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This novel is written exclusively for Right Truth Blog (www.righttruth.typepad.com) and its readers.

In loving memory of my precious
Sara (7/25/1951 to 12/13/2003) who always
encouraged me to write from the heart and was
at once both my greatest critic and my most
loyal fan.

In love with you always!

And...

To the greatest dad anyone like me could ever
have hoped for: Joseph Stanley Godlewski
(11/29/1918 to 04/14/2008).

You gave me life. Thank you!

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Chapter Forty-Five

December, 20xx
Near Tuscany, Italy

The gentle, green rolling hills of the Italian countryside were dampened with a cool, lubricating rain that marred the otherwise picturesque valley. The sun had been trying to peep through the overcast for quite some time, occasionally peering through as a deformed orb shepherded by diamonds of refraction.

Commanding the vale as it had since the early sixteenth century when the ancestors of Count Alessandro di Colonna decided that the valley was a pleasant locale which which to rest their nerves following centuries of strife, stood a magnificent yellowish stone structure ringed by veteran battlements upon its uppermost reaches. Over the course of time, the castle became known simply as *Ense et aratro* – the devices of war had spawned its creation, but its purpose became to wage absolute peace. At least that was the story crafted by the local workers who carefully blended their delectable symphony of Sangiovese, Cabernet, Sauvignon, and Merlot wine.

Even the casual dignitary, upon visiting the stately mansion of the present Gugliehno Hulderich, failed to consider anything beyond the regal tapestries, proud coat of arms, and an endless track of medieval armor lining every hallway beyond the Great Room that welcomed visitors out of the rain. To them, *Ense et aratro* was nothing more than an escape from the international crises that plagued the rest of the world on a daily basis.

Here wine, perhaps augmented with a generous carving of Asiago Pressato to entice the senses, convinced all that their beloved Italy was not on the frontlines against radical Islam. So fed and refreshed, few considered the diabolical evil that pervaded the country from the south. They simply ignored the troubles that religion, especially one spawned by human opportunism, could unleash upon an apathetic population.

European history had always been a clash between Christianity and Islam, but few understood that the differences were irreconcilable. Fattened with cheeses and dense with wine, the offspring of the likes of Count di Colonna simply sacrificed life and liberty for the facsimile of peace never considering that those invading from the other side of creation were manipulative, combative, and subversive. Italy never learned the lesson of fascism; it would not allow its history to be adequately taught amongst the newer generations.

With official policy dictated by popular whim, few politicians within the *Parlamento* cared to be brave enough to enact laws that were beneficial to the nation as a whole and merely concentrated on the fashionable. No, the safety of Italy's future rested with a few men like General Gugliehno "Il comandante" Hulderich who knew that fascism had always been their nation's vice. Whether flagrantly falling for the likes of Benito Mussolini or dangerously pacifying modern followers of the Prophet Muhammad, the Italian people had always tossed their lot in with the wrong crowd.

The Commander knew this was wrong. Hulderich had been fighting against terrorism since the 1970's and it seemed that just when the war was being won, transitory politicians would orchestrate some detrimental maneuver to sacrifice long-term survival for the benefits of temporal economics. Their constituency, being reared on placing bread upon their dinner tables, kept an unwritten rule that those who wished to kill them en masse would be best targeted by those yet to come. It was the

simple mindless game of burying one's head into the sand. It couldn't be a threat if it couldn't be seen.

General Hulderich was blessed with the heritage of a wealthy family. More importantly, however, a heritage that ran on rational thought. His father had been one of the most ardent opponents of Mussolini and nearly became Il Duce's victim had it not been for a breathtaking escape to Switzerland. Following the war, the Hulderich family fought against the rising tide of Communism and Socialism. Now, the battle was against the mindless destruction from a religion that nearly everyone else associated with peace and tranquility.

Hulderich ignored the politicians. He ignored the public. He ignored both the international media and the pantheon of international governmental organizations that mapped the planet like the human genome. What he did not ignore, however, were his "Three Rules" of existence: one, the Islamic terrorists were not human; two, that Islam was not a religion; and three, God required *him* to protect the human population.

These rules were not written in stone. They were written in blood and, as such, the retired General took them to heart like a man possessed with chivalry. Every motion of his body. Every speck of thought flowing throughout his mind encapsulated one mission: the defeat of Islam throughout the world. He tried the peaceful approach in the 1970s, showering indigenous cultures with economic aid and support, but when these same peoples used these very gifts to aid and abet those bent on conquering *his* culture and people, he decided enough was enough and declared open warfare. Well, not quite "open" as he put it.

General Hulderich had two main enemies: those whom he was trying to destroy and those whom he was trying to save. It was a never-ending battle between those who cried foul and fought and those who cried foul and capitulated. The Muslims feigned apathy and supported combat while the Italians feigned

combat and supported apathy. To be an official military commander in this kind of engagement was something that he just could not stomach and so Hulderich took the battle underground. Literally.

Deep inside the castle, at the very lowest levels hewed out of bedrock, what was once popularized as the dungeon of *Ense el aratro* was indeed a prison and interrogation center of immense proportions. Here, prisoners were not cuddled or coddled. They were broken down and mentally dissected. Every scrap of actionable intelligence was siphoned out from their sorry lives and then what remained was ultimately planted very quietly in the fields to foster a new growth of grapes.

Because of its historical purpose, the castle did not divert from its traditional architecture. In fact, much of what served purpose in the past found new life in other matters as befitting people with ingenious creativity. One of these mechanisms was a large wooden water wheel that utilized a powerful creek that coursed through the valley and beneath the western stones of the castle. Once used to grind flour, among other domestic uses, the broad wheel now gently revolved upon its axis, dousing the middle-aged Arab strapped to its paddles for thirteen seconds out of every sixty-five.

“How long before the rinse cycle is complete?” questioned Seth Carmassi standing next to the general, gazing upon the incoherently babbling Mahmoud al-Walid.

The general gazed at the Rolex Submariner strapped underneath his left wrist. “Well, *cugino*, I will give him another ten minutes before I ask him again.”