales of hay were stored by the ladder to the loft. Straw was strewn deeply on the floor and Paolo nestled into the hay while setting the lantern beside him. Captivated by the flame his mind expanded into an array of methodized thinking that integrated and systemized his thoughts. Paolo marveled at all the new information and fantastic insights that were now available to him.

Whatever had been lingering dormant deep inside of Paolo had been mystically energized by Grandpa's power. Now that it was active, he could convene with nature and delve into the auras that existed within all living things. And, sheltered within the auras were the caches of information that

unlocked the secrets of each organism from the most humble life forms to the overly complex . . . including people.

Now it was he who would travel the same mysterious path as Grandpa. Others often referred to Grandpa as “gifted,” but Paolo knew differently. Part of the power was simply a memory process. Whatever the previous Devas experienced, learned, or understood, all Devas thereafter would have access to that knowledge. In essence, he had inherited a bank of memories from the universal wisdom and collective intelligence of all the previous generations of Devas from as far back as the bloodline extended. This information could be recalled from his ancestors and used in the present via an intricate communication process that was enabled by metaphysical energies and a remarkable extrasensory connection. All these ideas were fluttering through Paolo’s mind when another insight exploded into his thoughts.

It seemed there were other memories; however, they were fragmented or incomplete. They appeared as just partial, uneven glimpses. Paolo was fascinated and suddenly an array of haunting questions filled his mind. *Could these memories be the experiences of the next generations of Calefatis -- the Devas who would come after him? Were they events remembered before they happened? Were they images of things yet to come? Were they the future?* Paolo pondered his perceptions and he was astonished. He may not have fully understood, but he clearly perceived this mystery.

Paolo stared intensely into the flame of the lantern as if being drawn into the fire would settle his speculations. He had not been attentive to the inklings harbored deep within his subconscious, but now his time had come. He had to understand and even more so, he had to believe. It was up to him to carry the strength of the Calefati line. His awareness took his breath away. The responsibility was enormous. *Was he ready? Was he worthy?*

Paolo searched his essence and grasped onto any sliver of character that he may have had in his young body. He had to reach his soul to find his answer.

“Yes, yes!” he spoke aloud in a determined voice, “Yes, I can!”

Paolo remembered how Grandpa, in no uncertain terms, quelled his doubts when he asked about the Amanita. He wouldn’t doubt himself again.

The day had been long and the inextricable events were woven together with a mass of feelings and perceptions. The deluge of information overloaded Paolo’s mind and he was exhausted. He nuzzled back into the pile of hay and fell into a deep sleep with the Amanita mushroom still clasped in his hand. Soon he was dreaming of many things . . . and all of those things had new meanings.

When he awoke, he was rejuvenated and climbed the ladder to the loft. He reached the overhead double doors and pushed them apart with a heave. The brisk, brash wind crashed against his body and Paolo raised his arms above his head, clenching his fists. His shirt thrashed in the airstream.

“Aaarrhhhh!” he screamed as loudly as he could. He shouted again and again until he couldn’t utter another sound. Committed in mind and soul, Paolo was ready to accept his legacy. The Deva was well known to farmers. They believed in the spirit of plants, but Deva powers were only possessed by a rare few. Now, he was the one entrusted with the privilege.

The storm had passed and there was an early dusk. The crescent moon was visible behind the clouds, mimicking the Mandala. Paolo now understood that the shape represented completion as in the harvest of their crops, harmony as in family, and truth as in the undeniable ways of nature. Everything was directed toward perfection and completion. For every end there was a spirited beginning, a beautiful cycle of continuity.

Paolo stared out to the mountains and valley. He watched the leaves stretch back into shape after their heavy soaking. Washed by the rains of heaven, the earth teemed with vim and vigor. Uncannily, Paolo could feel the ardor of the plants within and faintly watched the gnomes, elves, and fairies creating the work of nature by building the growth of the foliage by microns and moments. It was their stunning architecture that caused the development of all living things. *How easy. How breathtakingly simple it all appeared.* For Paolo, everything was anew with meaning and consequence. He was one with nature now.

Then Paolo felt something happening. At first, it was just a slow movement building deep inside of him. Soon it became a turning, twisting, glowing power that lifted him out of his body and enabled his spirit to burst free. He soared through the powerful mountains and over the steep cliffs and chasms until he was at the sea and watched the churning waves crash against the beaches and rocky crags. Then all at once, the real world was behind him and he was swept through the measures of time and space, layered in the overlapping sequences of macrocosm, creation, and universe until he stood once again in the loft of the barn overlooking the fields of his home.

Still entranced, Paolo began to reconnect to his body. Finally, he felt his feet planted firmly on the floorboards as he tried to come to grips with his out-of-body experience. He knew what had just happened was real. He knew where he had been was real. There was no mistaking the flight, sights, sounds, and feelings he had just experienced. He was in a state of wonderment, an altered consciousness. For sure, he was the new Mountain Deva.

Paolo had just gathered himself together when the lantern on the floor beside him began to vibrate. He knew what it meant and was gripped with fear. The flame quickly swelled and intensified, then snuffed itself out in a burst of bright light. Paolo looked around frightfully, peering out from the loft into the moist darkness.

“Oh, no, no!” Paolo cried out. “Please, no!”

The leaves rustled and the straw of the loft swirled about. The animals below seemed disturbed and sounded their distress aloud. Paolo saw a radiant form burst from the farmhouse with the speed and fierceness of a tempest. The spirit streaked about the farmyard and buildings in a frantic, staccato path. It touched everything in its course, then finally entered the loft and circled Paolo like a whirlwind until it abruptly exploded into thousands of flying sparks.

Paolo’s eyes filled with tears and his heart was heavy with a darkened sorrow. He raced down the ladder and through the barn, then streaked toward the farmhouse with all the effort and speed he could manage. He could already hear the wailing and cries of mourning that only death could manifest. The sounds would echo throughout the valley forever . . . Grandpa was dead!

Chapter 2

Times had been good for Paolo and the Calefati farm. It was 1909 and eight years had passed since Grandpa died . . . and time had churned forward acting as an idle observer in everyone's lives. But Paolo knew differently . . . it was measuring everything.

Grandpa had never been in favor of pursuing fuller financial success by enhancing the capabilities and output of the farm. Only minor expansion of crops occurred under his guidance. However, Thomaso was the new family patriarch and he saw things in a different light for the changing times.

The industrialization and modernization of Northern Italy forced the mass emigration of people to Southern Italy. With the increased population, food was in demand and the Calefati farm was in a very advantageous position to help supply the needed produce. Therefore, Paolo worked incessantly, cultivating the Amanita, collecting the seeds, and creating the various mixtures from assorted ingredients. He delved deeper into the secrets of the Amanita, mixing his solutions and brews like a sorcerer and soon he managed to develop a new, stronger strain of the mushrooms with increased potency. This new genus created a fertilizer, which unleashed an initial burst of energy that caused a tremendous growth spurt, yet slowly replenished the soil for continued plant development. Paolo applied this yield to the fields and watched in wonder at the amazing results. Each season the crops responded to the Amanita and the family efforts with near perfection. Soon, all the crops were being produced on a grander scale to meet the larger sales market. Paolo was pleased with the success and felt well satisfied that he had pursued the ways of the Deva with desire and dedication.

Like many farming families, the Calefatis had many generations living together under the same roof. The tradition continued when Catarina, Paolo's older sister, had wed a fine, young man from the next town of Benevento. His name was Giovanni Sorrento and they had moved into the farmhouse right after the wedding. Their first child, Roberto, was born two years later. Giovanni was only a few years older than Paolo and they became immediate, steadfast friends. Paolo also enjoyed his little nephew Roberto immensely. He often took him about the farm and they played regularly, singing songs, enjoying games, chasing each other, and sometimes after dinner, they would fall asleep together while sitting in Grandpa's old, cushioned chair.

Giovanni had been a carpenter's helper and was an earnest worker. When he first arrived at the Calefati home he tried to prove that he was worthy of Catarina by working relentlessly. He mended the barn roof, redid the farmhouse doors, built cabinets, repaired fences, and enlarged the back porch. Finally, Thomaso asked him to please stop his gracious efforts and assist with the farm work to help meet the increased business demands. Having been officially invited to work the good earth, side by side, with the men of the house meant that he was now being accepted into the family and Giovanni was thrilled.

Paolo hummed as the rickety wagon rocked leisurely along the dirt road toward the city. The vegetables were piled high in baskets and Oggi, the old farm horse, strained to pull the heavy load.

Oggi had been with the Calefatis since he was born. He got his name from being a little bit stubborn and Paolo would coax him along by calling out, "C'mon, today, huh, today?" Hence he was named "Oggi," the Italian word for today.

There was always a breeze along the jagged coastline whenever Paolo and his wagon descended from the mountain in the early morning. The tall trees and large thickets of wild hedges and bushes along the worn roadway made for a pleasing ride. Paolo felt the soft warm sunlight upon his face and lost himself in a sea of gentle clouds that floated in an azure sky above the rolling surf. It was just a beautiful day and Paolo felt happy. To intensify his feelings, he began thinking about Gina, a lovely young lady from the local cafe. Paolo was more and more aware that he looked forward to making his weekly deliveries just so he could visit Gina.

Paolo was now twenty-one years old and had grown into a strong, young man. He was powerfully built, with broad shoulders, massive chest, and bulging arms. His face had the chiseled look of a Roman statue, with crystal blue eyes set squarely over a straight nose. His cheeks were full and he had a pronounced chin that just extended slightly outward with a cleft. His skin was slightly weathered and presented a healthy, outdoor appearance and his hair was dark and wavy. By all accounts, Paolo was a handsome young man.

Paolo had various locations about the city of Benevento where he delivered his products. There were a few produce markets, a couple of large restaurants, and some larger wholesale accounts that resold the produce elsewhere. These dealings were the mainstay of the family business, however,

the growing city had the benefit a train terminal and Paolo hoped that could foster additional trade. He was presently negotiating with a businessman, Mr. Fraccione, who was interested in buying large quantities of produce and shipping them by rail to further southern markets. It would be a very good deal for the Calefati family.

After making deliveries and collecting his payments, Paolo would often stop at the Mia Casa Cafe for lunch. He liked to sit outside on the veranda, in the shade of the large, red awning with his back against the white stucco wall, watching the activities of the busy street. Crowds of people, wagons, carriages, autos, and trucks would fill the main square in a haphazard frenzy. They bustled about with the intentions of trade for the shops, markets, and businesses. Paolo watched this scene attentively, but was unimpressed. He was pleased that he was not as modern as others. For he very well knew what he admired most in the world . . . nature had no equal.

“Ah ha, Paolo my friend,” said an older man with a balding head, dark mustache, and a large smile. He had a towel tossed over his shoulder and walked briskly over to the table to embrace his dear friend. Arturo Colonari was a bit of a character. He had known Paolo since he was a youngster and was also an old friend of his grandfather, Antonio. Paolo respectfully stood to accept the greeting.

“Hey now, sit, sit, no need to stand,” said Arturo, motioning to the chair. “Tell me, Paolo, how is your sister?”

“She is well, *Signore* Colonari . . . as are the men of our household.”

They both laughed at *Signore* Colonari’s oversight.

“Well, what can I say, I do have an eye for the ladies, eh?” Arturo said. “Though, you understand, I care none the less for the health of our own gender. So now, let me ask again. How are the Calefati men?”

“They are all well, especially little Roberto, who looks more like Grandpa every day.” The mention of Grandpa brought a quick silence. Paolo slowly shook his head as he thought back to his wonderful days with Grandpa.

“That’s alright, Paolo. We all loved Antonio,” Arturo said. “Hey, did I ever tell you of our Bocce days together? How we beat the Castiglione brothers?”

“Oh, Christ, many, many times, Arturo!” answered Paolo. He held up his hands to stop Arturo from continuing. “Please, please, not again!”

“Okay, okay,” Arturo laughed. “But it was just such a great feeling to beat those smug bastards. Now, what can I serve the son of Thomaso Calefati?”

“I’ll have a nice plate of provolone, salami, tomatoes, and onions. Also, bring some red *vino*, please.”

“Ah, yes, what else is more fitting for such an afternoon?” Arturo said with a light laugh. “Sit now and relax. I’ll send out Gina with the platter in a moment. Enjoy your day, Paolo.” He was off with a brisk lift in his step.

As always, Paolo noticed the pleased smile Arturo had on his face when he mentioned his niece’s name. She was his brother’s daughter, whom he had raised since the age of seven when both his brother and Gina’s mother were killed in a travel accident. Now, she was twenty and quite a lovely young lady. Since Arturo never married and had no children, he thought of Gina as his own. He was proud to have been such an important part of her life and raising her was a pleasure . . . almost a gift. They had a comfortable life together in a nice apartment above the cafe.

Paolo closed his eyes to the brightness of the hot afternoon sun. His head rested against the wall and his cap was pulled low over his eyes, which slowly began to close with a lazy drowsiness. His neck had small drips of perspiration trailing below the loose red neckerchief he wore and the dark skin of his powerful chest was visible beneath his half-open shirt. Paolo began to see the images of nature forming in his head as he drifted off into a light sleep.

“Always sleeping,” said Gina loudly and noisily laid the platter of food on the table.

Paolo was startled and jumped up, bumping his head on the wall behind him. When he gained his senses Gina was standing before him and made for an eye-catching image. Gina had a statuesque face, typical of Southern Italian girls, with high cheekbones and large brown eyes. She had a Roman nose and a somewhat pronounced chin that together accentuated her attractiveness. Her shoulders were sloped down leading to a set of voluptuous breasts that displayed a healthy line of cleavage beneath the opening of her yellow blouse.

“It’s a wonder anything grows where you live. For sure your sister must do the work for you, Paolo,” said Gina, tossing her dark, long hair behind her. She was still holding the bottle of wine and a glass, and slammed them on the table.

Paolo’s eyes met hers and he answered playfully, “*Signorita* Gina, our crops grow in the early morning. Not in the heat of the day.”

Gina made a doubtful face so Paolo searched for something that would irritate her. “I guess a city dweller does not know the way of the Lord’s plants.”

“Look, look who talks of the Lord! When was the last time we saw you at the Church Del Mar, or God forbid, confession?”

Paolo stared down at the ground. He pulled off his cap and held it in his hands before him, then mockingly raised his face toward heaven. "My confession is with Him alone," said Paolo smiling. "Besides, priests do not like farmers very much. We farmers are closer to God than they are, and they resent that."

Gina laughed heartily and Paolo joined in. Then they heard *Signore* Colonari say to another customer across the cafe, "Ah, yes, what else is more fitting for such an afternoon?"

They both laughed till they cried. After the laughing stopped, Gina's hand was resting on Paolo's shoulder. She timidly pulled away when she realized she was touching him. That brief moment of contact was all it took for Paolo to have a succinct connection to Gina's aura. He saw a soft red glow surrounding her with sporadic yellow streaks of light radiating outward. The aura emanated steadily about her and Paolo could perceive that she was filled with affection . . . and just a touch of desire. Their eyes met for a moment and Gina blushed with embarrassment.

"My goodness, is that all you are having today, Paolo?"

"*Sì*, the deliveries took longer today and I had to talk to *Signore* Fraccione at the train station. It's too close to dinner to eat much more."

"Oh, meeting with Fraccione now. So, I guess you're a big businessman, huh? A real big shot, eh!" Gina threw up her hands, pretending to be angry.

Paolo stared into Gina's beautiful dark eyes. "But Gina, always remember, underneath I'm still the same peasant from the mountains." Paolo offered an unforgettable smile and Gina couldn't help but stare at Paolo's handsome face.

She became flushed when Paolo noticed and turned away awkwardly. "Well, Paolo, err, excuse me. I have other customers." She began to walk away, still flustered.

Paolo called after her, "Gina, please bring some more *vino* when you get a chance." He watched her leave and could see the beautiful swell of her firm rear beneath her white cotton skirt. It looked like an upside-down heart. And, thanks to the sun, he also noticed the outline of her long legs under the lightweight garment. Gina knew Paolo was staring and made sure she accented the sway of her hips.

Paolo liked Gina. She was friendly, funny, and honest, and when he saw her, he felt a stirring in his loins. He reflected on his notion . . . *an ass like an upside-down heart* and laughed to himself.

Two blocks away from the Mia Casa Cafe was LaMonico's Barbershop. It was a shop located in the heart of the business district that not only provided the best haircuts and shaves in the city, but also served as the local gathering place for old friends, politicians, policemen, and . . . members of the Camorra crime syndicate.

The Camorra was an old-order, well-established organization that dealt in bribes, graft, thievery, prostitution, enforcement, protection, and murder. They operated throughout the Campania region, with the main operations in the Province of Napoli. In most respects, the Camorra members were a group of criminals above the law. Since times were very difficult in Southern Italy, crime and corruption were widespread, and in some areas the law did not operate at all. These conditions were part of the circumstances that led to the immigration of millions of people to the "New World" from Southern Italy.

While Paolo was relaxing at lunch, a meeting was in progress in the back room of the barbershop. Those at the meeting consisted of Donte DelVecchio, the Camorra Boss, Lorenzo Stampanolli, the Mayor of Benevento, and Alberto Zamprella, the Chief of Police. The gathering concerned the particulars of some recently stolen merchandise. Unbelievably, the property was army articles, including clothing and medical supplies that had been robbed from the Italian government. The goods had been stored on a railcar in a maintenance yard of the railway complex that for obvious reasons was not secured or guarded. The distribution of the wares, the amount of payoffs, and division of the profits from the heist were the topics of discussion. Donte DelVecchio informed the mayor and police chief what had to be done to accomplish the task of delivery and distribution of the spoils. For their cooperation, they would each receive a handsome payoff and the promise of a job that they could issue to whomever they chose. The mayor and chief were very pleased.

Donte DelVecchio was born into the crime syndicate and used his cold-blooded methods and keen business sense to establish an early foothold in the sordid business. He soon accelerated his way through the ranks to the top position of power. He was a ruthless killer who answered each challenge with a fearless attack on his enemies. He never delegated what he could do himself, no matter what the danger or consequences.

One incident, which made Donte infamous and feared, was when he single-handedly thwarted a planned ambush against him and wiped out the entire male lineage of a family. The conspirators were a father and his two

sons from the Garapelli family, a somewhat rival faction, who were trying to outmaneuver Donte in obtaining leadership in the crime syndicate.

The legends said that Mr. Garapelli lured Donte to his villa with the pretense of negotiating an alliance between them that would allow for joint control of the Camorra operations in the Campania region. The mutual association would facilitate easy expansion of their illicit operations. However, Donte's suspicions were aroused when he was requested to come to the meeting alone.

Rather than avoid the trap, Donte concealed two Lupara sawed-off shotguns beneath his bulky jacket. They were modified with hooks on the shortened armrest, so they could hang from small, metal loops sewn to the inside of the jacket underarms. Donte also hid a small mirror in the cuff of his sleeve so he could watch behind him.

When the meeting started, Donte sat openly on the couch to appear like an easy target, but he slyly used the hidden mirror to cover his back. His bravado fortified him against the impending danger, and he felt a calm satisfaction knowing that all vantage points were covered.

When a Garapelli attacked from the rear, Donte sprung into action, diving toward cover and firing a Lupara with each hand. Once the smoke cleared, Donte stood alone and all three Garapellis lay dead. The rivalry for command of the Camorra ended that day and there has not been a Garapelli relative in the Province of Napoli since. Consequently, after paying off or threatening authorities and officials, Donte obtained all monies, jewels, valuables, and three deeds to properties, including the villa that he still lived in.

It was this tale of audacity that served as testament to Donte's unflinching leadership and personal involvement in business dealings. Thus, the cold legend of Donte DelVecchio was born . . . and it still remains intact and uncontested.

This was the manner of the man who ruled the Napoli Province with an iron hand. He instilled a level of fear throughout his charges and demanded complete obedience from his men. If this was the life they chose, then they would have to choose to follow his rule. Their loyalty was their incentive for advancement.

DelVecchio was a perfect fit for the new unified government of Italy. Decades of internal strife had left a legacy of violence, social chaos, corruption, and widespread poverty which left the law above the reach of the residents. This disorder, along with natural disasters, hindered the fledgling government and rendered them unable to bring aid to the people. Thereby, the

unopposed leader in the Province of Napoli was Donte DelVecchio and he was respectfully referred to as “Don Del.”

Donte had three sons. Neco was the eldest, twenty-six years of age, the middle son was Lembo, twenty-one years old, and the youngest was Nino, at nineteen. They were a great source of pride for Donte and all were included in the illegal transactions of the crime syndicate. And, to be sure that they would be without concern or compassion, Donte exposed them to all the tried and true skills that fostered success in the world of violence. Intimidation, coercion, negotiating, manipulation, assault, and murder were all part of their distinctive upbringing. In short, they were raised to be criminals.

Donte wanted his sons to be prepared to follow in his footsteps and stand ready to lead when the opportunity presented itself. Therefore, he made sure that each son had responsibilities and commitments. He felt there was no substitute for “on-the-job” experience and his personalized training. The three brothers received their assignments and instructions directly from their father and they answered only to him. As a loving and distinguishing gesture, Donte gave each son an expensive Lupara shotgun with a gold, engraved plate mounted on the polished mahogany armrest. The inscription read:

“Vengeance is Sacred!”
From Your Loving Father,
Don Del

Carved beautifully on the armrest, below the plaque, was a picture of an eye. Most people thought that it represented the evil eye of the Camorra, but it really meant “an eye for an eye,” the great equalizer for revenge. Everyone understood the Lupara represented vengeance, and it struck fear in everyone they passed as it hung freely from the shoulders of the DelVecchio brothers. They were not only above the law, they were the law, and everyone knew it.

It was Lembo that came to town with his father that day for the meeting at the barbershop. He waited out front with Constantino Zamprella, the police chief’s twenty-one year old son. The meeting seemed to be dragging on so the two friends decided to roam about town. Together, they were full of mischief and sometimes even more, therefore, no one was ever very happy to see them coming their way. For not only were they spoiled . . . they were also untouchable. The abrasive twosome stopped at a bistro for a late lunch, along with their fill of wine, then continued to move menacingly about town.

Lembo was always after the ladies, whom he enjoyed far too much. However, he had the same contempt for women as his notorious father. He

helped supervise the Camorra's warehouses in Napoli, taking great pride in his mistreatment of the unfortunate women who worked there. The tormented prostitutes feared his cruel and perverted sexual trysts, which often included spankings and whippings. He mostly preferred multiple partners and forced the frightened participants into lesbian acts to heighten his arousal. That not being enough, he also managed to manipulate the money, often taking a large share of their earnings. Sometimes, he would threaten to lie to his father about their behavior and cooperation with customers to gain even more control over them. He felt women were only good for one thing, and he made sure he got as much of that one thing as he wanted . . . plus more.

Constantino was more of a follower, and although he was uncouth and gruff, he was tolerable when he was by himself. Lembo was never really bearable. In any case, when they were together, things had a way of escalating.

The cafe was nearly empty and Paolo knew he should be heading back to the farm. He got in his wagon and started Oggi toward the road home -- but while the wagon creaked and jostled, Paolo's thoughts were locked on Gina. For some reason, he couldn't get her out of his mind today, and he felt different in a silly, dreamy way. *Was it love?*

Then from nowhere, Paolo's whimsical mood became serious when he suddenly realized he wanted Gina in his life. The decision was so spontaneous it was as if he had been put under some sort of magical spell.

Paolo was pleased with his decisiveness, but now he was unsure of what he should do to gain Gina's affections. He passed a floral shop and decided he would buy some flowers and ask Arturo's permission to court Gina. Then he would request her company for a picnic on Sunday.

Yes, that is what he would do, thought Paolo. That is the way to start.

In his excitement, Paolo's mind whirled and he pictured how he would ride his beloved Oggi to town and gently lift Gina upon his steed. Then, together they would share Oggi's strong back in an easy gallop to the mountains. As they went higher into the hills he would dismount and lead Oggi by the bridle to a wonderful mountain glade that had a panoramic view all the way up the sparkling coastline. Once there, Gina would shimmer like all the other jewels of nature.

He entered the floral shop and the full beautiful fragrance of lilacs permeated his senses. Paolo had not even remembered that sweet aroma since

he had last doused with Grandpa. He recalled how he had experienced the lilac scent when there weren't any lilac bushes anywhere. *Was that sensation a connection to Gina . . . was she to be the love of his life?* Paolo thought.

Paolo purchased a giant bouquet of lilacs. He loved the color and aromatic bouquet and so would Gina. He knew she had feelings for him. He had seen that her aura was the colors of warmth and love. She was glowing because of him.

Paolo ran to the wagon and returned to the cafe. The veranda was now empty and Paolo assumed Arturo was at the market buying the products for the evening dinner business. That would leave him alone with Gina -- hell, he would just seek consent from Arturo later. Things were setting up perfectly.

Destiny and Fate are the brothers of the future, reflected Paolo, *but sometimes you must initiate*. He entered the cafe with a big smile on his face, ready to confess his feelings.

He expected to see Gina setting tables, however, the inside dining was room empty. *Why were the tables not set . . . and why were the curtains drawn?* Paolo stood there with the lilacs held before him like a young schoolboy. Everything seemed odd and Paolo knew something was not right. He moved slowly through the tables and headed for the kitchen. He quietly pushed open the swinging door, and to his shock he saw Lembo and Constantino holding Gina down on the large, wooden cutting table.

Gina's skirt was bunched above her waist and her ripped blouse and undergarments were lying bunched on the floor.

Lembo was standing naked, leering over Gina as Constantino laughed in cruel delight. *Thank God he came back*, thought Paolo in a panic.

Gina squirmed to get free and caught sight of Paolo. Her eyes showed a glint of hope and despite the dreadful onslaught she had the presence of mind to signal a caution to Paolo with a shaky pointing of her finger. Paolo glanced and saw the Lupara on the nearby counter. Nevertheless, the disgust and anger inside Paolo rose from the bottom of his core and he soared into a fiery rage. Lembo and Constantino were so distracted by Gina's body they didn't see Paolo begin his ferocious rush.

Gina cried out Paolo's name just as the assailants turned and saw Paolo already charging with all his might. He threw down the lilacs and heaved his large shoulder squarely into Constantino's side, sending him flying with a crash against a rack of glasses and dishes. Constantino landed face down behind the toppled rack amidst the broken dinnerware, stunned. Lembo pushed past Gina, knocking her to the floor as he bolted for the Lupara, but Paolo raced to the front of the table to block him. Gina landed on the broken

dishes and scattered lilacs. Her arms and legs were being cut from the glass slivers and razor-sharp porcelain fragments as she tried to crawl away, screaming hysterically in terror.

Paolo grabbed Lembo's arm as he reached for the gun. They struggled together, grappling for the weapon. The gun was locked in both their grips as they wrestled violently, vying for the upper hand. Suddenly they slammed against the table, blasting it over onto Gina's foot. She screamed out in pain as the heavy table smashed the bones in her ankle. Paolo could actually hear the awful shattering of bone.

Somehow, Constantino managed to get up and leap onto Paolo's back. Paolo was still embroiled with Lembo, struggling for the firearm, and tried to gyrate and whirl to shake Constantino off, but he had a full, strong grasp around Paolo's waist. The three men writhed and thrashed about in a desperate battle that rained ruin and destruction upon the kitchen facilities. An open sack of flour went flying, spraying the room with a fine powder, a crate of sundries crashed from a storage shelf and exploded a rack of canisters below, and the kettle of simmering tomato sauce toppled over, pouring down the side of the stove and onto the floor. The mess was commingled beneath the desperate stomping and kicking of the three brawlers.

With no alternative, Paolo finally plowed backwards with his full force, flattening Constantino against a cabinet of pots and pans. The crash and noise of the metal cookware flying everywhere was deafening. Constantino's whole body went limp and there was a heavy, agonized moan.

Lembo continued to struggle frantically as he tried to pry the gun from Paolo, while Gina began to edge from the melee toward safety. She was in tremendous pain, and slowly inched away . . . half unclothed and using whatever remained of her shredded skirt to cover her naked body.

"Leave, farm boy," Lembo demanded through clenched teeth. "You can have her when we're finished." He somehow managed a strained laugh.

Paolo ignored him and focused on Gina, who was still moving toward the door. In that moment, Paolo felt a full surge of love for Gina.

"Don Del is my father, you idiot!" Lembo shouted as he pushed mightily against Paolo's neck with his forearm. Deadlocked between their taut grips was the Lupara and the look on Lembo's face boded a life-or-death ending to the frenzied conflict.

"Gina is my love," Paolo retorted without thinking. For the rest of his life he would never forget what he said. He never knew why he said it, but he always remained thankful that he did say it for Gina to hear.

After hearing what Paolo said, Gina turned slightly to look back at him. Their eyes met for just an instant when Lembo squeezed the trigger and the gun thundered its explosion. The force of the discharge and speeding pellets hit her squarely in her bare chest, knocking her violently across the floor. She tumbled through the broken glass, pots and pans, kitchen utensils, and lilacs, then crashed against the stove and slumped in the corner -- nothing more than a disheveled, bloody, broken body. Once such a sight of loveliness, she was now just a discarded mass.

Paolo screamed a loud anguished cry of disbelief, “Noooo . . . Ginaaaa.” He thought his blood would boil from the fury he felt.

“Let go, you fuckin’ dirt farmer! Or Don Del will avenge -- you and your family!” Lembo screamed.

Paolo felt the strength rise through him as the adrenaline pumped and his anger heated like lava. With a mighty heave, he pushed Lembo away while still clutching onto the gun with an iron grip. The tactic rendered the gun to his possession. Lembo had lost the violent tug-of-war and landed heavily on the floor. Suddenly, he was completely defenseless and vulnerable, just like Gina had been for their onslaught. He immediately realized his predicament and got up to his knees, then started to beg. The flour that covered his body made him look like a ghost.

“Please, *signore*, it was just for fun! We were only--” stammered Lembo. “Don Del will fix it all and you can have--”

Lembo never finished his last sentence as Paolo pulled the trigger and a resounding blast roared through the ransacked kitchen. Lembo was lifted off the floor and landed alongside Gina’s twisted body. This infuriated Paolo.

“You will not lie beside her . . . even in death, you bastard,” Paolo shouted at Lembo’s lifeless body. He dropped the Lupara, then picked up Lembo’s remains over his head and threw him across the room, next to the other piece of shit, Constantino.

“Garbage, human trash,” cried Paolo in repulsion.

Paolo was splattered with blood and was walking aimlessly through the gore and mess when Arturo arrived. Arturo screamed from the bottom of his heart when he saw Gina’s body crumpled in the corner. He ran to help her, but once he was near, he knew she was gone. He cried a wail of sorrow and then the hollow feeling of hopelessness crushed whatever was left of him.

“Oh, *Dio Mio*,” Arturo screamed in torment. “Jesus, have mercy on Gina. Please, help me, God!”

He then turned to the two lifeless men against the wall and recognized Lembo and Constantino. He knelt beside them and realized Constantino was

still breathing and groaning a low painful sound. He wasn't bleeding much, but internally it seemed that he was badly hurt. However, Lembo was just a bloody, dead pulp. Arturo rushed over to Paolo, who was still standing there dazed.

"Paolo, what the hell happened?" cried Arturo as he shook Paolo by the shoulders.

"They, they were going to rape . . . rape Gina," lamented Paolo. "I came back to ask for permission to court her and I found them both ready to, to have their pleasure. Gina was--"

Suddenly Arturo hugged Paolo in a futile embrace as tears rolled off his face onto the floor. "Paolo, you must run. Go, you must hurry!" Arturo declared. "Don Del and Chief Zamprella will be here soon. Paolo, their sons are--"

"Their sons are shit!"

"Yes, yes, but you must save yourself. Go, go, Paolo, please! Go home, tell your father," pleaded Arturo desperately. "There's nothing here for us anymore."

People had heard the shots and gathered outside the cafe. Now, some onlookers were beginning to enter the dining area with hesitation. Who knew if the gunfire was finished?

Paolo embraced Arturo, kissed him goodbye, and exited through the back door where Oggi and the wagon were still hitched securely to the post. Paolo quickly untied his horse, climbed aboard, and screamed for Oggi to run like the wind. He drove off, leaving the cafe and his old life behind.

"Home, Oggi, home! Giddy yap Oggi, giddy yap! Home boy, bring me home, Oggi . . . please, bring me home," pleaded Paolo to his old, trusted friend.

Oggi never heard such urgency from Paolo before, but he sensed the importance and responded with a burst of speed. The wagon lunged forward and Paolo raced up the mountain road, bouncing over the dangerous ruts and holes while the wagon wheels rolled precariously near the edge of the steep precipices. Paolo couldn't have cared less. *What was the use?* Oggi pulled for as long and hard as he could with Paolo urging him on. He responded like a young colt in a race, giving all he had for his Paolo. Finally, the farm loomed in the distance, like a beacon in a storm.

Word spread fast about the trouble at the cafe and Donte, Chief Zamprella, and Mayor Stampanelli reached the cafe running. They angrily pushed everyone aside and entered the wrecked kitchen. Don Del and Chief Zamprella ran to their sons. Donte stopped dead in his tracks and stared down

at the bloody body of Lembo. Death was no stranger to Donte and his experience in these matters told him Lembo was lifeless. He knelt beside him and whispered a tender goodbye along with a silent promise. There was no ice in his veins that afternoon and tears welled in his eyes, but he wouldn't let anyone see him cry.

Donte stood, moved to the Lupara on the floor and picked it up. Then he loaded two more shells into the chambers that he had in his jacket pocket. An old habit of carrying extra shells had benefited him many times before. He saw Arturo kneeling over a body in the corner. Arturo had covered Gina's body with a tablecloth and the blood was seeping through. It appeared loathsome against the white clean linen. Donte crossed the room and peeled the tablecloth down, exposing Gina's intact, lifeless face. Once he saw the dead young woman, Donte immediately understood what had happened. Then, in front of everyone, he fired a blast into her inert face, completely eradicating it. Arturo screamed out in madness. Donte placed the gun to the back of Arturo's head and once again pulled the trigger. Arturo's head splattered in bloody disarray against the wall.

Donte then went over to where Chief Zamprella was tending to his injured son. Constantino's back was badly injured, but he was conscious and able to speak. Donte knelt on the floor in his own son's blood to speak with Constantino.

"Connie, who is responsible for this outrage?"

"The, the, farm boy, Calefati . . . Paolo, from the mountain," answered Constantino weakly.

The Don hesitated then mulled his thoughts. When he stood a heavy, pained expression flooded his face. "Mayor," he said, while walking out and glaring straight ahead, "get me the deed for this property!"

He then left, carrying Lembo's Lupara with him. He glanced at the engraved plate with its menacing inscription and squeezed the barrel tightly. He would return home soon enough and tell his wife and two remaining sons of the afternoon tragedy, but first, he would put a contract on the head of Paolo Calefati and instruct his charges that this matter was the top priority. It wouldn't take long for the orders to travel within Don Del's underworld network and then permeate throughout the Province.

Chapter 3

It was dusk when Paolo arrived at the farm. He jumped off the wagon, ran to the house, and flung the door open with a crash -- screaming as he burst into the kitchen where the family was having dinner.

Thomaso stood up from the table, startled. "Paolo, what, what's the matter?" When he saw that Paolo was covered in blood his entire demeanor changed to concern and he rushed to his son.

Paolo was frightened and exhausted. He flopped into a chair with his head on the table and took deep breaths, gasping to speak. Finally, he gained control and told the shocking story of the afternoon skirmish and the horrifying consequences as his family listened in disbelief. Paolo was almost crying. He didn't care about himself, but now his entire family was in danger and that was what worried him most. It all seemed unreal and for a moment he wished that he hadn't gone back, but underneath he knew that Gina deserved to be protected, and now . . . Gina was dead.

Thomaso was completely crushed by the news. He knew what had to be done, but now everything would change. Nothing could be worse news. The world turned upside down for everyone that afternoon . . . or maybe, it just collapsed instead.

Paolo continued raving about how the most feared man in the Province was now after the Calefati family and would hunt them down without mercy. They had to protect themselves. They had to flee, but where could they go?

"Paolo, Paolo, hold on. Wait, wait!" Thomaso said. He gently placed his hand over Paolo's mouth to silence him and then added in a quiet voice. "I'm sorry about Gina, but you must--"

"The caves, Papa," Paolo shouted. "We could hide in the caves! No one knows of our mountain caves, right?"

"Paolo, stop, please stop!" Thomaso demanded and put his arms around his son. "Don't say anything more."

Although Paolo couldn't calm himself he finally went quiet. His chest was still heaving and his eyes were wide with desperation.

"I have to tell you something, Paolo. It's important, and there's very little time."

Paolo finally sat at the table ready to listen. Everyone gathered as near to Paolo as possible and Catarina stood behind him with her hands on his

shoulders and worry in her heart. Then Thomaso began to tell his tale of Grandpa and Don Del.

“Paolo, a long time back,” Thomaso began, “Don Del’s eldest son, Neco became ill and the doctors couldn’t diagnose what was wrong with him. No medicines seemed to do any good and Neco was getting worse. Don Del sought out Grandpa and came to our farm. Neco was his only son at the time and he meant everything to him. It seems that Don Del somehow heard of Grandpa’s ways and the healing of the Amanita. After all, he is the head of all sources here in the Province. In any case, Don DelVecchio just about begged Grandpa to help Neco get well.”

Paolo had never heard any of this before. “When was this?”

“Well, before you were born. Neco was four years old,” Thomaso answered. “Anyway, Grandpa was reluctant. There is always a risk in healing. You of all people should know that. Nevertheless, Grandpa knew if he failed, there would be severe consequences. However, if he refused Don Del’s request, things could be even worse. To deny Don Del when he asks for help is almost suicide. Either way Grandpa had to try.”

Paolo was stunned. This was something he should have known about. Grandpa was his legacy. “Well, what happened?”

Thomaso stared off, closed his eyes, and strained to remember. Then he continued. “Grandpa went to DelVecchio’s home for a week to treat Neco. He felt him for any ailments with his hands and powers and found that the kidneys were not functioning correctly. He then nursed him with Amanita mixtures, however, with little results. He then went into some sort of trance where he was able to place himself within Neco’s body, or he somehow saw into Neco’s body. I don’t understand the Deva way.”

“I know, Papa. It’s when the Deva separates from his body and can then--”

“Not now, Paolo -- please!” Thomaso snapped. “Anyhow, Grandpa somehow knew that a few weeks before his illness, Neco had fallen backwards and landed flat on his ass. The bottom bone of the spine, called the coccyx, got pushed into the nerve that carries the life forces to the kidneys and impeded their functions. The damaged bone stayed crooked in this position, causing Neco’s kidneys to fail. And, that was the correct diagnosis.”

Thomaso stopped abruptly and got up from the table. “Now, we must hurry.”

“No, tell me what Grandpa did. I must know.”

“But, you don’t understand. Don Del wants his revenge. You must leave!”

Paolo jumped up, he had almost forgotten his fears and the wrath the Calefatis now faced. *Leave? Had he heard correctly?* It really didn’t sink in.

“You have to finish. What was the outcome?”

Thomaso realized the urgency of their predicament, but his heart was heavy and he was not anxious for Paolo to go. “Okay, if I continue will you get ready?”

“Just tell me, already.”

“Well, Grandpa explained all this bone business to Don Del and he insisted that Grandpa correct the condition, not the doctors. Once again, Grandpa was hesitant, but you just don’t say ‘no’ to Don Del. So, Grandpa made a potion from the Amanita, which they made Neco drink. It put him into a trance and he was unable to feel very much. I guess it sort of numbed him--”

“The trance can be produced when--” Paolo blurted out.

Thomaso gave Paolo a sharp look to silence him. “Then Grandpa used an Amanita ointment to lubricate his finger. They turned Neco over and Grandpa slipped his finger up Neco’s ass and physically bent the tailbone back into its rightful position. This relieved the interference to the nerve path and the kidneys quickly recovered. Grandpa left a mixture of the Amanita for Neco to continue to take, and in a week he was healed. Now enough, Paolo!”

“What was the result of this incident?” asked Paolo stubbornly.

“Oh, my God, Paolo!” said Thomaso in exasperation. He shook his head and quickly continued. “Then afterwards, Don Del offered Grandpa anything he had. Any of his possessions, any job, property, wealth, women, you name it, and Don Del would accommodate him. But Grandpa wanted nothing in return, except for Don Del to leave our family in peace, and of course, to keep the Neco incident to himself. Grandpa didn’t want people seeking him to heal everyone. He said it was not his calling, and besides, it was just too uncertain and dangerous. He didn’t wish to cure on a regular basis. He only wanted to farm . . . and explore the benefits of the Amanita.”

“So, it was sort of an unpaid debt for Don Del? He is indebted to our family. Is that it?”

“Well, I see it more as gratitude, but if you look through the eyes of Don Del I guess you could put it that way. The Camorra live in a cynical world. So, I figure that Don Del will not murder our family, but he definitely sees that he is entitled to kill you. Remember, an eye for an eye, you see.”

The father and son looked at each other through watered eyes.

“Do you remember what I told you when you were a little boy, Paolo?”

“Si, Papa, an eye for an eye and sooner or later . . . the whole world will be blind.”

The two men embraced while crying on each other’s shoulders. After a moment Thomaso managed to tell Carlos and Catarina what to do with the

Amanita seeds and then begged Paolo to quickly pack. He was going to L'America. It was his only chance to escape. Paolo protested vehemently, but his father saw the bigger picture and made sure Paolo saw it too.

"Paolo, you must think better. The Deva is at stake here. You cannot let the heritage end! Grandpa is counting on you and so are all the Calefatis hereafter. Now please, get ready to travel, before all is lost."

The words hit Paolo in the core of his being and he quickly cleared his mind. In his worry he had forgotten about the Deva. His father spoke the truth, he had to leave. The Deva must survive, all else seemed pale in comparison. The lineage must never be broken and despite his angst he could never consider the Deva a burden. He grudgingly went to pack.

"Giovanni," Thomaso called to his son-in-law, "would you please travel with Paolo to Napoli. He will need help and he should not be alone. Stay off the roads, use the paths and byways. Travel unnoticed, everyone will be trying to help Don Del. They will be well rewarded if they do. The seaport and docks will be teeming with Don Del's men, so be extra careful. Please protect Paolo, he is my only son, and true, down to his bleeding heart . . . plus, he is the Deva. I don't know how he will--" His voice trailed off into sobs as his staunch facade crumbled.

Giovanni loved Paolo and greatly respected the Calefati family. He felt lost in this overwhelming situation. He was only a bystander until Thomaso had asked for his help. Now, he really felt like he belonged. Suddenly, he was truly "family."

"Thomaso, *Padre*, if I may. It is my place to serve the family I live with and live for. I will offer my full assistance to Paolo at any risk. He knows the mountains and I know the cities. We will succeed. Thank you for asking me to help. I am honored with your trust."

"Thank you, Giovanni. And, please make sure that he leaves Italy, no matter how much he objects!" The two men shook hands firmly.

Thomaso then hurried upstairs to find Grandpa's belongings that were kept in the attic. He opened an old trunk and inside were the simple keepsakes of Grandpa's life. There were his documents, his army uniform, a sword, some daguerreotypes, a few souvenirs of city visits, assorted jewelry, and at the bottom of the trunk . . . was an old Roman gold coin.

"Ah, *si, si*, thank God it is still here," whispered Thomaso, while squeezing the coin in his hand.

This was the token of appreciation that Don Del had given Grandpa so many years ago for saving Neco's life. It wasn't so much the value of such a collectible, it was that it served as a marker from Don Del himself. Don Del

gave it to Grandpa with a promise that he could use it at any time for any reason, and he would honor it. Now was the time to cash it in.

Paolo packed his clothes and some mementos in a small suitcase. Then he left the house and walked to the front yard where he did a complete three hundred sixty degree rotation. He took everything in that he could: the farmhouse, the path to the mountains, the crops and gardens, the terraced slopes, the old barn, the fenced pens, the open valley, and all the loving people in his life. Twenty-one years of memories came roaring back and flooded his mind, like the rising tide. He gazed above to the night sky looking for something to hang onto, but tonight there were only clouds. *Could he find something in the Deva world that would be able to keep him home?* He waited and searched, but the truth was before him. He had to leave this world . . . it was the end of life as he knew it.

He heard a neigh and trotted over to the old barn that was always such an important part of his life. He descended to the cellar and stared at the rows of extraordinary mushrooms and felt an emptiness that quickly turned into an ache. He hastened back upstairs and visited Oggi in his stall. Everything tugged at his heart at once. *How could he leave? What about the Amanita? What about the Deva? What about his family?*

“Oggi,” he whispered, “forgive me for leaving you. You’ve been such a good friend and the years we’ve spent together were golden times. I’ll remember you always. Think of us as one and the same.”

He rested his face against Oggi’s long head and sighed deeply. He felt the deep, sad ache from the very heart of the huge animal. Oggi loved him and now he knew it was good-bye. Paolo looked into Oggi’s large round eyes and didn’t have the answer as to why love sometimes can hurt so much. He turned and left the barn and returned to the house, crying softly.

Everyone was gathered in the living room and the heartache was as difficult and demanding as when Grandpa had died. Paolo’s sister was just weeping uncontrollably, and Uncle Carlos was simply at a loss for words. Paolo picked up little Roberto and squeezed him with a hefty hug. “I love you,” Paolo whispered into his ear and Roberto managed to say, “Me too.” A weak smile came to everyone’s face.

Paolo then shook his father’s hand and the handshake immediately became an embrace. When they separated they put their arms over each other’s shoulders and walked side-by-side to the front door.

“Paolo, be careful and remember when you are alone that we are always with you.”

“I will, Papa, I will, for I know the strength of my beautiful heritage.”

Thomaso then showed Paolo the Roman gold coin Grandpa had received from Don Del. “Don’t worry about us. Don Del is indebted and this coin will remind him,” Thomaso assured Paolo. “He will come for vengeance, but he has an obligation to his own word. Even Don Del cannot be untrue to himself! That is also a part of the reputation he needs.”

“But Papa, you don’t know that he has any honor at all, especially since I killed Lembo.”

“Don’t say it like that. You’re not a murderer!”

“But I pulled the trigger and I could have stopped! I don’t know why I didn’t.” Paolo answered. He thought back to the afternoon debacle and then added quietly, “I must have had intentions. I guess, maybe I was consumed by revenge.”

“Paolo, it was uncontrollable. It was a desperate struggle. You could have died the same as poor Gina. If Lembo had gotten the Lupara, he would have shot you as cold as ice,” retorted Thomaso. “Enough of that, now!”

Paolo lowered his head at the mention of dear Gina. He could hardly believe she was gone.

“Come, it is time . . . you must go, Paolo,” said Thomaso. “Giovanni is waiting. He has some cheese, meat, and water for your trip. You must stay strong, the Deva depends on you, and so do we!”

Again, Paolo looked at his wonderful home in the mountains and realized how happy he had been there. However, it would be sanctuary no more, for both Don Del and the police were after him.

“Can we take Oggi?” asked Paolo with no hope in his voice. He was urgently seeking to hold on to his old life just a short time longer.

“No Paolo, they know Oggi better than they know you. Now, take this money and go.”

“Papa, I can’t! How will you make do without our money?”

“It’s only 400,000 lira. The farm will take care of us . . . it always has.”

Paolo met Giovanni in the front yard and everyone came out to see him off. Paolo kissed and embraced each person individually. They all softly whispered their goodbyes. He started to walk away and it seemed as if it were all a surreal dream, but Paolo could feel reality resting on his shoulders like a great weight. He was leaving his home. Tears were in his eyes and his mind was numb. Then he heard his father call after him.

“Paolo, tell me what I don’t know, huh?” yelled Thomaso. “Why is the Deva only for every other generation?”

Paolo turned around, showing a faint smile and answered, “Because, if it were every generation . . . there would just be too many Devas!”

Paolo knew his father just wanted to remind him about the importance of being a Deva. He also knew that his father had always wished that he had become a Deva, but alas, he was just the wrong generation.

Soon Paolo and Giovanni were far along the path and out of sight. The cover of darkness suddenly enveloped the landscape like a light had been turned off. The family went inside already missing Paolo, and then the awful feeling of worry set in. This would not be easy. The magic days of the Deva that existed all these years, all these generations, was no longer a part of their lives. The poison mushrooms would remain lethal, and basically useless, and the crops would go without the magic stimulus from the Amanita fertilizer. The Califati farm was immediately rendered ordinary in the course of a sudden, tragic encounter.

The close of the day offered no rest for everyone whose life was touched by the gruesome episode of the late afternoon and the throe of hearts breaking filled the night. However, come daybreak, Don Del and his men, armed with guns and riding horses, arrived at the Calefati farm. Don Del himself banged on the front door and called for Paolo to come out. Thomaso thought that was a good sign, since he feared Don Del would break down the door and start shooting.

Thomaso opened the door and three men briskly rushed past him to search for Paolo. Other men were heading toward the barn. Thomaso held the Roman coin tightly in the sweaty palm of his hand.

“Thomaso, right, Antonio’s boy,” Don Del said with a Lupara in his hand and a bodyguard by his side. “Ah, I see you are prepared and have my coin at the ready.”

Thomaso meekly held the coin out and Don Del smacked it away, infuriated. It landed on the ground and Don Del kicked it.

“I want your boy, Paolo,” Don Del shouted. “Paolo, the fucking murderer.”

He grabbed Thomaso by the throat and pinned him tightly against the wall. “To think someone from Antonio’s family would betray me for a woman -- a bitch, a goddamned whore!” he growled with a hint of madness in his eyes. “Can you believe, my son’s life, for a fuckin’ harlot!”

Thomaso struggled to answer, “Don Del, it was--”

“Shut up, peasant,” Don Del screamed. “Where is Paolo?” He tightened his grip on Thomaso’s throat.

“I don’t know, I don’t know, Mr. DelVecchio!” answered Thomaso in a raspy voice. He prayed that the lie would not show in his face.

The men exited the house and reported that Paolo was not inside.

“You know Lembo is, err, was,” said Don Del correcting himself, “the same age as your Paolo. Yet, he killed him, and for what . . . because he had some fun with that lowly peon girl? So fucking what if she was a little bit used. It would have done her some good to be fucked by a DelVecchio. For this -- I lose a son? And believe me, Thomaso, you will lose a son too!”

Thomaso didn’t answer and made sure he looked away from Don Del’s eyes of steel. “Now, you think you’re going to hide behind that fucking coin from twenty-two years ago, huh?” Don Del shouted. “While my Lembo is dead cold!”

He threw Thomaso to the ground.

“Now, I’ll ask you again, where is Paolo?” he screamed and kicked Thomaso in the ribs. Thomaso rolled to a stop against the porch fence.

“I don’t know!” Thomaso answered, while gasping for breath. “He came to say goodbye, then packed and left. He didn’t want to put us in any danger. I don’t know where he is. He didn’t even know about the coin. Please Mr. DelVecchio, believe me, I do not know where he went.”

Don Del walked over to the gold coin and snatched it from the ground while the bodyguard lifted Thomaso to his feet. “This coin is only for the innocents in your family, but Paolo is not innocent. Now, where did he go?”

He threw a round-house punch that hit Thomaso squarely on the jaw and sent him spinning against the wall, then down to the porch floor. A tooth went flying, his lip split wide-open, and blood ran down his chin. Don Del then knelt beside Thomaso and slyly inquired, “Did he run to the North to perhaps hide in the large cities . . . or maybe, he tip-toed east, to the Mediterranean? How about L’America? Remember, the police are also looking for your Paolo. He’s wanted throughout all of Southern Italy. But I guess anywhere would be a great place for a murderer to hide, just like any snake in the grass does. After all, he’s a slithering coward for leaving his family unprotected!”

Thomaso was dazed but continued with his denials. “Mr. DelVecchio, I don’t know, I don’t know, I swear. He would not say. He knew we would be in jeopardy if we knew. I cannot tell you what I do not know.”

“You don’t know where your only son is?”

“No, I don’t. It’s true. You understand the circumstances. He wouldn’t say . . . for fear of the consequences.”

The men reported that the barn was empty. Don Del was disappointed, but not surprised, and ordered the men to search the paths, crops, and gardens.

“You know, Thomaso,” said Don Del, as he pulled him up off the floor and onto his knees by the front of his shirt, “it will become very difficult to

sell your crops after I am through making my contacts. No one will buy your goods for fear of irking my anger. Your farm will go broke, no?"

Thomaso didn't answer.

"Tell me, who has Antonio's ways now? Is it you, your brother . . . or Paolo? You are the only male descendants, true?"

Thomaso struggled to his feet and Don Del quickly placed the Lupara at his neck. "It's, it is me," Thomaso managed to say. "I took my father's place. He taught me whatever he could, but . . . but I don't have the gift to go with it."

Don Del took the handle of the shotgun and thrust it into Thomaso's stomach. He writhed in pain and toppled against a porch post. Somehow he managed to hold on and steady himself. He gripped the wooden support with all he was worth . . . for Don Del wasn't going to see him go down again.

"I don't believe you!" shouted Don Del into Thomaso's grimaced face.

"Enrico," Don Del called to one of his men, "were there any mushrooms in the barn?"

"The whole cellar was full of 'em, Don Del."

"Go get a bunch of them and bring them here," commanded Don Del. "And bring the fuckin' horse, too!"

He returned his attention to Thomaso. "You know, killing your family would be worse for Paolo than killing him. He would forever live a very guilty life. Who knows how long he could live with that awful feeling? So I must confess, right now, that possibility seems very appealing to me," said Don Del calmly.

Thomaso was hurt, but he had to offer resistance to Don Del's thinking or all could be lost, so he boldly grabbed the gold Roman coin from Don Del's hand and held it up. Thomaso did it so quickly that Don Del was taken by surprise.

"Mr. DelVecchio, Don Del, please, you gave this token to my father for a reason," Thomaso began. "Please, remember, it was because you and my father worked all the day and night through for a week to nurse Neco. And finally, you succeeded and saved his life. Certainly, he would have died without Antonio's help. Now surely, you cannot honor my father by killing his family. I understand your vengeance, but it must be forsaken. The honor of your word has a reputation that is as well-known as your reprisals. Please, do not discredit your word today."

Don Del stepped back as if remembering the occurrence when Enrico arrived carrying the Amanita mushrooms and leading Oggi by the reins.

“Well Thomaso, if you have replaced your father . . . you will have no fear to eat these mushrooms,” said Don Del, grabbing the mushrooms.

“But Don Del, that would prove nothing!”

“If you die it will prove you have lied, and that means that you also lied about wherever Paolo has gone. Now eat.” Don Del stuffed a mushroom into Thomaso’s mouth. “Chew, you farming bastard.”

He made Thomaso eat four complete mushrooms as he stood there smirking. Then he waited half an hour for his men to return from their search. He studied Thomaso for some sign of discomfort or pain, but Thomaso was without symptoms. Don Del did not know the poison took a week or more for ailments to develop.

“I must move on if I am to catch up to that no-good, fuckin’ son of yours,” said Don Del. “However, I will always know where your farm is. If Paolo returns and I find out about it, there will be hell to pay. Mark my words -- everyone will die.”

Thomaso felt a relief, but the ordeal was not over.

“Tell me, where is your daughter’s husband?”

“Oh, well, err, he is from Benevento and went to see his mother, who is ill,” answered Thomaso. “He should be back late tomorrow or the next day. He doesn’t even know what happened.”

“We will see, you never know what my many eyes will discover,” cautioned Don Del as he stuck his finger into Thomaso’s face. “Beware Calefati, and remember, from this moment forward, I have paid in full . . . but your debt has just begun. Consider the separation and worry you now suffer over your son as your down payment. Never forget, I am everywhere!”

He grabbed the gold coin from Thomaso and mounted his horse. Thomaso felt relieved and hoped that they would not take Oggi with them.

But suddenly, two of Don Del’s henchmen placed their Luparas against both sides of Oggi’s head and emptied all four chambers into the animal. Oggi’s head and front quarter blew apart and the rest of his body flew violently backwards until it landed in a pile of blood, bone, and guts in the soft, tilled earth of the front yard.

“No, Oggi,” screamed Thomaso while covering his face. He couldn’t bear to look at what was left of the family’s companion.

Don Del and his men rode off shouting for their mounts to make haste. A small cloud of dust followed them along the open path and quickly they were out of sight.

Suddenly, miles away and from out of nowhere, Paolo cried out, “No, Oggi,” and all at once he felt like he had been struck in the chest by a bull. He

had to sit down and catch his breath and then began to cry softly. The tears were for Gina, his family, and now his wonderful horse, Oggi.

Giovanni heard Paolo's muffled sobs and placed his hand on his shoulder. "Paolo, what is wrong?" He could feel Paolo's chest heaving and his body trembling. "What is it, are you alright?"

"Please, Giovanni, give me a few moments. They have killed Oggi and my heart is aching. We will travel soon."

Giovanni stared in surprise that Paolo could know of such a repulsive act, but he could see that Paolo's eyes wore a blank stare and the color in his face was gone. Certainly, it must be true. He gently patted Paolo on the back to comfort him and then said quietly, "Paolo, then you must take the time to grieve. We've traveled all through the night so let us rest here for a while."

Paolo was as still as stone and didn't move for what seemed quite a while. Giovanni could see that even though Paolo was sitting right before him, he was really somewhere else. His whole countenance was vacant.

Paolo finally spoke, "Giovanni, something is wrong at home. We must go back!"

"Paolo, no, no, we cannot! Your father said for you to leave Italy, and he told me to make sure that you do."

"But Giovanni, the family is in danger. They killed Oggi. I cannot let everyone else answer for me. Suppose it was my father?" The concern for his family and his mention of the beloved horse filled Paolo's eyes with tears.

"Look, you knew Don Del would come to the farm searching for you, and you knew there would be trouble," said Giovanni. "But your father is stronger and wiser than you think. All these years you have done for your family, now, let them do for you."

Paolo wasn't convinced and remained quiet as he stared back at the path they had already traveled. Giovanni feared Paolo would just bolt toward home. "Listen Paolo, I don't know how you knew about Oggi, but whatever conveyed that tragic information to you hasn't connected with you about your father or other family members, right! So, therefore, everyone must still be safe." Giovanni was pleased with his reasoning.

Paolo had a tight grin on his face. "Giovanni, I know you mean well, but if it happens again . . . it will mean it's far too late, right?"

Giovanni slowly nodded his head in agreement and was at a loss for further ideas, but suddenly he understood just how difficult all this was for Paolo: leaving his family in danger, leaving his home, leaving his country, and leaving his simple life behind. When all that was combined with being

pursued by the most notorious killer in the crime syndicate, it certainly made for a frightening and overwhelming situation. His heart went out to Paolo.

"Come now Paolo, rest briefly and then we'll move on," Giovanni said, nudging Paolo up and grabbing him by the elbow.

Paolo got to his feet and answered without looking back, "I know you're right, Giovanni, but I cannot rest for fear of madness, and it is the truth when you remind me that I must leave. It must be done, no matter how I am torn. So, let us move onward, right now."

"Okay, that's good, Paolo. Forward is always for the best. Come now, the world awaits you. Always forward," Giovanni answered.

Paolo just had an empty look on his face.

"*Sempre Avanti!*" shouted Giovanni to enthuse Paolo.

"*Sempre Avanti,*" sighed Paolo quietly, with no feeling whatsoever.

As the two travelers pressed on, the chill of early morning was burned away by the rays of the sun. The planet Mars could be seen high in the endless daytime sky and served as a guiding beacon, or was it a warning? The two weary friends continued stealthily onward toward Napoli, the great Southwestern Italian seaport, where Paolo could take passage on a steamer to L'America . . . through an ocean of tears.

Thomaso rushed to the kitchen, mixed some soap and warm water, and drank it down quickly. He almost immediately regurgitated his stomach contents into the bucket kept by the water pump. The sloppy mess was littered with big chunks of Amanita mushrooms. Thomaso had hardly chewed the mushrooms, making the large pieces less digestible. Plus, he was aware that he had been ingesting the poison mushrooms his entire life and his body had developed a degree of tolerance to the alpha-amanitin toxin. Therefore, there was no real danger from the mushrooms, and the most he would suffer would be a few days of diarrhea. But the brutal killing of Oggi was another matter. The bloody scene repeated itself over and over in his mind and his stomach felt waves of nausea that he knew would remain for quite a while thereafter.

"Please God . . . bless the beautiful beast," Thomaso whispered between tears.

As transatlantic transportation became more affordable the steam ship lines were teeming with business. They hired United States recruiters who scoured the cities and countryside flaunting the benefits of immigrating to America to drum up business. They also hired traveling representatives to peddle their tickets throughout the region by offering convenience and immediacy, rather than have customers travel all the way to Napoli, just to buy a ticket. Giovanni knew of such a person and after some inquiry they located his house. Luckily, he was at home when Paolo and Giovanni arrived at his door. He was only too happy to make a last-minute sale of a one-way steerage ticket to L'America on the steamer "*Gera*" for the price of thirty-eight dollars. The ship left the next day and they could easily trudge the last stretch of distance in time for departure. The benefit of this transaction was that Paolo would not have to purchase a dockside ticket where Don Del's men could be watching. It also meant that Paolo's name would not appear on the main manifest, but would be added later from the supplemental registers of the area sales representatives.

After leaving the ticket agent's home, Paolo and Giovanni pushed on, and finally from a distant hilltop, they looked down on the city of Napoli with almighty Mount Vesuvius visible in the near sea. They had traveled fifty-five kilometers in just thirty-six hours, using the back paths and creating their own shortcuts to avoid detection. Without any sleep or rest they were physically exhausted. Don Del's gang members and sources would have traveled much faster to reach the seaport to quickly spread the word that Paolo Calefati was wanted by Don Del and the Italian Police.

Paolo and Giovanni decided to sleep safely above the city on their secluded mountain perch. The city looked magnificent as the last of the sun's rays were shadowed with twilight and the city lights offered an inviting flicker. The ancient city mimicked the glowing hues of an amber necklace and the lapping waters of the Gulf of Naples caressed the beautiful, sanded beaches of the horseshoe-shaped harbor. A hopeless Paolo could only sigh at the beautiful sight below.

They made their camp and settled in for a much needed rest. Paolo tightly clutched the precious ticket in his jacket pocket as he closed his eyes for the last time in Italy. He had no dreams at all that night, only worries and fear came to his silent mind, like threats in the night.

Paolo and Giovanni rose early in the morning and snaked their way down the steep incline into the busy harbor streets until they reached the waterfront. The ships were massive and Paolo felt dwarfed as he stared at the full length of the steamer from an alley between two storage buildings, keeping well-

hidden and out of sight. Giovanni went to buy some more cheese and salted meat for the voyage and Paolo watched as the loading dock became a bevy of activity. The sailors were hoisting pallets of cargo, warehouse workers loaded their hand carts, delivery wagons bustled, and passengers were crying their goodbyes to loved ones. The dockside was mobbed.

When Giovanni returned, they saw two men with Luparas strapped over their shoulders climb the gangplank. The two men gruffly pushed the passengers aside as they ascended to the deck to speak to the officers on board. There were a group of Gera officers at the boarding entrance who were busy checking tickets, directing passengers, and keeping visitors off the ship. Don Del's men talked to the officer in charge and he let them check the manifest. They told the chief officer to be on the alert for a Paolo Calefati from the Napoli Province and then retreated back to shore. The chief officer placed the manifest with all the other paper work on his clipboard and returned to his duties. He had other responsibilities to worry about.

Paolo grasped the scope of Don Del's presence as the two gunmen made their way along the wharf and a sick feeling rolled through his stomach. He was going to have to wait for the last minute to board. Hopefully, the chief officer would not remain at the point of access for the entire time.

"Giovanni, you must tell everyone of my love for them. There was hardly any time and everything did not end well," said Paolo. "I will think of them always."

Giovanni could hear the sadness in Paolo's voice and his own heart sank.

"Paolo, don't fret, you've been a good son and from what I know, a good Deva," answered Giovanni, "... whatever the hell that is!"

They both had a good laugh and soon enough it was time to say their goodbyes. They embraced, and Paolo slipped 150,000 lira into Giovanni's jacket pocket without him knowing.

"Times will be hard for the Calefatis and the farm," whispered Paolo, "so you must rely on each other. Be strong. Thank you for your help and tell Roberto I'll miss him dearly. Goodbye, my friend."

Paolo saw the chief officer hand the clipboard to another official and leave the deck as departure time was near. This was his chance . . . now or never! Paolo then slapped Giovanni on the back, grabbed his bag, tucked his hat down, and headed for the gangplank. He didn't like the noise or the sway the gangplank made as he tramped up the steep incline, but his legs kept churning until he was finally on deck. There were others before him and the short line moved quickly. He didn't make eye contact when he handed his documents and ticket to the officer for fear that he would somehow be

recognized. Paolo held his breath and looked away in apprehension. After checking Paolo's credentials and collecting his ticket, the officer promptly directed him toward steerage. The steamship was about to cast off on its journey, taking a disheartened Paolo with it.

As Paolo scuffled along the narrow deck, he suddenly felt truly alone for the first time in his life. *How had his life changed so quickly? Where was life taking him? What will happen to him?*

"Are Destiny and Fate really the brothers of the future?" Paolo mumbled as the great ship lurched forward.

Chapter 4

Paolo had a forsaken feeling as the ship left Italy. It seemed the land, with all its magical powers, melted behind him until it was finally out of sight. His Deva strength lessened proportionately as the steamer churned further out into the mysterious sea and his connection to the earth was stretched so thin he thought he would be torn to pieces. Paolo felt afraid and weak, doubting his powers and himself. This pessimistic outlook was a reminder of his tenuous situation -- traveling alone toward an unknown country and planning to become invisible. Certainly, it would lead to a life without purpose.

Adding to Paolo's misery were the harsh conditions of the steerage accommodations. Steerage was the section that steamship companies used for third-class passengers. It was below decks in the rear of the ship, near the steering equipment. In essence, it was the location where people were packed together and treated as profitable, human cargo.

The living quarters were appalling, with little or no lighting, water seepage through the ventilation ducts, and one toilet for every hundred people. The berths were four rows high, undersized, and rickety, and the overcrowded setting barely left any room for privacy. Plus, the prerequisites were in order for the breeding of maladies such as trench mouth, body sores, and lice.

Depending on sea conditions, a voyage could last anywhere from five to seven days, however, the journey always seemed without end. And besides the physical troubles, Paolo was still haunted by images of Gina . . . so he couldn't sleep and hardly ate.

For three days Paolo wallowed in his predicament, feeling numb and hopeless. His only outlet was to spend as much time above deck breathing the open air . . . regardless of the rainy weather. But the next night, the overcast sky finally cleared and Paolo could see the endless, shining stars and the glowing quarter moon. He suddenly became responsive and felt that he found an oasis in the middle of the dark, black sky -- for the moon seemed to be following the transatlantic steamer.

Thank heaven for the crescent, thought Paolo. Has it come to save me?

Paolo suddenly recalled the Mandala and its extraordinary sense of fullness and completion. Those thoughts reminded him that his awareness and perceptions were implements that still united him with nature . . . and they could be the solution to enduring this journey.

The sea was a vibrant, wondrous sphere of the world's physical balance, and soon Paolo realized the ocean was also a part of his Deva spirit. For all nature is connected in a beautifully structured foundation of interactions, support, and relations. It serves as the grand master of mutualism and continuity, and in essence . . . holds the world together.

Paolo then knew that his feeling of duress was only fear rising from within and that he would have to gain control. He was at his prime and was powerful in both body and spirit. He would have to step into this new life and take stock in himself. After all, he was armed with the Deva.

Paolo clenched a fist and raised it to the shining moon in celebration of his new found determination. He had his companions in nature, what more did he need?

After that, Paolo devoted his time to delving into the deep endless ocean. He would become engrossed in the waves, tides, and currents until he was inspired with awe as the liquid powers reached crescendos of energy that nothing could equal. He would also rouse his adept sensitivities to conjure images of the amazing sea life, set in stunning seascapes, as bright as an artist's easel of brilliant colors. In all, it was a gorgeous, entrancing world of perpetual motion, which could lift a lost soul to new highs of hope and belief.

Thus, to help compensate and heal, Paolo would immerse himself in this realm of undersea miracles and garner the benefits. It was not his true medium, but it was still his world to partake and explore. This became his lifeline and enabled Paolo to survive the lonesome, burdensome voyage.

Finally, after six days at sea, the "*Gera*" steamed into New York Harbor. Paolo felt the relief surge through his body. The sight of Lady Liberty holding her torch of welcome gave Paolo a much-needed lift. However, across the Hudson River, set above a huge factory in Jersey City, was the giant Colgate Clock. As the ship churned up the Hudson, flanked by the tall New York City buildings, Paolo could only focus on the 50-foot clock. He wasn't sure why, but he felt that the enormous clock was somehow connected to him.

After the great ship docked, all steerage passengers were immediately ferried to Ellis Island for medical and legal exams. Those who traveled in the ship's cabins had the luxury of staying in their rooms to complete the exams, which were performed by government inspectors. These mandatory exams would determine if a person could enter America or be denied access and consequently deported.

The people were packed tightly onto the ferry barge and Paolo was pressed against the rail of the ship as he stared out to the streaming Hudson River. There was an atmosphere of concern amongst the new arrivals and

Paolo was able to identify with all their anxieties. After all, everyone's future would soon be cast. However, the choppy waters of the Hudson remained indifferent to the fears of the passengers and the boat steadily drew closer to the imposing Ellis Island complex. Only time would tell their fate.

Once the ferry landed, Paolo was carried along with the nervous crowd as agents herded everyone to the baggage area on the lower level of the facility. It was here that the immigrants checked their belongings and soon the piles of trunks, luggage, and suitcases formed small mountains above the large, rolling cargo carts. The haphazard stacks were heaped precariously high, just like the hopes of the immigrants. Paolo wondered how a lifetime of possessions could be so easily reduced to such clutter and rubble.

Upon entering the building, every immigrant was directed to scale the steep stairs to reach the "Register Room." Paolo kept his small bag with him, and despite the demanding incline and the thirty-nine steps, he had no trouble ascending to the floor above. However, others were not so able, and struggled with the ascent. It was only when Paolo reached the top that he realized everyone was being secretly observed by medical inspectors. Anyone identified with an ailment was immediately marked with a medical code that was written in chalk on their clothing. Basically, they were to be rejected before they even started and Paolo could feel their panic as the fear of deportation loomed.

Paolo was handed a medical card and directed through the stately "Great Room." He felt somewhat insignificant amid the size and grandeur of the massive chamber. But, despite the splendor, the area was packed with thousands of anxious immigrants and there was an underlying feeling of confusion and a constant muddle of distress -- and now, Paolo was a part of it.

Paolo was told to take his place between the railed dividers with the other immigrants who were waiting to receive their medical exam. He straggled into place and counted twelve narrow stalls guiding the uneasy masses forward to face their "Day of Judgment." Everyone stood nervously in line until it was their turn to come forward . . . and face their worst fears.

Unbelievably, the doctors checked for sixty symptoms of illness and anything could go wrong and cause rejection, and although Paolo didn't have any physical problems, he was still worried. The doctor quickly checked Paolo's mouth, nose, face, and scalp for sores or infections, then evaluated his coordination. When he finished, he used a wire hook to lift Paolo's eyelids to check for trachoma, a contagious eye disease that caused blindness and was cause for deportation. The procedure hurt and Paolo muffled, "ouch."

Afterwards, he wondered if he had been infected with the disease from the hook, which had been used on everyone else.

After the exam, those diagnosed with apparent health or physical disabilities were quickly chalked with more medical codes. Plus, there was a Special Inquiry Code that served as a catchall. It was used for resolving doubt or solving problems for unusual medical conditions or difficult legal concerns. Any unfortunate soul who was chalked with SI was very often shipped back to their country of origin as soon as possible.

The doctor returned Paolo's completed medical card and an inspector instructed him to wait for his legal interview. Paolo sat on one of the many benches which filled the waiting area. It felt good to sit for a while, but the surrounding conversations raced past him in so many different languages he soon felt alone and overwhelmed. He couldn't believe that he was sitting amongst foreign strangers in a new land. Then he noticed there were visitors in the balcony and they were talking freely to their family members below. An ache crept into Paolo's heart as he thought of the family he left behind. *Would he ever see them again?* Finally, he was told to enter the legal ranks.

While Paolo was standing in line, he stared back at the medical sector and noticed that some of those who were chalked would slyly wipe the code marks from their clothing, or turn their clothes inside out, then try to mingle into the process again. Since there were so many immigrants passing through the proceedings, a few were successful. Paolo had to stop himself from cheering when he saw a woman sneak back into place again.

With all that was happening, Paolo wasn't really paying attention when suddenly he was surprised by a voice. "Next," called an inspector. "C'mon, C'mon, I haven't got all day. Move up!" He didn't even look at Paolo.

The agent was a small, spectacled, middle-aged man with thinning hair, and a pale complexion. Paolo noticed his hands were thin and weak.

"Documents?" the inspector demanded, with his hand already extended. Paolo handed over his record of birth from the church, a receipt for sea fare, showing the port of departure, and his completed medical card. The agent quickly copied the information onto the legal questionnaire.

"Occupation?"

"Farmer," responded Paolo with his eyes lowered.

Paolo knew that some unskilled laborers were rejected outright because they were considered to likely become a public charge. He hoped that the inspector considered farm work skillful labor . . . but it was unlikely.

"Money?"

"*Sì, sì.*"

“How much money do you have?” the inspector asked sternly.

“200,000 lira”

“American!” commanded the inspector.

Paolo did not answer. He didn’t know American money, let alone conversions. The noise, confusion, and tension of the day’s proceedings became all too demanding and Paolo suddenly went blank.

“No *capisce*, err, understand.”

“Oh, for good God’s sake!” shouted the inspector for everyone around him to hear. The nearby inspectors abruptly stopped what they were doing and looked over at Paolo. When they finished staring, they all had a hearty laugh.

The inspector pulled out a chart and with a pencil converted the lira to American dollars. “Pain in my ass,” he said aloud and banged the chart down on the table angrily.

Paolo looked up perplexed. *Why was the inspector trying to intimidate him?*

“You have one hundred fifty American dollars.” The inspector paused and then added, “You goddamned Guinea!”

Paolo lowered his eyes as he felt the blood rush to his face. Humiliation was not a feeling he had ever experienced before. It felt ugly and he resisted the urge to grab the inspector by the throat, only because he had to enter America and start a new life.

“Do you have a criminal record?”

Paolo hesitated as he thought about the Lembo incident.

“Do you have a record?” The inspector asked again with a suspicious stare.

Sweat formed on Paolo’s brow, but he answered emphatically, “No.”

“Have you ever been to the United States before?”

“No.”

Indentured servants were not allowed. If someone else paid Paolo’s fare in return for work promised he would be rejected. The inspector rifled the question, “Who paid for your passage?”

“I did!” Paolo snapped back.

The inspector delivered the remainder of the twenty-nine questions in a gruff, arrogant manner and Paolo squirmed beneath his icy glare. Finally, the compulsory questionnaire was complete and Paolo sighed with relief. The interrogation was over.

“I see you have your bag, *paisano*. Why didn’t you leave it in the baggage area when you first entered?”

Paolo was surprised by the question. "It's all I have. They said I could take it with me, or leave it downstairs," Paolo answered. "It's not too heavy, so I carried it."

"It has to be inspected. Take it to the desk in the corner."

Paolo slid through the opening in the guide rails and walked to the desk, where he waited for another inspector to search his clothes and belongings. Paolo grew worried, if they found the hidden Amanita seeds he would be sent back to Italy immediately and face some horrible consequences from the authorities . . . or the DelVecchio family.

By law, no produce, agricultural products, or live animals were allowed to enter the United States. Contamination, fungi, or undetected insects could blight US crops, or bacteria and viruses could infect livestock or the US populace, causing major problems. This was a high-security priority and there were to be no exceptions or deviations. Those attempting such deeds were considered smugglers and there would be criminal consequences, not just deportation. As Paolo waited, he imagined what life was like in prison.

Paolo's sister, Catarina, had wrapped the Amanita seeds in cotton linen and sewed them tightly into the seams of the jacket collar and bottom hem. More seeds were sewn into the underside of the brim of Paolo's wool hat. She worked frantically, yet skillfully, to avoid any tell-tale signs that the garments had been altered. She had wept quietly as she sewed, already missing her beloved brother. There was a finality to their hasty good-bye, and she knew it. Meanwhile, Uncle Carlos had worked in the barn hollowing out the heels of Paolo's shoes to stash more of the Amanita seeds that Paolo needed. He nailed the heels back to the shoes and sealed them with tar to keep water out.

Paolo held his breath when he saw that the agent was about to begin the search. The inspecting officer was short, portly, and tired. After having Paolo empty all his pockets, he only half-heartedly searched Paolo's clothes. Then, he simply tossed Paolo's cap on top of the table without even looking at it. The shoes were never touched, much less inspected. He told Paolo to open his own bag and take out the contents. Paolo obliged, although he was somewhat perplexed at the superficial scrutiny.

It seemed the agent didn't want to have anything to do with foreigners. Once the inspector was satisfied that all was in order he asked the standard question for this station of the immigration procedure.

"Do you have any agricultural products or live animals in your possession?"

Paolo answered a hearty, "No, sir!" He was surprised at his bravado.

"Collect your things and pass to the next line for your papers."

Paolo felt thankful and fumbled about as he quickly put everything back into his suitcase. As he trudged toward the next line, someone grabbed his shoulder, turned him about, and wrote on his lapel. To Paolo's horror, he had been chalked. The code was SI.

"Come with me," said a guard sternly as he tugged Paolo's bag from him.

Paolo turned and saw an enormous man wearing what looked like a policeman's uniform. The man was burley, had a thick mustache, and his eyes just peeked from beneath his brimmed guard's hat. He held Paolo by the arm and briskly escorted him along a narrow hallway. They stopped at an office door and with a brief knock the guard ushered Paolo into the room.

Inside was an older man, perhaps fifty years of age. He was seated at a large desk and behind him were rows of file cabinets and shelves full of books, binders, and folders; the room had a cluttered, unorganized appearance. The guard placed Paolo's bag next to the desk.

A sign on the desk read "Mr. Olivio Calabrese."

"Sit down, *Signore* Calefati," he said, without looking up from the form he was studying. The document was Paolo's questionnaire. He spoke Italian, so Paolo would better understand and no translator was needed. The guard remained in the room.

"I see you are from the province of Napoli," Calabrese said as if he was reviewing Paolo's background.

"Yes *Signore*, err, Calabrese," stammered Paolo. "From the city of San Vito."

"It says here you are a farmer, *si*?"

"*Si*," answered Paolo, wondering what was going on.

"Also . . . there is no criminal record."

"True."

"That is good. America does not want the dishonest or the thieves," said Calabrese, still staring down at the questionnaire. "Not to mention, the murderers and rapists."

Paolo twisted nervously in his seat. *Did they know of the cafe murder, or the Camorra and DelVecchio family? Or maybe this was about the hidden seeds. Perhaps it was because that lazy inspector didn't do a thorough search of his belongings. Will they find the seeds now?* Paolo began to sweat and his mouth was drying up.

"We need good farmers in America," Calabrese said. "The soil is rich and everything grows!" He laughed and waved his arms upward. "Yes, farming is good, honest work." He then got up from behind the desk and walked toward Paolo. His cold, empty eyes stared at him intensely.

"But, today -- yes, today," Calabrese continued, "Paolo, my good friend, we have a problem with farmers." He shook his head from side to side with his lips pressed tightly together.

Paolo did not understand.

"Today, over 10,000 immigrants will enter America. Jesus, just look at that crowd and those lines out there," he said and pointed toward the closed door. "They come from all over, seeking freedom, religion, and economic opportunity. And, guess what, Paolo -- most of them are males!"

Paolo couldn't understand the point Calabrese was trying to make.

Calabrese was walking freely about the small office now. "Yes, two-thirds of today's immigrants are of male gender! Now, if that ain't a shit load, huh?"

Paolo was dumbfounded. *What the hell is he talking about?*

"And, guess what else?"

Paolo knew his face had to be nothing more than a blank stare, because he was totally lost.

"That's right, Paolo -- you got it! Most of them are farmers! Why, just today, we got over 2,500 immigrants who are fucking farmers," Calabrese yelled and then slammed the papers on the desk. "Especially the goddamned Irish with that fucking potato famine they had sixty years ago. Can you believe it? They're still leaving Ireland, for Christ's sake!" He clutched both hands to his head and pulled at his hair.

Although Paolo felt uneasy, he was somehow suspicious that Calabrese had said this all before. And, regardless of his actions, there just wasn't any sincerity behind his words. He could see Calabrese was not really upset, no matter how much he stormed about the office. It all appeared to be an act and Paolo wondered why.

"Now, you can see what a problem that is, right?" Calabrese said with satisfaction, as he was near to making his point.

Paolo did not answer. Instead, he stared right into the eyes of this strange man in such a strange place. Paolo swore he saw that his soul was black.

"So anyway, Paolo . . . we just can't let any more farmers in today. They'll only become a burden on the country. It's simple math. There are just too many fucking farmers!" Calabrese explained. "Do you understand, *signore?*"

Paolo did not know what to say. *Was he being rejected?*

"And, there are quotas that I myself have to answer for. My job has responsibilities. I must be careful, or else I could lose my position. It is my

fault if there are imbalances in the ratios.” Calabrese placed a hand on Paolo’s shoulder.

Paolo felt that Calabrese was seeking his cooperation, but for what?

“You know, to return to Italy you will have to pay your own fare. It’s true, if you are rejected and have enough money, then you pay for your own voyage back. And I’m sure you remember that awful voyage, eh, *signore*,” added Calabrese for persuasion. He held his nose to suggest a foul smell.

Paolo felt his heart sink. He was crushed.

Return to Italy! That’s out of the question! There are dire consequences.

The fear must have shown in his face because Calabrese immediately pounced on his prey. “However, Paolo, perhaps we can work out a deal.”

“What? A deal!” said Paolo as if he were coming back to life. He looked up at Calabrese from his chair and hoped that he didn’t appear too anxious.

“*Si*, yes, a deal! You see, if you can find it in your heart to make a donation to our little pension fund, we could probably allow one more farmer into the great land of America today,” Calabrese said. “You could begin your new life within an hour.”

Paolo was stunned, but he finally understood exactly what it all meant. It became clear what Calabrese wanted. Ploy or not, he would be forced to pay if he wanted to enter America.

Paolo knew he shouldn’t answer too quickly and reveal how eager he was to cooperate, but he couldn’t help it. “*Signore*, how much for the donation to the pension fund?”

Calabrese could see he was now getting somewhere. “Well, there are three funds, Paolo,” Calabrese began. “My fund, as administrator, is the most in need, with the paper work and all. It needs fifty to become better prepared for my future. The guard, he needs only twenty-five and the inspectors they share twenty-five for their account. That’s a total of a hundred.” He deliberately didn’t say dollars. Calabrese waited momentarily, giving Paolo enough time to sort it through and do the math.

Then he continued. “Paolo, it’s a very good deal, eh?” It was said almost in a whisper.

Paolo remembered the conversion of his lira gave him one hundred fifty dollars. If he paid he would only have fifty dollars left to start his new American life . . . unless of course, he ran into any other bandits.

“Choose *Signore* Calefati, America or Italy. And let me just add that most immigrants from Italy come here with less than thirty dollars, so you are still better off than most.” Calabrese used his hands to represent a balance scale.

Paolo evaluated his predicament and knew he could not return to Italy. That was completely out of the question. He also knew he didn't have much time to decide.

"Listen Paolo, by law, you are required to have twenty dollars to enter this county and after our transaction, you'll still have more than twice as much as that," said Calabrese intently. "It's a great county, filled with opportunity. You are young and strong. Believe me you will earn that money back in no time. So, don't worry, success will soon be yours!"

Paolo was still thinking when Calabrese again pressed the issue, trying to convince him to pay into their greedy scheme. "Paolo, we hardly searched your bags, your belongings, or your clothes. We won't check the sponsor you listed on your questionnaire, either. Remember, you must have a sponsor already living here in America to be admitted. That could take time to investigate, and you would have to remain here until it is finished," he said convincingly.

Paolo knew he had provided a fictitious name for the questionnaire and became very uncomfortable.

Calabrese paused and then walked in front of the chair Paolo was sitting in. He bent over and leaned right into Paolo's face. "Take the deal, *signore*, take the deal, now." He clasped his hands together, as if praying, and then shook them toward the ceiling.

Paolo realized he had to commit or all would be lost. They controlled the rest of his life. His future was in their hands. "*Buono, Signore* Calabrese. I will donate," Paolo said as civilly as someone could while being coerced, but inside he had a feeling of resignation . . . or was it revenge?

"Ah ha, that is good, that is wise. I knew you were smart," said Calabrese. He couldn't conceal his wry smile.

He then held out his hand to seal the deal like a gentleman. Paolo looked at the crook standing before him and saw that Calabrese was almost gloating over his successful negotiation. He cared little of abusing his position and taking advantage of desperate, frightened immigrants.

Calabrese was taken by surprise when Paolo suddenly jumped up from the chair, grabbed his hand firmly, and wouldn't let go. Paolo held on tightly, searching for an aura from Calabrese. When Paolo finally perceived Calabrese's emanation, the colors were muted in a black and purple haze, barely emitting from his body. The dim, defeated covering revealed an empty soul, devoid of truth or honor. Paolo then began to see glimpses of Calabrese's life swirling before him in quick bursts of energy. The vivid memories disclosed a naked insight to Calabrese's life. Calabrese had a wife,

two daughters, a lovely home, and also an unsavory mistress. He drank, gambled, and led a boisterous, rich life, but beneath it all was a deep, penetrating darkness that would lead to misery and misfortune. Calabrese had syphilis and it was growing stronger against his body's immune system.

Syphilis was often called the "Great Imitator" because the symptoms often resembled other diseases, and therefore, it was easily misdiagnosed. Such was the case for Calabrese. Paolo saw the infection from within. He watched the disease manifest and fester, eventually carving its way throughout the body. First would come the open, repulsive lesions, then the swelling and soreness, next the lumps and tumors, and finally the attack of heart, organs, bones, eyes, and brain. Ultimately, the horrible disease would lead to death. He had caught the disease from his mistress, and infected his wife. In the not so distant future, all three would die a slow, painful death. His preying, evil ways would then be paid in full.

"Let go, *signore*!" shouted Calabrese, pulling his hand away from Paolo like it had been burned.

Calabrese was sweating and grew red in the face . . . as if he had suddenly been shamed. Paolo knew that he deserved to be humiliated by his lusty, appalling life. He stared intently at Calabrese, until he finally lowered his eyes. Then, Paolo reached for his lira and counted out the correct amount. He did not hand it to Calabrese for fear of making contact again. He placed the money on the desk, and although Calabrese was still a bit flustered, he quickly scooped up the currency.

"There now, very good, *signore*," Calabrese said a bit shakily. "I will finish your papers and then you will be free to go."

He immediately sat at his desk and completed some forms, then handed the papers to Paolo and waved toward the door. "Greggorio," he said, pointing at the guard, "will show you where to go. Goodbye and good luck in America." Calabrese had his head down and wouldn't look at Paolo.

Now that the deal was completed Paolo knew he was dismissed. He was anxious to get out of there before anything else happened. He quickly grabbed his bag and went to the door, which Greggorio had already opened for him. It was obvious that he had remained in the room as a source of protection in case a confrontation occurred during the sleazy meeting.

"This way, *signore*," said Greggorio, while nudging Paolo down the hallway in the opposite direction of the way they had arrived. Suddenly he seized Paolo's bag from him.

"What now?" Paolo exclaimed, and instinctively reached for his bag and held it tightly.

“No worry, *signore*, I carry for you.”

Paolo stared at the guard and then slowly released his grip on the bag. Greggorio wiped the SI chalk code from Paolo’s jacket.

Then they began to walk through the now-dimming hallway. It was late afternoon and the evening dusk was beginning to diminish the light of day. At the end of the corridor they turned into a door, which led to the basement stairs. Paolo and Greggorio trudged downward until they reached a large cellar. The room was dark and dank with piles of boxes and a scattering of old furniture and equipment. They made their way through the clutter via a makeshift path. Paolo wondered how many other poor immigrants had made this harrowing trip. Finally, at the far end of the basement, Greggorio opened a small side door and a shaft of evening sunset shot into the darkened room, like a ray from heaven.

Through the open door, the back of the Statue of Liberty was framed against a glowing, setting sun. The surrounding layers of clouds were long, clustered, and fully billowed and seemed to cradle the great, metal lady in the softness of their splendor. Early twilight bathed the majestic statue in an orange, glorious blush that reflected both her beauty and majesty. The blue and white waters of the choppy Hudson lapped at the shores of her island and her starred pedestal pointed to lands afar. An endless azure sky held everything together in a remarkable magnificence.

Paolo stopped in his tracks and gazed in amazement, realizing what a significant moment this was in his life. If he had any doubts and disappointments due to the journey and events of the day, they were immediately forgotten.

Sometimes, Paolo thought, just sometimes, man and nature could connect in wondrous harmony! This sight was just such a union.

Greggorio placed Paolo’s bag outside the door. “Come, come, *signore*,” said Greggorio, motioning for Paolo to come outside.

Paolo stepped out into the warm sunlight and the cool, slapping river wind almost lifted his hat off his head. In this bright, open environment Paolo immediately began to commune with his element and his body began to relax after the stress and anger he had experienced for the day. Suddenly, he decided he was lucky to be where he was. Everything was in sight. The money would hurt his start, but it wasn’t the end. This was the beginning.

“*Signore*, I am sorry,” confessed Greggorio, turning away from Paolo.

“My mother, she is sick, and my wife is pregnant with our third child and, and the rent it is due, plus there is the food.” His voice trailed off in shame.

Paolo couldn't believe what he was hearing. After being robbed, the thief apologizes? *America definitely was different!* Even so, he felt sorry for Greggorio. Paolo was not one to judge, especially after what he had done to Lembo DelVecchio.

Morals are only responses to your circumstances, thought Paolo.

"But, Greggorio, it is not right!" Paolo said, venting his anger without thinking. He tried to calm himself, but once again he spoke his mind, "Listen, I'm sure you are not yourself. I understand the pressure in your life is too much and you have fallen on difficult times, but to apologize to me after taking my money is insulting."

"I know, I know, but I'm just trying to seek forgiveness," said Greggorio.

"For God's sake, I'm all alone, how could you do such a thing to people. And, and what about families? Frightened families, even families from your own homeland! Greggorio, you must find some honor for yourself," Paolo said. He was surprised at what he had blurted out and was unaware that the pension thieves only targeted solo immigrants.

"But, *signore*, if I don't do it, some other guard will. Or, they could take my job and give it to another. Things are not easy. My hands are forced. There are not many jobs and people keep arriving," Greggorio said as he tried to rationalize his actions.

Oh Lord, as if it wasn't his fault at all, thought Paolo in amazement.

"*Signore*, I mean, Greggorio, please, please just send me on my way."

"Okay, okay, let me see." Greggorio looked at the shoreline. "When you go ashore you will be in Jersey City, New Jersey. It is a state that borders the Atlantic Ocean and--"

Paolo waited for him to continue, but Greggorio was silent. "What, what else . . . go on, please."

"Wait, please sit, sit, *signore*. Let us sit," said Greggorio who quickly sat down on the grass with his back against the wall of the rear of the building.

Paolo reluctantly joined him. Now it looked as if they were just good friends talking about old times while sitting by the riverside.

"Ahh, that's better," said Greggorio. "Let me see, oh yeah, well the ferry barge can take you from here to Jersey City. It is a major waterfront area with extensive freight and passenger transportation. There is a station there called the Central Railroad of New Jersey Terminal. However, you can buy a train ticket right here on Ellis Island and convert your money too. We have a ticket counter and money-exchange window next to the exit."

Paolo was surprised to hear that, but had some misgivings about being shystered again. He gave Greggorio a dubious look.

"It's true, you can change your lira into dollars and buy a ticket to other places in America, right from here. Then, after you are ashore, you can walk to the train station and travel. It's nearby and an easy walk. It all starts there at the train terminal," Greggorio explained easily. "The great farmlands are to the west. Some farms are near and others are much further."

"What other choices are available for me?"

"Well, you can also continue from here to New York City and the harbor area instead. Many arrivals choose to go there because of the businesses, jobs, and big-city living." Greggorio suddenly stopped talking and momentarily admired the beautiful day and picturesque setting. However, Paolo was in no mood to wait.

"Go on, please, it's getting dark!"

"Oh yes, yes. Let me go on. Well, many immigrants use the trains when they arrive. So, the railroad employees are used to foreigners. They'll be helpful with language, information, and directions."

"How much is that train business? For the tickets, Greggorio?"

"Oh, *signore* it depends--"

"No, no, please call me Paolo. It sounds as if we're friends."

"Well . . . Paolo, it depends where you want to go," Greggorio answered with an honest smile. "The further your destination, the more the ticket will cost." He expressed distance by spreading his hands apart.

Paolo had a worried look on his face as he thought about his money and Greggorio noticed his concern. "Listen Paolo, I don't even have your money yet. Otherwise, I would give some back to you and help you out. Calabrese keeps us waiting. He runs this pension, err, club."

"Some money back?" snapped Paolo. "Pension club, you're joking, right? Jesus!"

"Sorry Paolo, I'm just trying to set things straight. I didn't even get my share last time. Calabrese is a real tightwad and he does whatever he wants. He's the boss."

"Your share?" Paolo sneered to let Greggorio know of his disapproval.

Greggorio hung his head and turned away.

"Hold on now, Paolo. If you want, you don't have to buy any ticket at all. You could stay right in Jersey City and save fare money. There are plenty of factories and even some farms," Greggorio said. By the look on Paolo's face it didn't seem as if he believed him.

"It's true, right up in the Greenville section of the city there are a few farms near the Hudson River. The riverbed soil and silt of the Hudson made a

great, fertile delta and it's excellent for growing tuber vegetables. If you go across the train tracks there's plenty of land for farming."

Paolo found it unusual that a guard would know such things about farming. However, everything Greggorio said was suspiciously thorough.

"How do you know this?"

"My cousin Melina is married to a man who has a horse and wagon. He transports the produce to market, or sells it in the streets. You know, a deliveryman and vendor. Sometimes, he lets me work for a day's wages. I'll take any extra work I can get."

"Is there anything else that I should know?"

"Well, just that a man like you, being alone and all, could live very cheaply right there . . . until you find day work or even a full-time job." Greggorio pointed at the Jersey City waterfront.

Paolo wanted to get more information so he could best decide what he should do.

"Where can I settle, I mean, stay?"

"There are boarding houses, or homeowners take in renters."

"Where do I find such places?"

"Well, there is Second Street where it meets Coles Street, or Third Street at Newark Ave."

"That is good. Is it far? How do I go?"

"The ferry barge will leave you on shore. It's a very short ride. You could swim there from here, no?" Greggorio pointed at the short expanse of water. "Then walk up past the train terminal till you reach Grand Street. That will take you to the Downtown section of Jersey City. There is also a streetcar on Grand that you can ride for a couple of pennies so you don't have to walk to get there. Tell the operator where you want to go."

Paolo had heard enough. He was ready. He slowly nodded his head. That was what he would do. His day had been long and hard. The Statue of Liberty torch was now lit and the floodlights illuminated her stately stance. Darkness was near and it was time to move on.

Paolo stood up and glanced at the mighty lady then turned his back and grabbed his bag.

"Come Paolo, we'll get your money changed."

Greggorio walked with Paolo to the money-exchange area where Paolo converted his lira to fifty American dollars. Right next to the exchange was the train ticket office. Paolo stopped and stared at the nearby ticket counter where many people were purchasing tickets for destinations near and far in America. He didn't know any of the locations listed on the signs and felt an

uncertainty rising. The choice he made here and now could last a lifetime . . . for all that happened from this point forward would be a direct result of this decision.

Choose wisely. Remember, you are the Deva.

Paolo searched internally, trying to summon the powers that would show him a glimpse of things to come . . . where he would be, what he would be, and who he would be. *Could the Deva lead him to the decision that would allow him to reach his rightful place in the future? Would the moments of continuity arch the dimensions of time and provide a glimmer of what will be?*

Paolo focused, straining to find a vortex that would enlighten his way. But instead he saw only flashing colors, hazy hereafters, and unknown pathways. Nothing was vivid or defined and whatever shadows were lurking showed no interest in helping. There was nothing meaningful to be seen, except excited immigrants rushing toward their new lives. For Paolo, he was on his own and this decision would be his alone.

Paolo heard Grandpa's words echo. "Sometimes it just happens and sometimes it doesn't happen at all!"

Paolo thought it through. After his voyage, he was not anxious for any more travel and now he only had limited finances. He had to be careful with his money. Since he was basically in Jersey City already, it might be a good place to start. And if he had to move on, the train station was located right there. Finally, he decided . . . *he would get a room at a boarding house in Jersey City.*

Greggorio showed Paolo to the loading dock for the ferry barge. They passed an area by the dock that the Ellis Island employees called the "Kissing Post," because so many waiting family members gathered at that location to greet their incoming loved ones.

"Gracias Greggorio," Paolo said as they reached the boarding entrance. He immediately realized the foolish irony of the situation . . . thanking the person who had helped cheat him out of his money!

"By the way, where are you from in Italy?" Paolo asked.

"We are the Citerelli family, from the Italian capital of Italy. We were big city people and worked in the maintenance businesses of Roma." He emphasized his strength by clenching both fists and raising them to his shoulders. Paolo took it to mean that he collected garbage in Rome and laughed to himself.

Paolo started to enter the gateway when Greggorio grabbed him by the shoulder, "Goodbye Paolo, and remember, always keep your papers with you." He patted Paolo on the back as a goodbye.

Paolo wasn't really searching but noticed there wasn't any vibrant aura from Greggorio. Instead he perceived an empty gray haze that enveloped him. It was a blank, hollow cloak, devoid of any essence. Paolo paid no attention to it and joined the line of waiting passengers. The line moved slowly and Paolo stood in silence while Greggorio remained at the gate. *Was he making sure he boarded?*

Finally, it was time to embark. Paolo didn't call goodbye, he just stepped onto the boat. When he looked back, he could no longer see Greggorio in the crowd. He found a seat and set his bag between his feet. Without delay the ferry cast off and Paolo bid farewell to a bad episode and lost himself in his thoughts. He reviewed his new learning experiences in America. Since arriving, he already felt his first pangs of humiliation, languished in desperation, and was bilked out of his money. It was not a good beginning.

However, when he reached for his cap and remembered the hidden seeds, he knew he had what he wanted. He was in America and still had the Amanita seeds. The boat docked and when Paolo stepped on the mainland he just stood there, as if he were rooted to the ground. Then he bent down and grabbed a handful of soil and worked it through his hands. He had to do that before he did anything else. Finally, he headed for Downtown, Jersey City. Now, he would just have to find a place to stay and move forward from there.

"How did it go?" Calabrese asked Greggorio.

"Like a charm. The dumb Wop thanked me. Can you imagine being such an idiot that you're grateful for losing your money? I'll tell you, carrying the bag is a real nice touch. They must think you're full of regret or something, just because you carry their goddamned luggage. Next thing you know, they think they can trust you! Fuckin' *gedrools!*" Greggorio replied, then laughed loudly.

"Any problems?"

"Hell, we'll have no trouble from him. He was just as happy as shit to get going in the New World. He went to Jersey City. Believe me, he'll be in Jersey City forever. He'll probably die there!"

"Good, the sooner the better. Fucking farmers are all the same. They think growing shit is some kind of miracle and they're the only ones who can do it," Calabrese said. He leaned back in the chair and put his feet on the desk.

"Hey, my acting is getting pretty good, huh?" Greggorio said with a slap on Calabrese's shoulder.

“Yeah, yeah, you should be on Broadway . . . a real fucking Douglas Fairbanks,” said Calabrese. “Here’s your cut and tell the two inspectors to come get their share now, or forget about it. It’s late and I want to get the hell out of here. I’m going to see my Angie baby tonight.” He puckered his lips together and made a sloppy, slurping sound, then started laughing.

Greggorio picked the money up from the desk and walked to the door while whistling. *All in a day’s work!*

The conductor did not speak Italian, but Paolo managed to mime sleep. From experience, the man understood just where Paolo wanted to go. As the streetcar jostled along Paolo stared through the window at the busy city. Of course, everything was new and unfamiliar, but more than that . . . it wasn’t Italy, and Paolo felt a yearning edge into his spirit. Finally, the conductor told him it was time to exit.

Paolo arrived at Second Street and rented a room in a rooming house for five dollars a week. The ten by twelve-foot room was clean, but in need of some fresh paint. The faded tan walls were dingy and the wood trim was chipped and peeling. Some plaster was down from the ceiling and the overhead light fixture was missing the globe. Not even a window. There was a bed, bureau, lamp, closet, wooden chair, towel, and a basin with water. The common bathroom was down the hall. It sure wasn’t much, but to Paolo, the room was a welcome, private escape from the unfamiliar city and its inhabitants. He laid on the bed, satisfied to just be alone, and waited to drift off to sleep.

He closed his eyes and reminded himself of one thing he always knew, but never wanted to forget . . . *nature should never be confused with human nature.*

Despite the hum of the city and noisy hallway, Paolo slept soundly through the night. There were no dreams of gnomes, or elves, or fairies working their special magic for the plants. The world outside was just solid brick, hard asphalt, and cold metal . . . but long live the Deva anyway.

Vengeance Is Sacred

... a thrilling tale of revenge, love, and the paranormal

From the mountain farms of Italy to the distant shores of L'America, young Paolo forges an unforgettable journey of fortitude, intrigue, and love as he eludes the retribution of the Camorra crime syndicate.

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*Can Paolo overcome the blind forces of reprisal . . .
and is the future as predetermined as one may believe?*



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