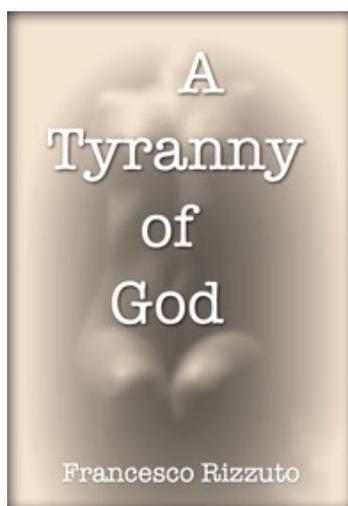


**BOOK CLUB STUDY GUIDE FOR
'A TYRANNY OF GOD'**

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INTRODUCTION

This ebook is a study guide for the historical fiction novel *A TYRANNY OF GOD* (ISBN 9780995812697). It is intended as an introduction for book clubs considering the selection of this novel. It is also suitable as a teaching tool and study aid for senior high school and university level students.

Part One contains a detailed overview of the story arc. It is recommended that the reader first read the entire novel before proceeding to parts three and four of this Study Guide.

Part Two contains an abbreviated character arc for each of the major characters figuring in the narrative.

Part Three lists the major themes developed in the novel.

Part Four offers some topics for discussion and suggested resources for further reading

A TYRANNY OF GOD is not a religious novel, despite the title. It has been rated mature due to graphic sexual content and some violence sprinkled throughout the narrative. Neither is it an erotic novel per se. It is above all a story of human relations and the triumph of love over the ruthless machinations of fate.

The novel has gleaned excellent reviews and is available at Amazon and other major ebook retailers. Excerpts were short-listed by several university short-story competitions in 2015-16.

A Short Synopsis of the Novel

On a stormy night in October 1943, a small frightened boy flees German SS and Italian Fascist police as they round up the Jews of the Roman ghetto for transportation to Auschwitz-Birkenau where almost all the deportees will perish.

Plucked from the dragnet by an aged priest and his two perverse assistants, the child is sheltered in the rectory of a nearby church where a feeble-minded scullery maid and six slobbering mastiffs become his new family. When the war ends in 1945, he enters the seminary and becomes a priest.

Newly minted Father Adamo Di Domenico is a conflicted individual who constantly finds fault with both himself and his adopted religion as he struggles with the hypocrisy and injustices that surround him and the contradictions in his own life. For criticizing the Church in print, he is summoned before a Vatican tribunal and banished from his native Rome to a parish in the far reaches of Canada. Here he begins a slide into madness, engaging in an erotic relationship with a young nun and descending deeper and deeper into a well of guilt and despair.

While delivering a lecture on the Lost Jewish Library of Rome, he is inadvertently reunited with his only sister thought to have perished at Auschwitz. But their meeting comes with a curse. The father who abandoned them in 1939 has died and left the siblings an inheritance so controversial and morally compromising that the Church will do anything, even murder one of its ordained, to obtain it.

Some readers' comments about A Tyranny of God:

(@KT_McColl) A Tyranny of God is a remarkable accomplishment. Covering over five decades, it lays bare the terrible brutality of the Second World War, its lingering consequences, and the breathtaking mendacity of the RC Church in enabling it all.

In the novel, the reader follows the life of Adam Di Domenico, a Jewish boy adopted into the Church towards the end of the war, later becoming a priest, his heritage hidden. Through Adam, the reader is drawn into a world of political duplicity and deceit, which is nowhere more telling than in the Church's complicity in providing safe passage to Nazi war criminals at war's end.

If this political backdrop isn't compelling enough, the author manages to weave an intensely personal story, which sees Adam, now exiled by the Church to Canada, reunited with his sister, whom he believed lost in Auschwitz.

It's impossible to do justice to the various subplots in a short review; suffice it to say that this is a truly compelling read, from the opening pages through to the end. On the one hand, it celebrates the individual human spirit, while on the other pillorying organizations that would subvert that spirit to nefarious ends.

Not only is this novel clearly meticulously researched, it is also exceptionally well-written. If you're a fan of historical fiction, do yourself a favor and add A Tyranny of God to your must-read list.

(@yutta-hey) The opening really pulled me in which is a must for me. Your writing is truly beautiful. I'm honestly ashamed I kept this waiting around in my library for so long.

(@PaperKisses 2098) This is an opening line to die for. The detail is amazing.

(@Sylvania) I cracked up so hard at work. The priest seems so used to dealing with mental people. Ooh I am on edge. Damn, you know how to keep an audience guessing. So much savagery. Love it!

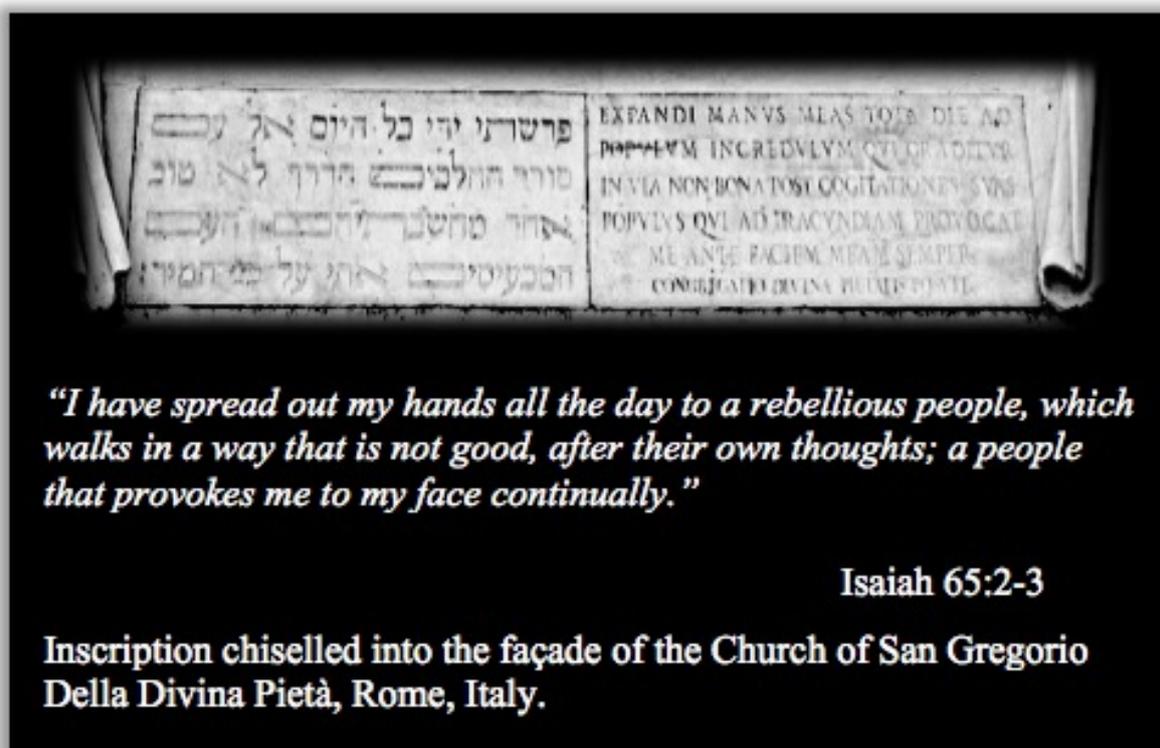
(@josegalindo462) A very believable story. It feels real and historical. I needed a few days of reflection after finishing the book. It shows aspects of the nature of human beings that left me worried and concerned, so untrustworthy, egoist and violent. So easily influenced by doctrines and beliefs that give us permission to commit crimes. The book questions the benign aspect of human nature, except for the female character Kathleen. It seems that since organized religions appeared in the world, humans have lost their innocence, replacing it with evil.

(@outlander333) Tells the historical record from a human standpoint. An intriguing story.

PART ONE

The Story Arc

THE SETTING



The church of San Gregorio della Divina Pietà is situated in what has traditionally been known as the *Claustro dei Ebrei*, or Jewish Ghetto of Rome. Its claim to fame is that, over the last five centuries, Jewish residents of the ghetto were forced at bayonet point to attend degrading sermons in the church plaza delivered by the fanatical Dominican Order, until the Papal States came under Italian government control in 1870. The so-called Order of Preachers, founded by Saint Dominic Guzman, loomed large in the formation of the Inquisition that terrorized Italy, Spain, Portugal and their colonies for three hundred years before it was banned by national governments at the beginning of the 1800's. The Inquisition was primarily known for staging hideous show trials, gruesome torture and executions, and the systematic destruction of Jewish communities wherever its tentacles extended. Hitler's Nazis used techniques developed by the Inquisition in carrying out their 'Final Solution.'

The doctrine that Jews were responsible for the murder of Jesus Christ of Nazareth at the beginning of the first century CE infuses Christian thought and has given legitimacy to anti-Semitism and the wholesale massacre of Jews, especially in Germany and Eastern Europe as late as the 1940's, as well as inspiring today's Neo-Nazi movement.

The church of San Gregorio della Divina Pietà exists in the Rione Sant'Angelo district of Rome, Italy. The cited inscription is chiselled in both Hebrew and Latin in its façade. Although the narrative is based on real historical events, the characters and action taking place inside this church and its rectory are fictitious.

THE JEWISH-ITALIAN NIGHTINGALE



Jacob Mortillaro is a *tenore di grazia* (a tenor such as Caruso, Pavarotti et al), of the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma. He is also the lover of the notorious Diva, Lucrezia Malatesta, known as the Jewish-Italian Nightingale. After Lucrezia travels with her husband Manfredi to New York to star in the Metropolitan Opera's 1940 rendition of *Aida*, Jacob receives a letter inviting him to audition for the role of Radamès in the opera. Jacob abandons his wife Anna and their children, Atalia and Adamo, to join his opera friends in New York.

*Jacob refolded the single, gossamer-thin sheet, returning it to the envelope with its red, white and blue trimmed border and the Statue of Liberty engraved on the cancelled postage stamp that he secreted inside a sheaf of music under a tall pile of leather bound librettos and books. He thought he could detect Lucrezia's faint perfume emanating from between the florid lines of her husband's handwriting. When he thought of Manfredi's offer of the male lead in *Aida*, it was the smooth, moist passage between the diva's thighs that more immediately came to mind.*

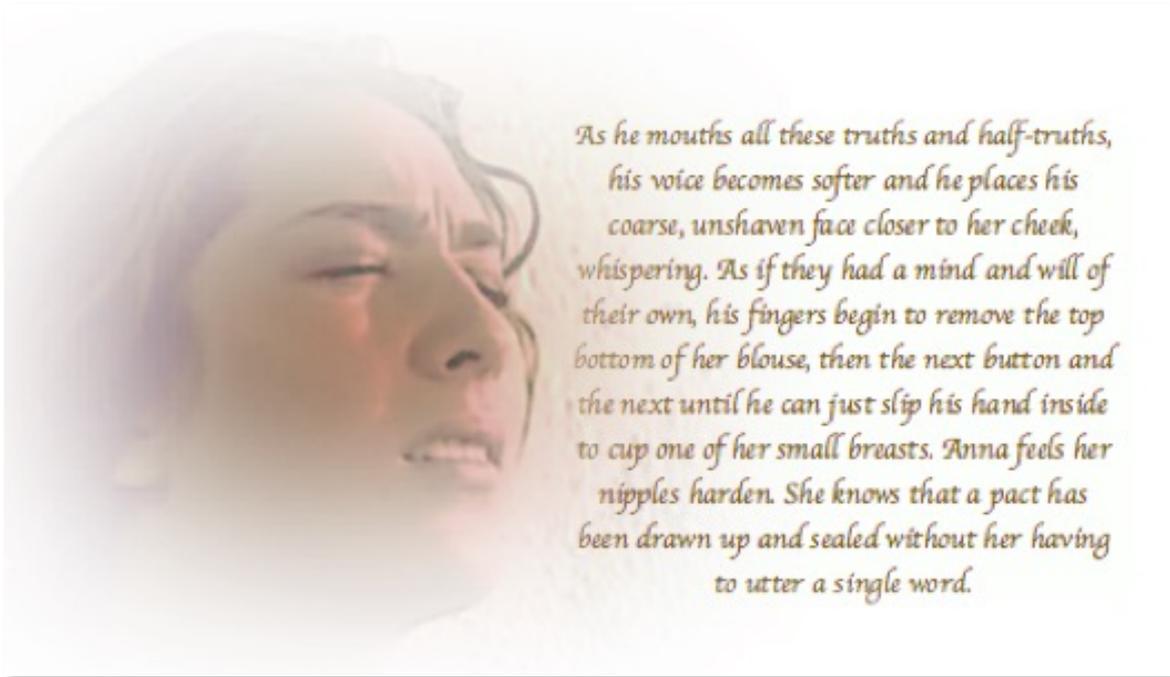
Working at the Metropolitan Opera would place him close to Lucrezia again, this time away from the prying eyes of Anna, his wife. It would be a difficult sell but, in the end, she would accept his decision to go. He would frame the proposal as an opportunity to move the family far away from what was shaping up as another exercise in collective madness and the latest chapter in a long history of oppression and abuse of European Jewry.

Anna took the proposal with resolve. They barely survived on his small salary from the Teatro dell'Opera and whatever extra Lira he managed to earn entertaining at weddings and bar mitzvahs, she pointed out. Their fourteen-year-old daughter Atalia was next to useless. Mussolini had expelled all the Jewish children from the schools after enacting the racial laws only the year before. Now the girl lay about the apartment all day in a deep funk, absentmindedly thumbing her shabby collection of movie magazines and frequenting a nearby cinema after dark, her behaviour the subject of many a heated family argument. Little Adamo, practically at his mother's breast, was too young to contribute anything to the family

larder. Finally, they didn't have sufficient savings to purchase even one third-class steamship ticket to New York, never mind four.

Other than that, Anna informed her determined husband, he was free to go.

THE LANDLORD'S VISIT



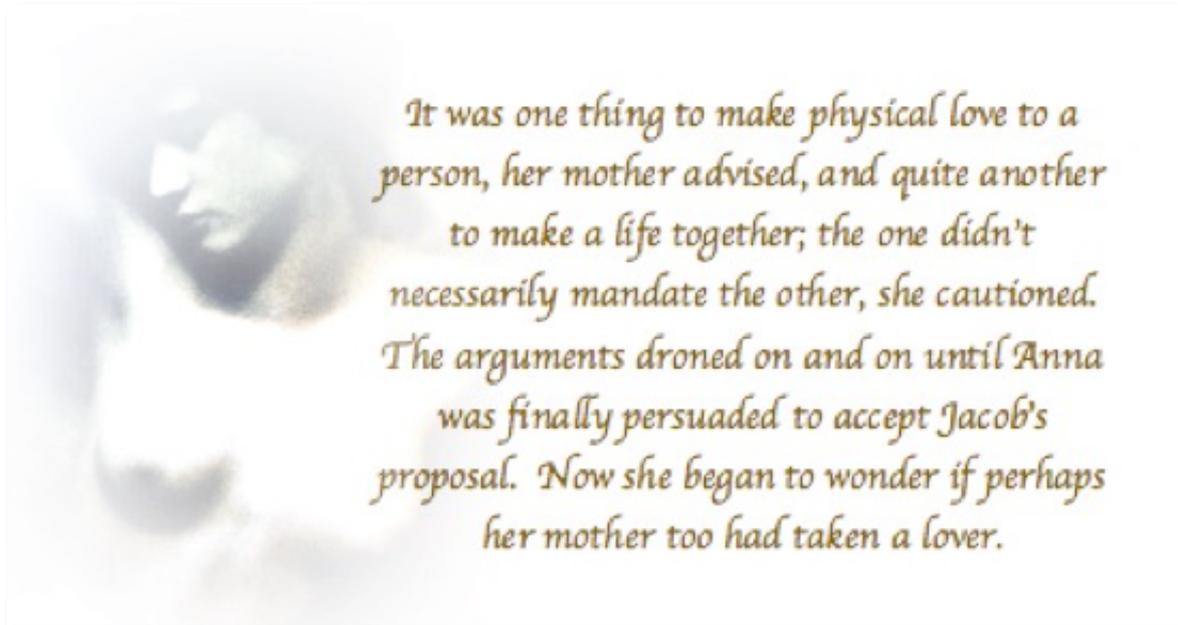
Jacob has abandoned his family without any means of support. Anna pawns her jewellery and other family heirlooms then searches without result for work, but the racial laws of 1939 have severely restricted the ability of Jews to participate in Italian society. Almost overnight, Anna and her children have become pariahs.

When their Christian landlord comes to collect the rent, he makes Anna an offer.

The man was blunt in his proposal. The woman needed something, namely this flat of his that her family had occupied during the last six years. She could pay for the accommodations in Lira notes or they could negotiate another means of exchange.

When a husband goes to America, the shameless fellow informed Anna, he finds another woman to fill his need. There was no shortage of females, especially in New York. They waited in droves for the handsome Italian men when they disembarked at the wharves in Manhattan, taking their pick and leading them straight home to bed. He knew about these things. He'd been to America himself, worked hard and come back with money to purchase these flats that he rented to people in the ghetto. Now he was enjoying the fruits of his labour. But how many other fine husbands like him had she seen returning from America to their families or sending the passage money as they promised? They rarely ever did.

ANNA'S DILEMMA



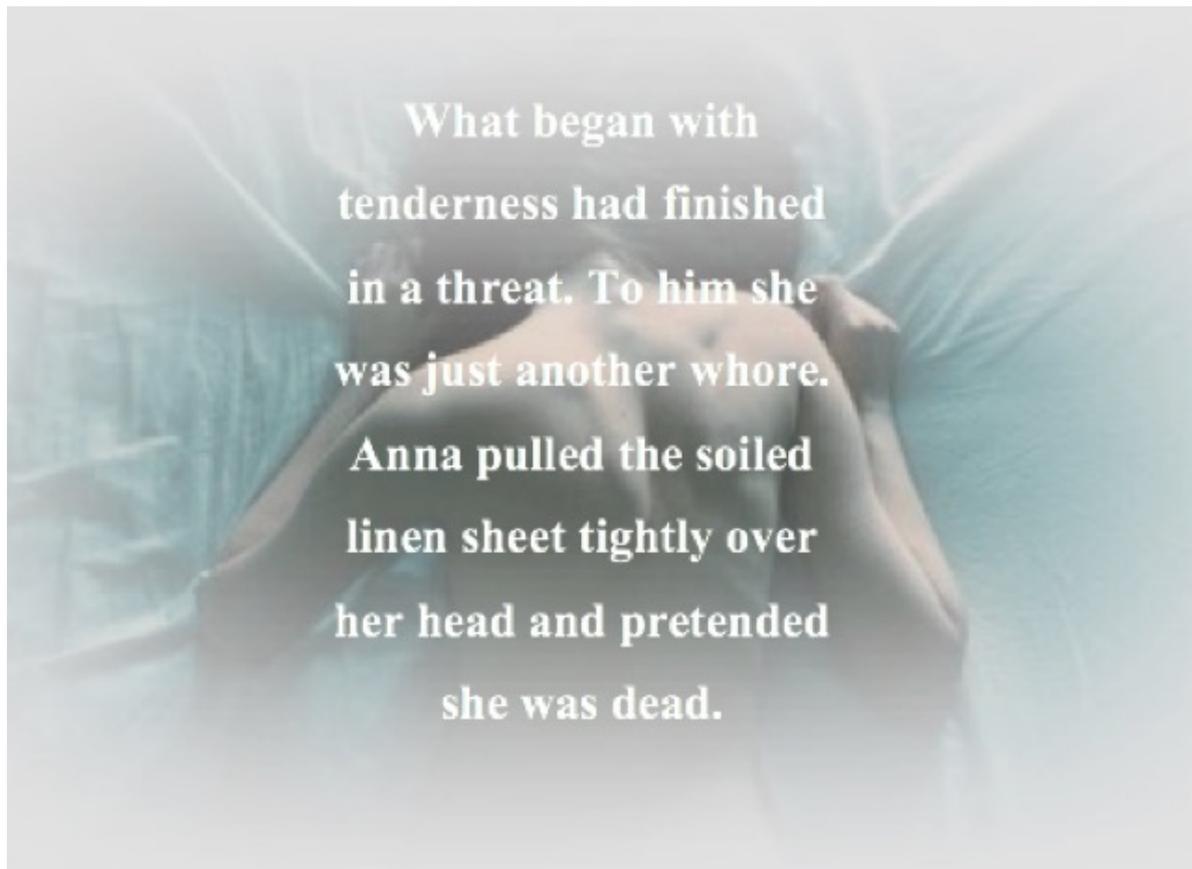
Anna is forced by circumstances to accept the landlord's proposal and engages in an affair with the man who visits her for sex two days a week. She compares this new relationship with her failed marriage to Jacob.

After five months without any word, she had come to regard Jacob Mortillaro as her ex-husband and each passing day confirmed the validity of the landlord's remarks. A man quickly finds another woman to fulfil his need. When a husband goes to America, he rarely comes back. This is what he had said the day he came to collect and she had no money to pay the rent. The words were pure spezzatura and like a splattering of wine stains they simply refused to wash away.

She had submitted to his proposal under duress, in a spirit of acceptance, and without much resistance. The angry, wrathful HaShem was sometimes prone to overlooking acceptance of evil, she thought, if it were done without compromise and out of necessity. Like the virgin daughters of Lot, for instance, who eagerly coupled with their besotted father to prevent the extinction of the whole human race, while Sodom burned in the background. Acceptance was one thing, but the Almighty didn't like compromises. His was a Fascist universe starkly delineated in black and white. There were only the victor and the vanquished, which made perfect sense. In a compromise between food and poison, she reasoned, death was the only sure outcome. Therefore, Anna had accepted the inevitable and allowed herself to be vanquished.

The man was rough and uncultured in practically every way, so unlike the meticulously groomed Jacob with his penchant for learning, extensive knowledge of the Talmud, and his musical abilities. Nevertheless, he was better endowed and more sexually accomplished than her absentee husband and Anna, who despite her timid self was a secret risk taker, had lately decided she would open herself a little to him, that is, she had allowed him to bring her to orgasm which was a feat that Jacob, after so many years, never quite managed.

ANOTHER OFFER



One afternoon, Anna's lover makes an offer.

The landlord finished his business and reached to the floor to recover his trousers before leaving while Anna lay naked and sweaty on the crumpled bed, the one that she and Jacob had shared and where she had birthed both her children. She calmly surveyed this unexpected stranger who had so artlessly entered her life, neither lover nor client, and for whom, despite the circumstances and defying all logic, she was beginning to experience some tender feelings.

He flipped the thick suspender straps one after another over his shoulders, straightened his waistband and patted down the crumpled trouser fronts then, before opening the door to leave, reached into a front pocket to extract a few Lira notes and placed them on her dressing table. Anna said nothing, not even thanks. She didn't need to wash his soiled undergarments or prepare his pasta for him or endure his complaints about her relatives or listen to a never-ending litany of annoyances or share a life that had long since degenerated into a routine of hostility and petty bickering. She wasn't his wife.

"A deacon of Saint John Lateran owes me some money," he said to Anna, stalling in the doorway with his crumpled felt hat in hand. "Gambling debts. I can ask a favour, like a job for you cleaning toilets in the rectory or something. Even Jews can do that kind of work. It doesn't take any skill. Do you want me to talk with him about it?"

“Yes. Please do that for me if you can. You know how difficult it is for us and I want more security; that is, besides what happens in this room.” She was careful not to offend this man. He was her lifeline, after all. “I have two children to feed and I need a steady job.”

“Yeah, sure. Però, mi raccomando...don’t go turning no tricks with them priests, I’m warning you. Sono cattivi, tutti quanti. They’re a bad lot, all of them.”

What began with tenderness had finished in a threat.

THE MIRROR



Anna Mortillaro studied her image in the gilded antique mirror that hung above her dressing table. It was Jacob's gift to her after Atalia was born and he landed the part of Tonio, the fool, in the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma's 1931 production of Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*. Eight years later, like Anna herself, this battered second hand mirror in its scarred wooden frame was badly in need of re-silvering.

Anna prepares herself for a job interview at the Vatican.

Every year that passed, her face in that mirror reflected a measure of change, not necessarily change for the worse, but change nonetheless. She let the creamy silk camisole slip from her bare shoulders enough for the looking glass to verify that her breasts were still high and firm even after nursing two children; that she had stayed slim with a flat tummy. No new wrinkles or age spots had lately appeared in her cheeks or neck. She was still desirable, or at least the landlord seemed to think so.

Anna slipped on a white satin blouse and pulled the black wool skirt over her head and to her waist then secured the waistband with two metal snaps. She donned her black cashmere sweater with the mother-of-pearl buttons up the front. While dressing, she rehearsed her lines.

"I'm a widow with two children, Father. My husband was an Italian soldier killed in the Ethiopian campaign of 1935. Yes, I can clean the toilets and tidy up the rectory and scrub the church steps. How often would I be needed? What would be the hours? Are there any other duties? And may I ask what the pay would be?"

Anna hesitated. What if the priest asked for her home address? Then he would know that she was a Jewess since predominantly Jews lived in the Seraglio dei Ebrei, the Roman ghetto.

THE MURDER



Anna Mortillaro takes up her duties as a cleaner at the Basilica of Saint John Lateran, the Pope's own church. One day in the spring of 1943, she is busy scraping pigeon droppings from the base of the tall marble columns at the Basilica's entrance. She has let down her long raven hair and is on her knees with her soap bucket and scrub brush. From inside the Basilica, the richly clad Pope suddenly emerges with his German military escort and stops to deliver an ad hoc sermon.

"Mary of Magdalene was a Jewess," the Pontiff continues. "The Book of Isaiah, chapter 65, verses 2 to 5 tell us: 'I have spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people, which walks in a way that is not good, after their own thoughts; a people that provokes me to my face continually.' Mary did not walk in a way that was good. Her people, the Jews of Nazareth, did not accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

"Mary Magdalene was a prostitute. She provoked God to his face by her licentiousness and her sinning. Her lusting led decent men into adultery and caused their good wives to suffer and weep and their children to anguish. Her life was a tool of Satan. But when she came upon Jesus one day, he cast out seven demons, which signified all the seven vices, from this woman and healed her and freed her from possession by the evil spirits.

"Behold now this wretched woman, fair of face and voluptuous of body, how she cleanses the feet of His Holy Church, the mother church of the whole world, with her perfumed hair. See how the harlots and sinners of the world will likewise come to kneel at the feet of His mother church, as Mary Magdalene once did, to be purged of their demons."

The Supreme Pontiff throws a final grimace at Anna who is busily scrubbing bird faeces from the feet of Jesus' mother church. His military escort assists the Pope into a waiting motorcar

that merges with a cavalcade of limousines and guard vehicles with machine guns mounted on their chassis.

Someone in the departing crowd treats Anna to a sharp kick in her backside that sends her tumbling face-first against the massive base of the marble column that only minutes earlier she'd been scrubbing clean in preparation for the Pope's exit from the basilica. A stream of thick arterial blood gushes from her nose and she can feel with her tongue that a front tooth has chipped off and cut through her upper lip, leaving a taste of rusted iron. The other two cleaners in her team are nowhere to be seen. They'd sensed trouble brewing when the man began his unscheduled sermon. Like most Italians, they were wizards at reading the signs and knew instinctively when it was time to melt away.

A staccato burst of machine gun fire from the last departing vehicle sent Anna Mortillaro to her knees again, crumpled on the cobblestones in a pool of blood in the plaza of the Archibasilica Sanctissimi Salvatoris et Sanctorum Iohannes Baptistae et Evangelistae in Laterano.

ANOTHER VISIT FROM THE LANDLORD

“So, when he started opening the buttons of my blouse one after another, I just let him do it. It was late at night and she hadn’t come home yet. We did it right there on her bed. It was my revenge. Afterwards, he told me how she’d been murdered that same afternoon but I didn’t feel sad. I wasn’t even surprised.”



Prior to her murder, Anna’s relationship with her daughter, Atalia, had been severely strained. Atalia blamed her mother for Jacob’s departure in 1939 and the difficulty of their situation. Often hungry and unable to continue in school because of the racial laws, Atalia began working as a part-time prostitute in the Rione Sant’Angelo. Afterwards, the landlord delivers news of Anna’s murder.

“In my own mind and heart, I mistakenly believed that she’d driven our father away, if not purposely then by her complacence toward him, so she could take up with another. That was a given. I never questioned how it could actually be so. I’d never tried to live together with a man. I used to listen at the keyhole of the bedroom door on the nights when she was servicing the landlord, taking in the sounds of their passion like a bad radio play, sounds that I never recalled hearing when our father was living with us. I didn’t understand why she couldn’t love Jacob that same way; why she so willingly opened herself to a stranger when she’d always held back from her own husband who was the father of her children.”

“I still don’t understand what she saw in that creep. He took about two minutes and wasn’t any more spectacular than other clients I’d been servicing as a part-timer at the Bordello Beatrice. That’s when I decided I wouldn’t sell myself short like my mother had done. I told the old man ‘va fan’cullo!’ and packed my suitcase that very same night.”

THE WHOREHOUSE IN VIA LUNGOTEVERE DEI CENCI

*“É vero? Altro che può?
Noi siamo putane, cara
mia. Tutti devono
guadagnarsi la sua
propria crosta!”*

Oh, really? And what else can he do? Huh? This is a whorehouse, sweetheart. Everyone of us here earns her crust of bread!”



After Anna’s murder in 1943, eighteen-year-old Atalia becomes an inmate of the Bordello Beatrice in Via Lungotevere dei Cenci where she reluctantly takes her eight-year-old brother Adamo.

When Atalia was forced to look after her little brother, she packed him along to the brothel dragging their cardboard suitcases behind them over the cobblestones. He could run errands for the girls and women there and do odd jobs and that way earn a crust of stale bread and maybe a little wine to soften it, is how she explained it to the madam.

In the end, the sly old woman relented. With her dark, Middle Eastern looks and her youth, Atalia could turn out to be a good earner. And if she wanted the girl, then she had to take the kid brother along in the mix. She decided to outfit the boy as a Renaissance house dwarf, teaching him to bow deeply and juggle a trio of polished brass spheres like the three testicles of Lorenzo Di Medici, to boldly strut about her salon demonstrating la mano fico for the vulgar amusement of her guests. She dubbed him Gufo, the owl.

“Truth is that I took you along to the whorehouse because you were the only family I had left. Secretly, I was hoping that someday Jacob would come back to us and we’d all return to the happy life we had before the war. I needed to keep you close, in reserve so to speak, like a hostage. That’s how a child whore’s mind works.”

THE WARDROBE



*She had her own room with a high four-poster bed and a chambermaid to renew the soiled linens. On the wall, in an elaborately carved, gold leaf embellished frame above the mattress, hung a large Mannerist oil painting of *Virgen Lactans*, milk from the Madonna's naked breasts spurting down in a warm shower over the tormented souls in Purgatory. Little Adamo, who was wiry and short for his age, slept on cushions inside the huge mirrored wardrobe in her room, a place where he secreted himself while his sister serviced clients, listening in on the sound track but without seeing the picture. . . .*

Life was a good deal better for the siblings at the bordello. Newly hopeful Atalia had only to laze about eating chocolate bonbons while perusing her dog-eared collection of movie magazines between visitors.

There was a regulated tranquillity and dedication to purpose inside the Bordello Beatrice with its smartly costumed chambermaids and servers scurrying about their designated tasks.

Languid young goddesses graced the reception hall, postured like flawless pink alabaster statues begging adoration, newly opened blossoms in the Campo dei Fiori, delicacies the flavor of tartuffo and the seductive aroma of zagara. The gentle and reassuring ambience admitted no hint of the turmoil brewing in the city outside, a welcoming oasis of purloined pleasures amidst the impending storm.

THE RAID



October 16, 1943. The Gestapo, along with Italian Fascist police and military, begin the purge of the Roman Ghetto. Atalia has locked her little brother inside a tall walnut wardrobe in her room at the Bordello Beatrice.

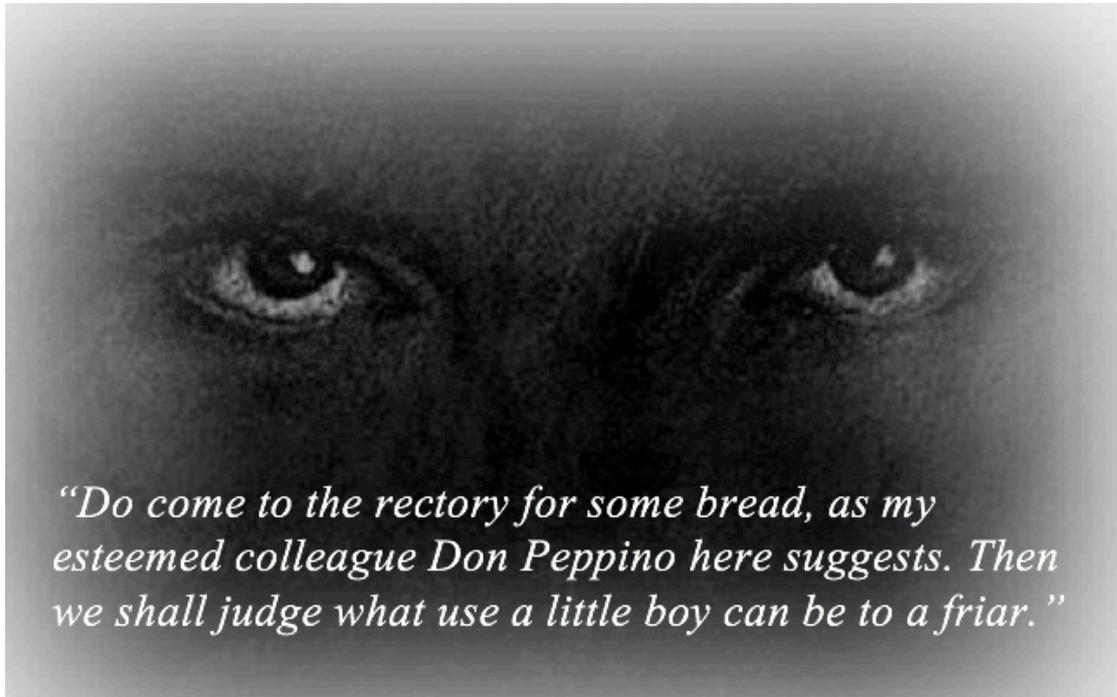
With a sudden shove, the wounded cabinet tottered in its uncertain dignity then thundered to the floor, coming to rest with the remnants of its door pressed tightly against the tiles. The soldier treated its slatted back panel to a final pounding with his gunstock but the noble old wood held firm. Guttural voices barked out orders in German; women and girls screamed and cursed and wept in Italian. From inside the darkened box, Adamo heard the crisp clatter of iron-heeled jackboots rushing away down the grey marble staircase.

“Raus! Schnell, schnell, jeder raus! Hurry, hurry, outside everyone!” the Untersturmführer shouts while slashing randomly to left and right with a stiff leather switch that he’d requisitioned from one of the women’s bedchambers. His orders are to clear the establishment, separate client from whore using a pry bar if necessary, then herd the riff-raff toward a marshaling yard set up at the nearby Theater of Marcellus. If any German military personnel or card-carrying Fascists or Axis-friendly diplomats or priests happened to turn up amongst the detainees, they are to be released unharmed.

SS-Obersturmbannführer Herbert Kappler is purging the Holy City. The raid is orchestrated by a stubby, lacklustre subordinate with a fearsome reputation, SS-Captain Erik Priebke.

Before the German forces abandon Rome to the advancing Allied armies, Kappler and Priebke will have resolved the 'Jewish Question' here once and for all. First, they will start with the whores, then work their way up the social ladder. By December, all will be reduced to ashes.

THE PRIESTS



Adamo escapes from the toppled wardrobe then dashes through the darkened streets of the ghetto, searching for his sister.

When the panting boy reaches the end of a narrow alley that opens into the Via del Portico d’Ottavia, he runs smack into a trio of men in black ankle-length cassocks with heavy woollen capes draped over their shoulders and black satin hats. They move in unison with the rainwater cascading from the rims of their mushroom-like ombrelloni that claw at the walls of this ancient passageway, a covey of bats issuing from a dank cave. They are the Dominicans of San Gregorio. Adamo’s father had warned him about the Dominicans too. One of the men grabs Adamo by the nape of his neck and hauls him up short.

“Marrona! Another Jew runt. Porca miseria! The exterminators didn’t trap all the vermin this time. Looks like they’ll need to make another sweep tomorrow.”

The boy tries hard to squirm free, to scurry away in the opposite direction this time, but the priest is holding him fast by the collar, thrashing. The man smells sour, like a bedchamber badly in need of airing but whose door and window are sealed tightly shut, or a tomb.

LIFE IN THE RECTORY



The orphaned Adamo is sheltered in the rectory of San Gregorio della Divina Pietà under the protection of its pastor, Don Peppino. He is placed in the care of the friars' housekeeper, Signora Baldasso. But the housekeeper has secrets of her own. She warns him to avoid the nearby Cenci Palace.

She was of medium stature, muddy complexioned, with badly hacked and dishevelled black hair that wreathed her oval face and thick-lipped features like an angry nest of vipers. Young Adamo's first impression was one of revulsion.

Signora Baldasso has cautioned Adamo to steer clear of the crumbling Cenci palace at night-time. Screams were often heard from inside the dark upper chambers, she tells him, and people sometimes report beams of light bobbing about behind the cracked and blackened windowpanes as the murdered family walks its silent corridors. She herself once caught a glimpse of the headless Beatrice stock-still in her blood-soaked negligée on a balcony under a full moon.

BEATRICE CENCI



In the vast Cenci palace on the edge of Rome’s Jewish ghetto, sixteenth century life was as gothic as anyone could wish with Count Francesco Cenci’s overbearing and violent nature haunting every nook and cranny of that fortress-like edifice, dark deeds done behind the closed doors of a prominent Roman family.

Later in 1957, when Adamo is a priest and hearing confessions in the chapel of San Gregorio della Divina Pietà, he counsels Piero Consani who believes that he is carrying on a love affair with the ghost of Beatrice Cenci, beheaded by the papal executioner in 1599.

Beatrice was clearly an unwilling victim of incest who had participated in the murder of her abusive father. The subsequent trial is famous for the ethical conundrum it poses, namely the issue of legal guilt versus moral innocence.

“In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Salve, fratello,” the priest replied. “How can I help you, my brethren? Have you come to make your confession?”

“No father, no confession. I came bearing evidence.”

“Evidence? What kind of evidence? Has another Christian erred and you’re pointing a crooked finger at him? God does not like tattlers, you know!”

“No, Father. That’s not it. I have proof that Beatrice was innocent.”

“Beatrice who?”

“La Cenci, Father. La Cenci!”

“But that Beatrice has been dead for four hundred years. The papal executioner chopped off her head!”

“Well, that’s just it Father. They didn’t, you see.”

“They did Piero, they did. Trust me. I was there. I witnessed the whole messy business. I was just a little boy growing up in Trastevere and our parents took us to see the executions in the Piazza Sant’Angelo. We packed a picnic lunch and there were musicians and jugglers and a puppet show. That was a long time ago. Go home now and rest yourself. La Cenci won’t be coming to you anymore, at least not tonight. Trust me. I’m your priest.”

“But Father, I want her to come. We’re having an affair, you see. But don’t tell her father the Count; please, I beg you. He’s a madman. He’ll murder us both!”

AT THE SEMINARY



The year is 1946 and Adamo is enrolled in the Seminario Preparatorio di San Jacopo. It is the pastor Don Peppino's wish that the boy become a priest. Adamo has befriended Pietro Monfrinoli, another seminarian who boards at the school.

Pietro tells Adamo that he has acquired a girlfriend. She was a fishmonger's girl in the market down along the Tevere. For a few coins, she would let him touch her lumpy breasts and one time she even planted a moist kiss on his lips, although her mouth tasted salty and she stank of the sea. Adamo advises his friend that talking about such things was surely sinful, never mind doing them. If he really loved that fishy girl, then his intentions had to be pure. He should not lead her to the Devil. Adamo never mentioned that he himself had once resided in a whorehouse or that he slept each night on a straw mattress in the belfry with a woman who wasn't his mother.

Pietro invites Adamo to join him on a weekend excursion to his family's home in the hills of Tuscany. At dinner around a rough-hewn table in the rustic farmhouse, Pietro's mother enquires about Adamo's family.

The boy is caught telling his first lie.

"Our family is Roman. Mamma works in the rectory of San Gregorio della Divina Pietà where we live," he replied. "My father is dead."

"Oh. Well, I'm sorry about your father, dear. When was that?"

"He was killed in the war," Adamo continued. "He died in Abyssinia in 1944, a captain of Bersaglieri he was. A hero. Il Duce sent a medal and his personal instructions for the priests to take us in. We've been living at the rectory ever since."

"But you must have the year wrong," Maria Giuseppina frowns. "The war was already over for Italy by '44. It must have been the African campaign of 1935, isn't that right Momo?"

She wrinkles her forehead into a 'v', struggling to understand. Being a countrywoman, her calculation skills are rather poor. Her husband merely shrugs, alternately drawing on his crumpled cigarette while poking a blade of straw into his unshaven face then sucking the end. The last thing he wants to be quizzed about is the war.

IN CARLOTTA'S BED

With Carlotta, sex play was always of the meat and potatoes variety. The hungry youngster would raid the woman's pantry whenever he fancied or if he lay sleepless and bored or else awoke rigid in the night, without preamble or ceremony or protest of any kind from her side of the bed. Her raw umber flesh exuded the faint aroma of fermentation that wafted in from the Pontine Marshes on the warm Roman winds. When he took her slender fingers into his mouth, he tasted her coterie of spices and the tang of raw garlic.

Young Adamo has discovered sex. Since 1943, when Don Peppino ordered the housekeeper to keep the boy in her sight, they have been sharing the hard, straw-filled mattress in her bedroom in the bell tower.

"Carlotta?"

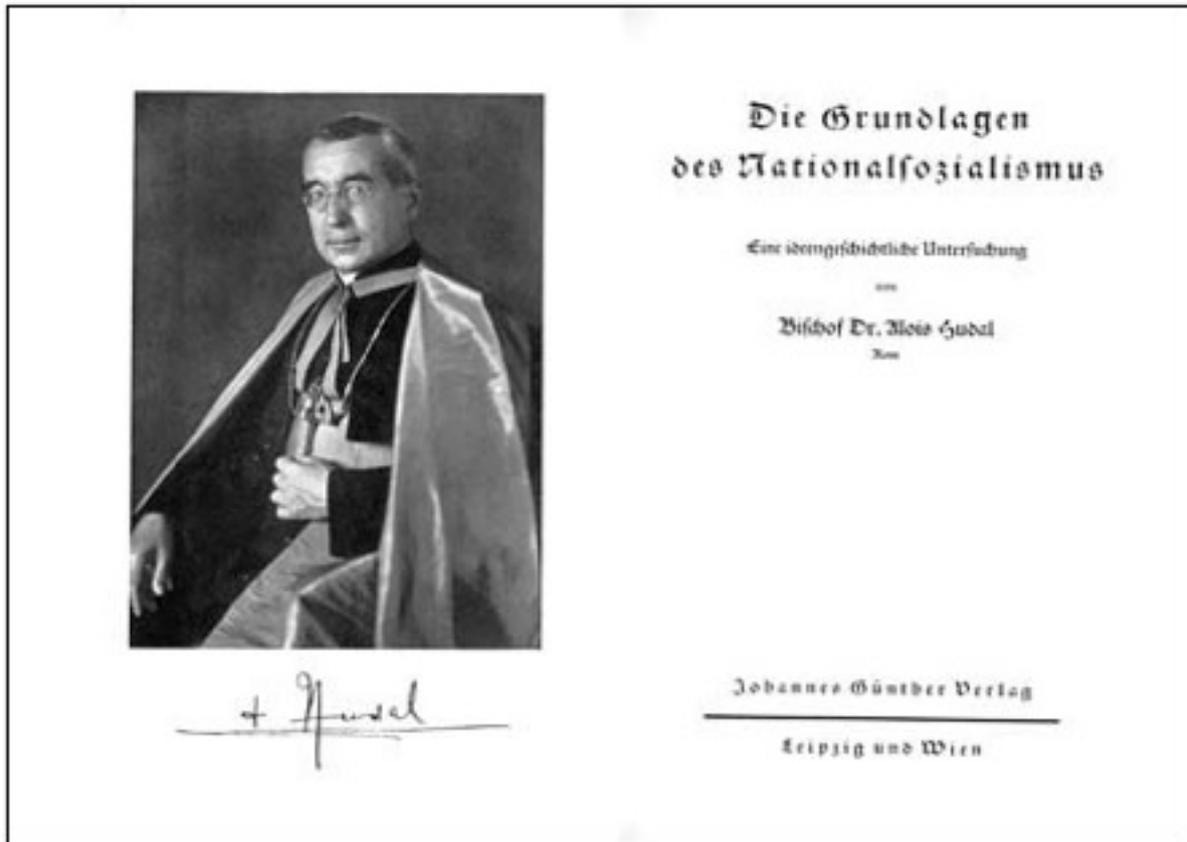
"Sì, caro mio. Dimmi."

"Do you think it's wrong for people to, well, you know, have sexual relations if they aren't married? I mean, like if they were in love and all that stuff?"

"The Holy Virgin was already pregnant before she got married. Did you know that?" she replied. "They say that San Giuseppe was too old to make physical love to her but they got married anyway because her stomach was already very large after her date with the angel and she would soon give birth to the Lord Jesus. Her father paid a large sum of money to the man just so he'd take the disgraced little girl off their hands. And did you know that San Giuseppe had six toes on each of his feet. Imagine that! An old freak!"

Sometimes Carlotta said the oddest things, Adamo thought.

THE BISHOP'S VISIT



The war has been over since 1945, but by 1947 Europe is still flooded with refugees. The Allies whose armies now occupy Germany and Italy are searching out the kingpins of the Third Reich, especially those responsible for the 'Final Solution.'

Don Peppino and his young protégé, Adamo Di Domenico, have received a summons from the Vatican ordering them to comply with the programme of Bishop Alois Hudal to spirit the perpetrators of the Nazi horror to safety. The Church will issue Vatican passports and provide shelter in churches and religious houses until safe passage to South America can be arranged.

Don Peppino and Adamo believe they have become passive enablers of Evil.

The Bishop explains:

"Fifteen hundred political refugees hiding in religious houses throughout Italy and a good proportion of that number are here in Rome. Pacelli is determined that the Holy See will assist its friends in transitioning from their currently insecure status, thereby relieving the Church of this burden. I'm talking about the burden of conscience as well as the financial pressure. Some of our guests have access to vast financial deposits and we want control of those resources to cover our costs and perhaps gain some compensation for our efforts.

"Some of the refugees are former SS personnel wanted by the Allies and who would surely hang if caught. All are being sought by the British and American military police on various charges. They are disguised as priests and lay brothers in certain of our religious houses. These men have access to a fortune in Nazi gold that was cast into bullion from tooth fillings and jewellery confiscated during the Final Solution. There are the gold stocks of several

national treasuries that were looted by the Germans from occupied countries then recast and hallmarked by the Third Reich, still hidden out of reach of the Allies. There is also a hoard of gold-denominated bonds that were guaranteed by a United States bank in the prewar years. In the view of the Curia, this paper and metal are money and money is neutral, a non-combatant. Our purpose, therefore, is to cleanse this neutral money of any residual stain and place it at the disposal of God.”

Don Peppino interrupted the bishop’s speech, which he’d obviously prepared and meticulously rehearsed beforehand.

“You mean the blood stains?”

NEW YORK 1939

They parked at Coney Island near the boardwalk then decided to stroll barefoot along the water's edge despite the cold. But when they returned for their shoes, someone had broken into the car and stolen them. They were naïve and law-abiding people who'd come to America to escape the lawlessness and corruption of their native island. Now their new countrymen had nicked their shoes



In the autumn of 1939, Jacob Mortillaro arrives in New York where the World's Fair is in full swing. He sleeps on a fold-out bed in the sitting room of Lucrezia and Manfredi's Manhattan apartment in a brownstone overlooking Central Park. Soon after arrival, he is awarded the part of Radamés, playing opposite Lucrezia's Aida at the Metropolitan Opera. In the Big Apple, Jacob encounters other Italian immigrants and decides to change his name to Jake, then finally to Jackson Moore.

At the Met, Jacob meets and falls in love with seventeen-year-old Lorena Sanchez, a mixed-race soprano and Lucrezia's new understudy.

Best of all, Jacob would now be drawing a small salary from the Met, at least enough to keep body and soul together. His first impulse was to rent a small, furnished apartment for himself somewhere in Manhattan where he could focus on his singing career and pursue Lorena Sanchez without too much scrutiny or interference.

Lately, he'd been discretely lurking in the street outside her apartment building on evenings when he knew she was at the theatre with Lucrezia, rehearsing their roles or kibitzing backstage with other performers. He wanted to ascertain whether or not the girl had a controlling mother or a roommate or perhaps even a jealous husband hidden in the wings. Fact was, he knew almost nothing about Lorena except that his heart raced wildly whenever she was near, and he'd found himself masturbating more than once over her image in an 8x10 inch, black and white photo of the naked girl that he discovered in Lucrezia's bedroom when she and Manfredi were away.

THE BEAUTIFUL DOMINICANA



Lorena Sanchez is known as the ‘Dominican Diva.’ Because of the race taboo in America, she cannot play romantic roles opposite a white person and therefore cannot take the role of Aida, the enslaved black princess of Verdi’s opera.

Jacob has fallen in love with the girl, or at least in lust, and begins to question his own future in grand opera.

Jacob was back at the ivories that same night, entertaining Lucrezia, Manfredi and Lorena with a medley of the Gershwin tunes that were so popular in America and that he played by ear.

“I’ve got a crush on you, Sweetie Pie....All the day and night-time, hear me sigh....I never had the least notion, that I could fall with so much emotion....”

When he played Rhapsody in Blue, he never diverted his own eyes from Lorena’s. He was determined to melt her young Creole heart, one sweet drop of beeswax and honey at a time until one of these nights they’d blow out the candle together.

NEW YORK BY NIGHT

After an hour and a half, the girl was still waiting, sipping champagne, batting her eyelashes and boldly chatting up Manfredi while putting a brave face on what was obviously a not-so-subtle form of discrimination. She could enter the club and sit down at a table but the kitchen wasn't going to serve her.



Lucrezia and Manfredi have invited Jacob, Lorena and Lucrezia's agent, Nino Torturici, to join them for a round of nightclubbing. Their first stop is the Stork Club. Lorena is allowed to enter the club but the kitchen refuses to serve her.

The Stork Club was the place to be seen, especially if one had beauty and money and influence and coveted more of the same. New York City gossip and arts columnists were fixtures of the place, and up and coming young stage and screen stars, or even hopeful unknowns like Lorena Sanchez, might discover their photos with a flattering caption in next day's newspapers. This was invaluable advertising and being seen in such places was crucial to career building, the very reason, in her own mind at least, that Lucrezia Malatesta was there.

Manfredi argued with the doorman that Lorena, who had tenaciously clung to his arm almost the entire night as if it were she, not Lucrezia, who was his wife, was a dark-skinned Spaniard and therefore a White person like himself.

"Excuse me, but this young lady has been waiting over an hour for a steak that takes two minutes to broil."

"The kitchen is busy tonight, sir, as you can see from the crowd."

The room was half empty.

"No matter. We're leaving anyway." Nino chimed in. He swiped his mouth with the white linen napkin and tossed it into his plate, pushed back his chair, then stood to tower over the headwaiter who looked to him like a pudgy, overstuffed penguin. He began brushing dandruff off the fellow's shiny lapels with the back of his hand, a little too aggressively, scanning him up and down with his eyes as if measuring the man for a coffin, all the while blowing cigarette smoke into his face.

"And don't bother yourself with the check. Not if you want to wake up tomorrow in your bed."

The little man was too terrified even to squeak. When a couple of burly goons in ill-fitting black tuxedos appeared out of nowhere, Torturicci reached a hand inside his jacket then grinned in their direction. Like nuns and cops, he thought, always in pairs.

“Venite. Venite pure!” He shouted in a rough, Sicilian voice, loud enough to cause other diners to drop their forks onto their plates in a chorus of tiny bells. The conductor signalled his orchestra to stop playing, as the two bouncers backed away, disguising themselves behind a potted palm.

THE BONDS



War has been raging across Europe since 1939 but America remains neutral.

Jacob accompanies Manfredi and Nino on a night-time excursion to a lonely New Jersey beach. Here they meet a mysterious Sicilian who leads them to a rendezvous with the crew of a German submarine. Manfredi passes a briefcase containing a block of bearer bonds to the officer who informs him that his orders are to take Manfredi aboard the submarine and transport him to Berlin as hostage, to ensure the veracity of the bonds.

Manfredi hands Jacob a business card with the combination to his safe handwritten on the reverse side of the card. Jacob is now entrusted with the remainder of the bond hoard which is the property of Jewish gangsters in New York, represented by Herbert Stark, owner of the famous Cotton Club.

Now even Nino seemed to fidget. He pulled his crush felt hat down low on his forehead while shifting his weight nervously from foot to foot in the sinking sand. Then he unbuttoned his overcoat to reveal a brace of chunky revolvers tucked into his waistband, extracted one of the guns, and handed it to Jacob.

“Ma cosa mi vuoi fare con questo? What do you want me to do with this?” Jacob stuttered, a good deal more confused and frightened than before.

“You just hold it for now. Capisce? When the time comes, you’ll know what to do with it.”

The two wary sailors, however, have levelled their submachine guns at Nino and are hesitant to turn their backs to follow the officer. When he rotates his head to summon them with a sharp whistle, the two reluctantly turn toward the dinghy at the same moment that Nino extracts the revolver from his belt and peppers their backs with hot lead. Next, he trains the gun on the Sicilian. But he’s too late. The old man has levelled ‘na lupara at Nino and blows off his face with a concerted blast from both barrels.

ORDINATION



January 1955. Adamo's ordination took place at the main altar of the Basilica of Saint John Lateran, as was the tradition for graduates of the Pontifical Roman Seminary. Meanwhile, the Vatican Bank appointed an American bishop as its managing director and launched a vigorous programme of money laundering for the Neapolitan 'Ndrangheta, the Santa Corona Unita of Apulia, and the Sicilian Mafia.

When his mentor, Don Peppino, dies of old age, young Father Adamo DiDomenico and his paramour, Carlotta Baldasso, are left to fend for themselves. Piero Consani, who confessed to being the paramour of the mythical Beatrice Cenci has hanged himself. In a well of grief and pain, Carlotta suffers another epileptic attack and dies in her lover's arms. San Gregorio della Divina Pietà is falling into ruin, its parishioners emigrating abroad. Not a single Jew has returned to the ghetto from the ovens of the Third Reich.

Whereas Germany was enjoying full employment with its bombed-out cities rebuilt in modern style and comfort and most of its citizens' basic needs provided gratis, life in Italy more closely resembled the African savannah where animals are thought to be free but only because they are not caged or chained. People stayed on the move, migrating to wherever there was work, sending money home from their jobs in northern Italian and German factories or from the Americas as they had done during the pre-war era. Poor Italians were free neither in time nor in space. Like wild animals, they were only free to wander compulsively from place to place in search of sustenance, constantly on guard against threats to their personal security or the wellbeing of their loved ones. Freedom from Nazi-Fascisti control did not bring with it a range of choices amid an abundance of opportunities as it did elsewhere, especially in the former Nazi Germany. People were truly unconstrained only in their ability to leave the place. And leave the place they did, in a veritable Italian diaspora.

MALAFEMINA

Published in 'Liberazione', Il Giornale della Società per
La Liberazione Della Donna, June 1969

MALAFEMINA

by

Monsignor Adamo DiDomenico, O.P., J.C.D.

The Roman Catholic Church and various Italian Mafias share some important characteristic elements. Both institutions embody the concept of clientelismo in their pattern of recruitment and resource management. Power runs exclusively from top to bottom, responsibility from bottom to top. Both emphasize the Cult of the Leader – the Supreme Pontiff with his bishops and priests; 'il padrino ed i suoi capi' – the Godfather, his captains and their 'picciuotti', the foot soldiers. There is the Mafia 'family' and there is the 'famiglia sacerdotale' from which leading churchmen are traditionally drawn. The program of each is dedicated to safeguarding its own ethos by opposing, co-opting, and ultimately destroying any institution, person or other entity that might emerge to threaten it. But the similarities do not end here.

After discovering that the name of his birth mother, Anna Mortillaro has been entered into the list of 'Venerables' as a Christian martyr, Father Adamo writes a scathing criticism of church policy with regards to women which he publishes in the Journal of Women's Liberation. He has already made a name for himself as a widely-read and outspoken critic of church policy. When 'Malafemina' comes to the attention of the Holy Office, which is the modern incarnation of the nefarious Inquisition, Adamo receives a summons to appear before a tribunal. His assistant pastor, Father Rocco, accompanies him to the hearing.

"I hope you won't take offense, Adamo, but the tone of your writings is not conciliatory. On the contrary, in general your writings are inflammatory. You challenge readers to take issue with the politics of religion, especially its rather bad historical record, which is something not even the Curia is denying. I don't know where that comes from, I mean, why you should want to question everything and even attack the Pope and others on a very personal level. I feel very close to you, caro mio, but there must be something I don't know about your past, why you would seek this kind of revenge."

"Thank you, Rocco."

CANADA



As punishment for having criticised the Church in print, Adamo is transferred to Saint Agatha's, an obscure parish in Vancouver, British Columbia, halfway around the globe from Rome. Here he begins his slide into madness.

In exile, Father Adamo struggles with the burden of guilt; the guilt of having survived the Holocaust when his entire community perished in the gas chambers of Auschwitz; as well as the guilt of later having helped the perpetrators of the horrors in their escape to freedom. He experiences terrifying nightmares while struggling to understand his dilemma and somehow maintain his fragile sanity. He believes that his having been hidden in a wardrobe in the warehouse during the Gestapo raid and thereby surviving the war was a huge curse.

Gradually learning to speak English and carrying out his priestly duties, he becomes friendly with Sister Magdalena, principal of the parish elementary school. But Adamo, who now calls himself Adam, is tired and bored of the hoax that he calls his life.

One day, he receives a letter from Father Rocco telling him that his entire book collection is being shipped to Canada. In the shipment, Adam discovers a book with the stamp of the Italian Rabbinical Library on its frontispiece. He is reminded of the lost Jewish Library of Rome that was looted by the Nazis in 1943 and never recovered. He decides to write a white paper on the subject and seek a publisher.

Meanwhile, Sister Magdalena, whom after almost ten years he has begun to call Maggie, has confided the story of her life and how she came to discover that she had a vocation. Adam, however, never reveals that he is a Jewish orphan who escaped a Gestapo dragnet.

One night, after he and Maggie have consumed several bottles of red wine in a local restaurant, they awaken together next morning in one another's embrace in Adam's spacious bed in the rectory.

Sister Magdalena was only Adam's second female lover. If Carlotta had been a larder stocked with staple foods, Maggie was the little bistro on the corner down the block from her former flat in Montreal where she and her ex-lover drank Beaujolais while he cradled her hand in his beneath the fringes of a wine-stained and threadbare tablecloth. Maggie made love with the lights on, demanding her own satisfaction before allowing Adam the privilege of his. If Carlotta had reeked of raw onions and the fecund Italian soil, Maggie smelt of the washing machine and scrupulous self-maintenance, tumble dried. She always showered and scrubbed herself with Pears before bed.

MAGGIE



For her, the act itself was straightforward enough but the aftermath of each coupling was complicated and fraught with innuendo. Later, inside the plywood confessional box in the chapel each Saturday afternoon, she knelt before her lover to implore God's forgiveness, not for their adulterous actions, but instead for having violated her vow of chastity, at the same time savouring the sweet repetition of those forbidden fruits in her wickedly delicious confession.

Monsignor Di Domenico is engaged in an erotic relationship with a young nun.

Unlike the unlettered Carlotta, to whom such things came more or less naturally, Maggie had had to study and hence learn the theory and practice of lovemaking, first from the farm animals, then at the university. For her, the act itself was straightforward enough but the aftermath of each coupling was complicated and fraught with innuendo. Later, inside the plywood confessional box in the chapel each Saturday afternoon, she knelt before her lover to implore God's forgiveness, not for their adulterous actions, but instead for having violated her vow of chastity, at the same time remotely savouring the sweetness of those forbidden fruits which she recounted in minutest detail in her wickedly delicious confession. Kneeling at the altar rail, she recited the three Our Fathers and three Hail Marys that he routinely meted out to her in penance. Later the same evening, she would remove her bra and panties, carefully folding and placing them together on the stiff, wooden IKEA chair in his bedroom.

During their first session, she boldly instructed Adam to lubricate his penis with some extra virgin olive oil then gradually insert it into her anus, a little at a time, while massaging the low mound of her vagina as she slowly and rhythmically built to a climax. That way, she told him, she could avoid another accident and still allow him his release. This form of lovemaking wasn't inherently sinful, she insisted, so long as his seed was deposited inside her body and didn't fall onto the barren ground, something that was roundly condemned by Genesis 38:6-9. Holy Scripture was, at best, a little vague on the subject. The gossipy Sisters Rufina and Guistinia had counselled her that in any case this was the way a priest preferred it; but always with other men, they added in a chorus of eye winks and disgusted grimacing.

THE JEWISH BOOK FESTIVAL



I still needed for her to preen and comb and brush my hair, to fuss over me and tell me how pretty I was, to give me sweets to eat. By her indifference, she made me feel unworthy of a mother's love. There was no way I could merit it. So, I made my own decision and then I came to hate her for it. After that, well, after learning to hate your own mother, it's easy to hate the entire rest of the world.

Adam discovers a newspaper advertisement announcing a book festival taking place at the Jewish Community Centre. The festival includes a series of presentations and conferences on various aspects of Judaism, particularly the Holocaust. Adam decides to enter his paper on the Lost Jewish Library in the proceedings and is invited to present its contents in front of an audience. The chairperson of the conference is Atalia Hoffman, founder of the Holocaust Survivors' Association of Toronto.

He reads his paper aloud, then takes questions from the audience. When he leaves the conference room, he is confronted by Atalia Hoffman, his long-lost sister thought to have perished at Auschwitz. The two later return to the rectory at Saint Agatha's where, over the course of a weekend, Atalia recounts her version of their family history and her story of the horrors.

"When the roundup started on that day in October of 1943, I realized you were hiding inside the wardrobe in my room where you liked to sleep sometimes so I grabbed the key out of the lock on my way down the stairs, leaving you trapped inside. Afterwards, I used to miss the Bordello Beatrice, especially when I thought I would surely perish in the concentration camp. But that came later. Meanwhile, I had plenty of time to reflect on the meaning of family and what had gone wrong in ours. I began to see Mamma and her choices in a somewhat different light. It's so amazing how staring death in the face tends to clear the mind.

THE EXTERMINATION CAMP



Atalia recounts her journey from the whorehouse in Via Lungotevere dei Cenci to the movie studios of Rome's Cinecittà and, finally, to the Dachau concentration camp. She tells her brother that they must put the past behind them and move on, if they are to survive in the world.

"It's like I tell my clients in counselling. A person entering counselling and a person writing a book are embarking on what is essentially the same journey. And that's what you're doing now, Adam. Both experience a need to penetrate the surface in order to let their personal story reveal itself, and in the revelation comes a measure of healing. Within every person there are years of earned insights and wisdom, especially inside those of us who've been to Hell and back. Like I said, the object is to penetrate to the core of one's being where the experience resides in the psyche, to get hold of it, to get control over our thoughts and emotions and in this way gain mastery of our own personal demons, at the same time managing our frustrations and neutralizing our anger. I'm not talking about navel gazing here. This is serious stuff. You can't go through life running away from the Nazis in your mind without ending up a suicide. It's just too exhausting. So, you let them out. The past is never dead and buried. It isn't even the past. Get out that typewriter of yours and write, Adam. What in the world are you waiting for?"

"I started the Holocaust Survivors' Association of Toronto to give some purpose and direction to my own life and to keep me from suicide, and in so doing, I discovered how to heal myself. I learned how to work through the humiliation and the shame. Sure. Running away from your suffering does make some sense, up to a point. But you can't run to the ends of the earth without eventually falling off the edge. One day, you'll need to turn around and face your demons, to take from them the weapons you need to vanquish them and move on. This is what you take from the experience that makes you grow instead of diminishing yourself with the guilt and shame and grief until one day you're reduced by time and attrition to a raging maniac, like a mad dog that needs to be put down because he's a menace to himself and to society."

"There isn't anything ennobling or uplifting about suffering, Adam, despite what your church and its saints may have told you. They were folks with serious mental illnesses and emotional issues who needed professional help in a time when there wasn't any. The priests might preach poverty and chastity and a virtuous life of service to the poor but I'd seen enough of

them in the whorehouse to know that it's all a veneer. The Vatican doesn't follow the teachings of Saint Francis, if you get what I mean. It played a major role in putting me and the rest of our people in the extermination camps. You thought I didn't know anything about your new religion, didn't you? Well, all religions are the same, little brother, even Judaism, battling one another over who has the best imaginary friend. A person doesn't need a faith-based view to live in the world. And afterwards, well, it's my belief that your whole universe just dies with you. Face it, Adam. There simply is no God. Have you seen any evidence of it? Quite the contrary, I'd say.

THE RAINBOW



Atalia recounts how she first is forced to act in pornographic films for the Germans during her stay at Rome's Cinecittà then, starved and sick, is transported inside a cattle train to the extermination camp at Dachau. Having barely survived the journey, she is assigned work as a servant in the SS canteen. While projecting a pornographic film for the guards' amusement one evening, her role in the film is rediscovered. Eventually, she becomes the sex slave of the camp commandant and is moved to a room above the coal yard. Her condition greatly improves. She only wants to survive and will do anything to please her captors.

"In the SS mess hall, the Germans showed pornographic films after dinner on a white bed sheet they'd slung from the ceiling along one wall. One of the men pointed me out in the film. It was a kind of sick comedy that made them all laugh because the camera showed the guy's penis getting longer and longer as it withdrew from my head; to them it was hilarious. At the end, they dragged me to the front for a demonstration. I had to prove that it was really me acting in the film. So I took this guy's männchen down my throat while he held a pistol to my head. If it didn't fit all the way, I was going to be dead.

When the camp is liberated by soldiers of the Rainbow Division (42nd Infantry) and 45th Infantry, Atalia is released.

"After the American commander returned to headquarters in his staff car, a group of his men lined up some of the captured camp guards against a high stone wall of the coal yard and machine gunned them all. I watched this horrible scene from my second-floor bedroom with no feelings at all, at least no feelings of regret, other than the fact that bullets were bouncing off the brick wall as bodies piled up beneath my window. They must have disposed of a hundred that way but later it was claimed only about thirty guards who tried to resist were killed. I wasn't sure if I'd go from being a whore for the Germans to being a whore for the

Americans. Or maybe face their firing squad after they finished with the camp guards and started on the collaborators.”

THE PRIEBKE FILE

Surname	Priebke
Given Name	Erich
Date of Birth	29 July 1913
Place of Birth	Hennigsdorf, Prussia
Aliases	No known aliases
Status	German national. Wanted by British and American military police. Catholic; currently residing in Vipiteno in unidentified religious house.
Profession or Trade	Policeman
Education	Unknown
Qualifications	Waiter
Affiliations	Hauptsturmführer (Captain), Gestapo. Assistant chief of all Gestapo and <i>Sicherheitsdienst</i> operations in Rome.
Particulars	Responsible for the execution of 338 Italians and Jews at the Ardeatine Caves outside Rome (1944).
Priority	High
Recommendation	Transport to Argentina.
Conditions of Aid	Subject agrees to divulge the location of cache of gold bullion hidden near Bolzano; also gold cache hidden under Monte Soratte (vicinity Rome) containing assorted gold jewelry confiscated from Roman Jews in 1943.
Action	ICRC travel document approved. Vatican passport issued. Argentine visa confirmation pending.

Adam has saved all the files on Nazi fugitives assisted by Don Peppino, Carlotta and himself under the orders of Bishop Hudal. He keeps these files inside a tattered leather briefcase in a bottom dresser drawer in his apartment. Before she leaves for Toronto, Adam extracts the file on SS-Captain Erik Priebke and hands it to his sister. Priebke was the officer who arrested his Atalia and raped her in the backseat of his staff car on the way to Gestapo headquarters in Via Tasso. In this way, Atalia was rescued from the fate of their fellow

Jewish neighbours who without exception perished at Auschwitz. Nonetheless, Atalia holds Priebke responsible for her journey through Hell.



"I thought maybe he was next going to shove me naked out the door of the car; that would have been preferable to not knowing what came next. At least I might have had a chance for escape that way. But instead, he first stood outside the car awhile and casually smoked a cigarette."

Adam had no desire to recount his own history but promised to write everything down and send the memoir to her in the post. He knew he'd never do it. He struggled with the decision to show her the files he'd brought from Rome concerning the fugitive Nazi war criminals that he and the others had collaborated in sheltering. He was ashamed. But in the end, he extracted only a single file from his briefcase and placed it on the kitchen table. It was the file for SS-Captain Erich Priebke.

"Where did you get this, Adam?"

"It's a long story. If you want to make your flight tomorrow then the explanation will need to wait."

"Alright. Then let's you and I make a deal here. I want this file and I'll tell you what I'm going to do with it. I'm going to turn it over to Simon Wiesenthal. Agreed?"

Adam had to think about that for a minute. "Who's Simon Wiesenthal?"

"Marrona! You really do live under a rock. Wiesenthal is a Nazi hunter. His organization works with Mossad to bring criminals like Priebe to justice in Israel. Even as a whore I never whipped a man. But I'd make an exception this time."

THE INHERITANCE

April 13, 1982

Kennedy & Kennedy, Incorporated
100 The Embarcadero
San Francisco, California 94105

Mrs. Atalia Hoffman (née| Mortillaro)
456 Fortescu Drive
Scarborough, Ontario
Canada M1B 0A1

Re: Settlement of Estate

Dear Mrs. Hoffman,

This letter is to inform you that the firm of Kennedy & Kennedy, Incorporated, has been nominated as executor for the estate of the late Jackson Moore, AKA Jacob Mortillaro.

Enclosed please find a copy of the Last Will & Testament of the deceased and a detailed inventory of assets compiled by our estate agent, as well as an interpretation of some specific instructions set forth in the Will.

Please review the material and contact this office at your earliest convenience.

Kennedy & Kennedy wish to convey their sincerest condolences for the loss of your father and our assurance of a prompt and efficient settlement of his estate.

Sincerely yours,

E. Kennedy

Edward Kennedy, Attorney at Law

Jacob Mortillaro has died and left his descendants a considerable fortune. Atalia and Adam travel to California to settle the estate. They are now rich beyond their imaginations and decide to retire, Atalia to California where she cultivates a love relationship with Edward Kennedy, the executor of their father's Will, while Adam pens a letter to the Vancouver bishop resigning his post at Saint Agatha's and leaving the priesthood. He rents an apartment in Vancouver's West End and embarks on writing a novel he calls 'A Tyranny of God.'

But the inheritance comes with a curse.

Adam dropped his father's journal and went to his suitcase for the paper package then tore it open. The coarse brown wrapping was so fragile that it crumbled to shreds in his fingers. The contents, however, remained as fresh and crisp as the day they were minted on fine, all-rag paper, like virgin banknotes. It was as his father had hinted in the diary. Here was a thick stack of Nazi bearer bonds denominated in gold by weight and guaranteed by First National Bank of New York. The face value of the hoard would be worth far more than his and Atalia's entire inheritance, given that the market value of gold bullion had been allowed to float and already peaked at over seven hundred dollars an ounce, from thirty-five dollars in 1939 when the bonds were issued. Analysts were predicting that gold would break the thousand-dollar mark before the certificates matured in 1989 and keep on rising.

He grabbed the telephone and rang up his sister in California.

THE CURSE



The package contained half a billion dollars' worth of bearer bonds guaranteed by a major United States bank. Adam decides to deposit the hoard in a safety deposit box in the Bank of Montreal on the following Monday. But things aren't always so easy.

When Adam invited his sister to spend the weekend at his apartment after their reunion at the Jewish Book Festival, he hadn't counted on Maggie misunderstanding the situation. On the first morning of Atalia's stay, which was a Saturday, Maggie called at Adam's apartment as usual before her routine jog around the park. When his sister emerged from the bedroom, bedraggled and naked under Adam's bathrobe that had fallen open, Maggie assumed the woman was a prostitute that Adam had picked up the night before, and stormed out the door in a rage.

Later, while Adam was in California settling his father's estate, Maggie entered Adam's apartment using her key. There she discovered the briefcase containing the Nazi files. She took her find to the Vancouver auxiliary bishop and was assured that men had odd tastes. She wasn't to worry anymore about the matter, he instructed, but simply leave the files with the bishop.

Later, after Adam's return and discovery of the block of bearer bonds, while he is having dinner in a local restaurant, Maggie revisits his apartment with the intention of making peace with her lover but discovers that he had gone. Instead, she finds the block of Nazi bonds sitting open on the kitchen table. Maggie helps herself to one of the bonds which she again delivers to the bishop.

It wasn't just the sex, she told herself. Adam was different from Javier Hernandez Bello in almost every way. Maybe he wasn't a stud-muffin like Javier and couldn't quote Heidegger and Kant but then who needed to? His was a sensuality that went beyond the sexual, a more spiritual approach to love, suggesting to Maggie that union with God might be achieved through the physical merging of a man and a woman. Or perhaps it was vice-versa; that she needed to go through God to get to a real man. Adam's persona seemed Dionysian to her, more feminine than masculine and always a bit childlike, at times even naïve, yet powerfully seductive. With him, it was as if she'd come full circle back to the little girl sequestered inside herself, the one that instinctively played the little mother but often needed a bit of mothering

for herself. If she could only control her urge to button their shirts and stick Band-Aids on men's scraped knees, maybe she could someday find true love.. At this point, however, she doubted it would be in the arms of Monsignor Adam DiDomenico, OP, JCD.

Maggie had been to the auxiliary bishop to discuss the files she'd stolen from Adam's dresser drawer. He counselled her to stay in her place, to focus on her duties at the school and not concern herself with the personal interests of the pastor. Men had peculiar needs and odd tastes, he said, without elaborating. Even priests could be interested in war or fast cars or movie stars, he told Maggie. He'd once served as a chaplain in the Canadian Forces himself. Priests were people, after all. Maybe World War II was a hobby. So the guy kept files on Nazi war criminals? No harm in that. And studying Judaism could be informative. Hadn't the Pope himself declared a rapprochement with the Jews in 1965?

Maggie had not dared mention their ongoing love affair or the fact that she'd caught Adam on the morning after with an over-ripe sex trade worker from the East End in his bedroom. She couldn't bring herself to even think about that episode.

THE ATTACK



A forensic accountant's report from the law firm of Kennedy & Kennedy has confirmed what Adam suspected, namely that the Nazi bonds were still legal and negotiable and that City National Bank (formerly First National Bank of New York) had an obligation to pay on the date of maturity only a few years away. The lawyers advised that the bond holder's life may be endangered as interested parties, such as the secret services of both East and West Germany and the United States, or even the Vatican, would likely take measures to acquire the bonds or to suppress any efforts to redeem them.

Adam deposits the Nazi bonds in a safety deposit box at the Bank of Montreal in downtown Vancouver, then decides to stop at the rectory of Saint Agatha's to collect some remaining boxes. While taking a short-cut through the Downtown Eastside, the most rundown and dangerous part of the city, he encounters a group of Native youths on a drinking spree.

Suddenly Adam was grabbed from behind and jerked to the ground, conscious only of the vise-like pressure of an arm clamped around his neck, cutting off his breath and circulation until he quit resisting and his head slammed onto the pavement. In the turmoil, he tried to roll onto his side in a foetal position, to better shield his vital parts from the kicks and blows that seemed to come from all angles at once.

"Fuck 'im up, fuck 'im up good," he heard an angry woman's voice screaming. "Kill da muddafucka!" Someone began prodding him in the neck with the sharp glass bottleneck, the one that had just now connected with his head, searching out the jugular vein.

"Cud 'im up! Cud 'im up real good!"

He felt the warm, viscous blood oozing from his nose and mouth and scalp. Someone kicked him hard in the ribs. They would beat him senseless. There was no defence or option but to try to remain conscious until this orgy of anger and violence was over. More blows then a sickening crunch in his chest, a broken rib or maybe worse.

He regained consciousness some time later in a back lane wedged between a dumpster and a burnt-out car with no idea of how he'd gotten there. Every bone in his wiry frame ached and there was blood and gravel matted in his hair. His upper and lower lips were badly split and with a swollen tongue the size of a sausage he could feel his front teeth dangling by their roots inside his mouth. One eye had swelled shut but he still had sight in the other.

He hauled himself to his feet and staggered drunkenly out of the lane towards a convenience store at the corner of the block. When he lurched through the entrance, he asked the young Asian girl behind the counter to please call for help. His voice was badly slurred. The girl ignored him. A customer placed some items on the checkout counter: four bottles of Chinese cooking wine, fifty cents apiece. This rotgut was cheaper and more potent than the more expensive wine the government sold in its monopoly liquor stores, if one could stand the salty taste.

"You wan call? Go telefon boot corner! Out!" The girl snapped. "You gedda out! Make my store dirdee!"

Adam staggered back toward the entrance, dripping blood. When he reached the sidewalk outside, a police cruiser was already docked at the corner and blocking access to the street, its blue strobes flashing. The cops had spied his assailants emptying a suspicious backpack onto the street and held the entire group in handcuffs with their faces against the side of the car, looking now like a flock of harmless, innocent lambs.

"Are you the victim, sir?" It was all so mundane.

THE POLICE RAID



Adam recovers from the severe beating received at the hands of the gang of Native teens. He is summoned to a preliminary hearing but refuses to testify against his assailants. Later, when as he approaches his building in the West End, a police SWAT Team is raiding his flat, confiscating his entire book collection and other personal effects. Adam retreats to a hotel where he shelters for the night.

Next day, he returns to find the building's door has been battered down and the landlady serves him with an eviction notice. Later the same day, he receives a visit from a Native woman who thanks him for not testifying against her grandson whom she is trying to raise under difficult circumstances.

Here begins the romance of Adam and Kathleen.

"My name's Kathleen Jordan. I came to thank you for not testifying against my grandson, you know, the boy who caused you so much trouble. You lied in court. I'm grateful to you for not making my life – our life – any harder than it already is. I'm indebted to you, sir. So, if there's anything you might need or want, then please let me know."

"Well," Adam replied, half-jokingly, "You wouldn't happen to have a place to rent? I've just been evicted from my flat."

Kathleen took a step backward then looked him up and down. The guy was in bad shape, but she'd seen a lot worse; been in that condition herself. She knew how it felt to be abused and physically beaten.

“You can come to my place if you like. Just a basement suite over on Glen Drive behind the railway tracks but it’s a dry place to hang your hat and I’m a passable cook if I don’t mind saying.”

“What about Mister Jordan and all the little Jordans?”

“There is no Mister Jordan. Why? Were you thinking about applying for the position?” Kathleen has started fiddling with the buttons on the front of Adam’s shirt that remained open when he fled the hotel in a rush and, in any case, he would need to struggle with since both his wrists were still encased in plaster. He felt an involuntary hardening inside his pants.

“Come on upstairs,” he said and gestured to the staircase with his head. Kathleen grabbed one crutch then slipped her free hand under his armpit, helping him to mount the stairs. She smells nice, Adam thought, a mixture of cheap perfume and cigarettes and woman sweat that was not unpleasant. Maybe it was just his hormones, he reminded himself. The more he craved relief, the lower his standards became. He hadn’t been with a woman since before the spat with Maggie over a hooker he’d brought home for the weekend, the one he introduced as his sister.

HAIDA GWAI (QUEEN CHARLOTTE ISLANDS)



Adam telephones his sister to tell her of his ‘accident’ (struck by a car while riding his bicycle) and finds out that Edward Kennedy’s law office has been burglarized. Jacob’s former home on Telegraph Hill in San Francisco where Atalia now lives was also broken into and the safe blown open with dynamite, wrecking part of the house. Adam and Atalia know for certain that someone is looking for the Nazi bonds.

Kathleen Jordan offers to take Adam to her former home in the Queen Charlotte Islands located off the north coast of British Columbia where he can hide out until a solution is found to their dilemma. Here they rent a cabin on Graham Inlet and purchase an old fishing boat. Adam tells Kathleen that he is a retired snake oil salesman. Kathleen returns to Vancouver to try and convince her delinquent grandson to return to the Charlottes with her.

One day, Kathleen tells Adam about the Haidas’ version of creation:

“The Haida don’t have a single god like the White Man’s. We have many gods if you want to call them that. The most important one is Raven. They say that Raven made the world. Raven is a real party animal. One day he was throwing a party and he needed more guests, so he brought people out from inside the earth and that’s how human beings got here. Another story says that he opened a huge clamshell and out jumped the human race. Sometimes I wish he’d left it shut. The world was already perfect without us. You see, Raven is too curious and that’s why there’s so much trouble in the world.”

QUIS UT DEUS



Did you think the Church runs on Ave Marias, Adam? That stuff is for the masses, the so-called 'Faithful'. That's what 'faith' is, you see, a willingness and ability to suspend one's sense of reality, to believe in the unseen, even the absurd. If intimidation or character assassination don't work, then we have a license to kill. Like James Bond. Only my license comes from God. *Quis ut Deus.*"

While Kathleen is away, Adam receives another letter from Father Rocco in Rome, telling him that their old seminary classmate, Pietro Monfrinoli, has been making enquiries about him. Later, he flies into the airport at Masset and tells Adam that he is living in Montreal now, although he is still a priest. He reveals that he works for the Vatican Secret Services and confesses to a litany of extortions and murders. Adam suspects that Pietro's visit has something to do with the bonds and, over several bottles of wine, the two men come to an arrangement. The Church will pay Adam the face value of the bonds in cash, although they will be worth a thousand times that amount on the maturity date. For Adam, it's a sure thing; for the Church, a gamble. Otherwise, Pietro confesses, he will have to kill Adam as per orders.

"Did you ever hear about a stash of Nazi gold bonds?"

Pietro stopped his monologue to treat Adam to another one of his unnerving stares.

"No. But go on."

He was lying. He was toying with Adam, once his best friend. Father Pietro Monfrinoli had been watching Adam for years, decades even, since the day that Cardinal Tisserant, who was in charge of the Vatican Secret Archives, had called him to his office in the Curia. The Cardinal was curious as to how a lowly priest had acquired the sensitive information for his publications and suspected that Father DiDomenico was enjoying unauthorized access to the Secret Archives and even to records of the Vatican Bank; a spy in the house of God. It was Tisserant who was behind Adam's exile to Canada, not some lowly misogynist Inquisitor, or even Bishop Marcinkus whom Adam had fingered in his treatise on Vatican corruption and the Italian mafias. His punishment issued straight from the top, one click below the Pope himself.

"Gold bonds guaranteed by Citibank. I have half a billion dollars' worth and I suspect the Church wants to get its lunch hooks into them. I need to talk with whoever is in charge and make a deal. What do you think, Pietro? Interested?"

“Very. I’m very interested, Adam. I think I can fix your problem. What’s the face value of the bonds?”

“Five hundred sixty-one thousand.”

“And the value at maturity? Tell me again, please.”

“A thousand times the face value.”

“Guaranteed I can get you the face value in cash in all unmarked bills, if you give me the bonds.”

“Okay. Then bring the money here to the Charlottes and we’ll make the exchange.”

“Con piacere, caro mio, con molto piacere. With pleasure my dear friend, with great pleasure. It would be a lot easier on my conscience than having to kill you.”

“In that case,” Adam replied, “Ego te absolvo a peccatis tuis in nomine Patris, et Filii et Spiritus Sancti.”

MURDER AT SEA



Kathleen has returned to the Charlottes with her grandson, Ricky, in tow. Over the next months, the boy takes to boating like a duck to water. Meanwhile, Adam tells Kathleen that he expects a visit by a priest friend from Italy who is helping him settle the estate of a deceased relative. Kathleen knows nothing of the bonds although Adam had given her the key to his safety deposit box and instructed her to bring the mysterious package back to the Charlottes with her.

After meeting Pietro Monfrinoli for a second time at the little Masset airport, they return to their cabin on Masset Inlet. A storm is brewing and the departure of Pietro's flight scheduled for the following day is in doubt. That night, Kathleen tells Adam of her suspicions about the man and accuses Adam's friend of making inappropriate gestures and propositioning her for sex. Adam ignores her protest. He has told Kathleen a lie about the reason for Pietro's visit.

The next day, Adam and Ricky set out to deliver Pietro to Masset and his return flight to Montreal. The weather is worsening by the minute.

He left the head and quickly climbed the short ladder to the deck then stealthily approached the bridge. Adam's attention was focused dead ahead, on the small patch of water he could actually see over the bow, trying to peer through the pea soup at the same time he checked the radar blips for signs of approaching vessels or large floating tree stumps. Silently positioning himself behind his old schoolmate, Pietro reached into his jacket pocket and uncoiled the fine stainless steel wire, then deftly flung it over his victim's head and pulled. Adam lost his footing as he spun the wheel and the boat responded by lurching hard to port. A gust of wind caught the vessel broadside, almost capsizing it as water rushed in over the

gunwales and the little craft bobbed helplessly like a cork in the trough, its engine racing wildly then just as suddenly braking as its bronze propeller rose out of the water then plunged back again. Adam couldn't see his assailant or protect his neck from the sharp wire that was searing through his flesh, crushing his larynx and about to sever his jugular vein.

The boy heard the clattering of boot heels on the deck overhead and reluctantly drew himself out of the bunk. It was their normal signal to come topside. He tossed the empty beer bottle into the galley's tiny steel sink with a sharp clank and pulled on his jockey shorts then his pants. He was planning a languorous session with one of the Hustler spreads but decided he'd better see what Adam wanted first. The sudden sideways lurch of the boat suggested they'd rammed something. He pulled his woollen toque down over his forehead and slipped on a pair of gumboots, then grabbed a life jacket and headed for the short ladder.

The two grappling men topside were locked in uneven combat that had progressed from the sheltered bridge to the boat's small open deck. They were in serious danger of toppling overboard together into the icy water. A person could only survive around five minutes in the cold North Pacific water without a survival suit, three of which Adam had recently purchased and stashed in the hold in case of emergency. They wouldn't do him any good now that he was being mercilessly strangled.

Pietro had miscalculated Adam's stamina in the confined space of the bridge and the sudden sideways lurch of the boat caused him to momentarily loosen his grip on the garrotting wire. Neither man noticed the fillet knife until the boy had plunged its narrow blade deep between Pietro's shoulder blades. Ricky then grabbed Adam's assailant from behind and brought him down with a knee to the small of the man's back while continuing to stab and slash with the knife until the limp, lifeless body slumped to the deck.

As a final touch, he sliced the man's throat from ear to ear with the fillet knife, as easily and calmly as if he were gutting a salmon, still holding the head upright by its crop of longish hair, a bewildered look of sudden incomprehension in his victim's glassy dead eyes. The boy let out a loud war hoop.

"Should I scalp him for you too, Chief?" he shouted sarcastically over the din of the storm, a tilted man's head in one hand, the menacing fish knife in the other, dripping blood.

Adam stared up at the boy in shock and disbelief, speechless.

"Okay, Adam. Now I don't owe you no more. Right?"

THE BARBECUE



Next morning, Adam awakens to find Kathleen and her grandson balling up scraps of paper and feeding them into the fireplace. She has already burned all the Nazi bonds and is starting on the banknotes. Kathleen is angry. The boy is cradling a shotgun.

“You need to make amends to your dead friend.”

“How can I do that? He’s at the bottom of the Inlet. And anyway, if it weren’t for Ricky, he’d have murdered me. Is that what you want?”

“That doesn’t matter. His angry spirit will make my life a hell of suffering. All night I felt his clammy fingers on my body rubbing and scratching with his sharp claws and pinching by breasts and he tried to slide his cold, dead cock between my legs but I kept pushing it away. I didn’t sleep the whole night. He’s gonna return again tonight he says, to fuck me proper and that way carry my soul to the bottom of the ocean and make me his drowned wife.”

“But what did you do with the bonds? That’s my question. Just answer, okay?”

“You mean the papers with the swastikas? We already burned them. Now we’re burning the money. I told your dead friend he can go away after all the paper is burned. He can collect it in the Afterlife and do whatever greedy ghosts do with dead money. Otherwise, I have to fuck him at the bottom of the ocean until all the money is earned and I don’t want to finish my life that way. I counted it first. Half a million dollars is a lot of blowjobs and lays. It would take forever.”

THE TRIAL



June 1996. Adam, Kathleen and Atalia have arrived in Rome for the trial of SS-Captain Erik Priebke who is charged with crimes against humanity. It was Eichmann in Jerusalem all over again, a show trial that only served to underscore the banality of evil, that is, ordinary people committing extraordinarily horrific acts as if these were normal, everyday occurrences and without any qualms of conscience whatsoever.

The trio checked into the Hotel Roma in Via Giovanni Armendola, just up the street from a small shrine dedicated to the Papessa Giovanna, the Dark Age female pope, and near the seminary where Adam had first studied. Atalia registered herself under the name of Atalia Kennedy. She and Edward Kennedy, her late father's lawyer, had married in the interim and settled into comfortable retirement in Jacob's house on Telegraph Hill. Edward's health was in decline and he'd decided not to make the trip to Rome with his wife. That's life, his sister told Adam. She was enjoying what happiness had come her way during their twilight years. With a little luck, this trial might even bring her a measure of revenge against an eighty-four-year-old man who, in her recollection of times past, symbolized all that was wrong with the world, a person who had been the catalyst for everything that happened afterwards in her life.

The other two registered as Adam and Kathleen Jordan. Adam and Kathleen had legally married – a first marriage for both of them – and, since the Haidas were a matrilineal society,

he took her surname and his Canadian citizenship papers made no mention of Mortillaro or Di Domenico. Adam had reinvented himself. He was writing 'A Tyranny of God,' his first novel and had again turned his pen, or rather his laptop computer, to political commentary and was welcomed back into the community of writers and artists concerned with the prospects for a better world. The novelist can better define reality than the historian, he now believed; history is too easily denied.

The world news media commented:

"Where had he been all this time? According to Nazi-hunters as well as several retired Nazis, Priebke was spirited out of Italy on a Vatican passport via the Ratline, an underground railway organized by a pro-Nazi Austrian bishop called Alois Hudal with the blessing of Pope Pius XII, duping the International Committee of the Red Cross and thwarting the international courts of justice. Of course, the Vatican has always denied the very existence of the Ratline, but when Priebke resurfaced recently in San Carlo de Bariloche in Patagonia, his friend and next-door neighbour turned out to be a close associate of Bishop Hudal, a former German army lieutenant called Reinhard Kops who worked closely with the Pontifical Commission of Assistance headed by the soon-to-be Pope Paul VI. Priebke had been living opening in Argentina for over fifty years and made trips back and forth to Europe under his own name.

A Ratline file on Priebke mysteriously surfaced during preliminary hearings to the trial, prompting new questions about the Vatican's role in atrocities committed during the Nazi era and its possible involvement in a resurgence of Neo-Nazism. Priebke himself has become something of a celebrity who continues to publicly deny that gas chambers were used in Nazi concentration camps and claiming that generations have been brainwashed into believing that they were. He is a totally unrepentant Nazi and an icon for racist skinhead gangs and other troublemakers seeking a resurgence of 'Aryan' values in the world.

All eyes will be on Rome in the next weeks to see if the Italians will shield their former ally from the long arm of international law. It has taken the world's conscience half a century to bring this man to justice. All bets are that he will walk free. Italy and the Vatican have far too much to hide and will likely not allow the floodgates to be opened and their courts become clogged with thousands of outstanding criminal cases from World War II, despite the fact that even in Italy there is no statute of limitations on 'Murder One'.

During the first weeks of the hearings, former SS-Lieutenant Kops, the prosecution's key witness, mysteriously fell from the balcony of his suite in a Rome hotel. Although the injured man survived and is resting in hospital, he has decided to completely retract his testimony.

EPILOGUE



Former SS-Captain Erich Priebke was exonerated of all responsibility for criminal acts and crimes against humanity stemming from his service as second-in-command of the Gestapo in Rome. He walked from the Italian courtroom a free man.

When prosecutors tried to overturn the Roman tribunal's verdict – the Italian judges had voted two to one for acquittal – on appeal, on the basis that the man was in fact guilty of the first-degree murder of at least two Italians and that no statute of limitations existed even in Italy for such crimes, Priebke took his case to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg where he argued against the Nuremberg Principle IV. By that time, media exposure had emboldened the man and inspired the Neo-Nazi movement in Germany and elsewhere to attack synagogues, cemeteries and other symbols of Judaism.

Priebke died in 2013 at age 100 of natural causes in Rome, still under house arrest and living at the comfortable home of a Roman lawyer. During the Catholic funeral conducted in the Italian city of Albano Laziale located some twenty-five kilometres from Rome, violent rioting broke out between Neo-Fascists and anti-Fascist protesters. Eventually, the body was interred on an Italian military base at a secret location, one assumes with full military honours.

Former SS-Captain Erich Priebke enjoyed the protection and support of the international Nazi movement, the governments of Argentina and Italy, and the Roman Catholic Church. He died an unrepentant Nazi and race hater, an inspiration to those who would have the world return to the twin horrors of Fascism and Nazism.

PART TWO

Character Arc

Principal Characters:

Adamo Di Domenico (Adam, née Mortillaro), a Roman Catholic priest and doctor of canon law (protagonist)

Atalia Hoffman (née Mortillaro), Adamo's sister (impact character)

Jacob Mortillaro, Adamo's biological father, a Jewish-Italian opera singer

Anna Mortillaro, Jacob's Jewish-Italian wife and mother of Adamo and Atalia

Lucrezia Malatesta, Jewish-Italian opera diva and Jacob's lover

Manufredi (Manfred Alberto Rothschild), Lucrezia's husband

Antonio 'Nino' Torturicci, Lucrezia's agent

Lorena Sanchez, Lucrezia's American understudy and Jacob's new lover

Adolphe Radcliffe, managing director of the Metropolitan Opera

Monsignor Peppino Quatrocchi, pastor of the church of San Gregorio Della Divina Pietà and young Adamo's adoptive father

Fathers Emilio and Pompeo, assistants to Monsignor Quatrocchi

Carlotta Baldasso, housekeeper for the priests

Pietro Monfrinoli, seminarian and Adam's childhood friend

Father Rocco Uriati, Adam's former schoolmate and later his assistant pastor

Sister Magdalena, Principal of Saint Agatha's Elementary School and Adam's lover

Kathleen Jordan, Adam's new lover

Ricky Jordan, Kathleen's teenage grandson

Beatrice Cenci, a ghost

Bishop Alois Hudal, sponsor of the Vatican Ratline

Colonel Herbert Kappler, Head of the Gestapo, Rome

Captain Erich Priebke, Gestapo officer and second-in-command, Rome headquarters

Edward Kennedy, an American lawyer

An auxiliary bishop of Vancouver

Adamo Di Domenico (née Mortillaro).

Young Adamo (later, Adam) is the main protagonist as well as a moral centre of the story, in the end having retained his faith in God, although radically altered.

Adam emerges a winner, having faced a complex of challenges in his life. He survives abandonment by his father and the subsequent murder of his mother, then the arrest and deportation of his sister. In the end, he reconnects with his Jewish roots, reconciling his Christian upbringing with his ethnic reality. He finds peace and achieves happiness by reinventing himself.

Adam begins the narrative as a prisoner of himself. Throughout most of the story, he is compelled to conceal his Jewish roots. Rome is garrisoned by the German army and the Italian Jews have been shipped to Auschwitz and exterminated. As a small boy hiding from the Gestapo in a church rectory under the protection of its elderly pastor, he falls under the man's influence and follows a role scripted for him by others, that is, he attends the seminary and becomes a priest.

As he matures, Adam cannot control his impulse to criticize the Church which he sees as hypocritical and responsible for much of the current misery in the world, especially through its backing of the Axis powers in World War II and the destruction of his family. On the one hand, he tries to heed his mentor's advice to criticize the Church as a mother, not a mother-in-law, but asks himself: "What if your mother is a whore and a murderess?"

He wants to reconcile reality with what his seminary training and Judeo-Christian principles tell him is acceptable to God; at the same time, he fears the temporal power of the Church. When confronted with a moral dilemma, he instead follows orders and falls into line, thereby becoming what he considers a passive enabler of evil. His published treatise entitled 'Malafemina,' written upon receiving news of his murdered Jewish mother's nomination to the ranks of the Blessed (stage one of the canonization process and eventual sainthood) leads to his exile to Canada, serving as the emotional midpoint of the novel.

The guilt of having aided the escaping Nazi war criminals is added to the burden of lies he has had to tell in order to conceal his roots in the Jewish ghetto. After the war, he remains reluctant to come out as a Jew. Instead, he is seen as a repentant Catholic priest seeking to make amends rather than the Holocaust survivor he actually is. He speaks Giudeo-Romanesco dialect to people he meets in the small, reconstituted Jewish community but nobody remembers him or clues into his real identity. He wants the community to reclaim him without his having to do anything, but it does not. Like God who abandoned His people in their hour of need, Adam feels abandoned by his race. He begins a slide into depression after the simultaneous deaths of Monsignor Quatrocchi and the housekeeper Carlotta when, as the parish's new pastor, he presides over their double funeral.

When he is reunited with his sister in Canada, Adam gathers the strength to confront his demons. The coincidence of Sister Magdalena encountering Atalia in his apartment and mistaking her for a prostitute is the turning point of the story and the catalyst for his change. Soon afterwards, the random beating he receives at the hands of a group of Native youths leads to his relationship with Kathleen Jordan who picks up the torch from Adam as the moral axis of the story. In dealing with the bond dilemma, Kathleen forces Adam into resolving his personal issues and reinventing himself as a whole human being. He discovers in himself the ability to trust and therefore love another person (e.g., Kathleen), wherein lies the key to his redemption.

Anna Mortillaro

The character of Anna, wife of Jacob and mother of Adamo and Atalia, is not developed to any great extent. She is primarily a metaphor for the subjugation and persecution of Italian Jewry during the latter years of Mussolini's regime and the German occupation of Rome. She struggles with the issue of having had to sacrifice her personal and religious principles in order to survive. Nonetheless, in so doing, she finds a measure of personal satisfaction. Unable to achieve sexual gratification in her marriage with Jacob, she later finds it in a commercial relationship with the Christian landlord in spite of his treating her merely as a whore.

Anna's tragic death is also metaphoric of the Church's historic vilification of the Jews. The fictitious ad hoc sermon on Mary Magdalene that Pius XII delivers to his retainers outside the Basilica of Saint John Lateran, where Anna is employed cleaning pigeon droppings from the base of the marble columns (the feet of God's mother church), leads to her abuse by the milling crowd. She is murdered by shots fired from one of the departing German military vehicles protecting the Pope's cortege. Anna is a tragic figure who loses her life precisely at the point when she thinks she can survive the war.

Afterwards, the Church whitewashes her murder by declaring in *L'Osservatore Romano*, the Vatican newspaper, that the woman was a Christian martyr shot down by the godless partisans during an assassination attempt on the Pope and inters her body in the martyr's crypt of the basilica. When the adult Adamo, now a priest, learns of his Jewish mother's fate, the discovery adds to his angst. He publishes a treatise entitled 'Malafemina' that in turn triggers his exile to Canada by the Inquisition.

Monsignor Peppino Quatrocchi

Monsignor Peppino Quatrocchi is a quiet hero of the story. He is a card-carrying Fascist who sees the Church's role as a partner with the Italian state in a positive context. He wants all the benefits of Fascism but none of its dark side. He conducts imaginary debates with the exiled and later dead Mussolini. He is well connected by family and career ties with higher ups at the Vatican and wields some influence although he remains a humble priest. Adam later learns that his mentor was instrumental in formulating Mussolini's policy of internal exile for political dissidents rather than killing them outright as the Germans had done. When Monsignor Quatrocchi is forced to participate in Bishop Hudal's ratline, he anguishes over the fate of his own immortal soul and the corruptive influence on his young protégé.

Peppino Quatrocchi saved Adam from the Gestapo roundup on October 16, 1943. Some years earlier, he saved young Carlotta from stoning by an angry crowd. Carlotta and Adam are pariahs who grow up in the shelter of the rectory under his protection, she as housekeeper, he a foster son and the man's successor. The pastor hopes to see Adam, with his roots in Judaism and the Holocaust, become Pope of a revitalized Roman Catholic Church. This is his eleventh-hour offer to God (represented by a life-size polychromed Jesus hanging on a cross from his office wall), in order to absolve himself of the sin of collaboration with the twin evils of Fascism and Nazism.

Carlotta Baldasso

Carlotta's story parallels Adam's to a considerable extent. As a child, is rescued by Monsignor Quatrocchi from an angry street mob and grows up sheltered in the rectory. When eight-year-old Adam arrives there in 1943, Carlotta is around age thirty. She is

somewhat simple-minded but imparts a native sagacity about life in rearing young Adam, teaching him through parables and bedtime stories, scribbling her folksy philosophy on his *tabula rasa*. She is a lonely, childless woman with a desperate need for love. When Adam reaches his teens, the two enter into a love affair that emotionally ensnares Adam, and her early death further adds to his conflict and burden of guilt.

Carlotta's infirmity remains unexplained in the story except to say that she suffers 'spells' which led to her being stoned in the street as a little girl and her subsequent rescue from the mob by Don Peppino. She keeps her hands and feet bandaged or in gloves as persons suffering the 'stigmata' (Saint Teresa, others; bleeding from the hands and feet) were known to have done. Although metaphoric, this is not a significant element in the story. Her emotional state on the night of Monsignor Quatrocchi's death triggers another spell and she dies under Adam's attempts to restrain her. Their relationship and its tragic finale marks Adam for life and impacts his struggle for identity and peace. In fact, Carlotta suffers the symptoms of Quarten Malaria, a disease common in Rome before Mussolini's administration caused the Pontine Marshes to be drained. Her condition is metaphoric, as the Germans sabotaged the dykes and pumps in a vindictive reprisal before abandoning Rome to the advancing Allied armies. Although Carlotta survives the war, she does not survive the peace.

Atalia Hoffman (née Mortillaro)

Adamo's sister is a rather spoiled girl before their father abandons the family in 1939 when she is fourteen. Her dream is to become a movie queen at Rome's new Cinecittà studios, the Hollywood on the Tiber that Mussolini has created. She witnesses her mother's struggle to support the family and her affair with the landlord. When Anna is killed early in 1943, Atalia drags her little brother off to a brothel where she becomes a whore, rather than debasing herself in the same way her mother had done. Living conditions in the brothel improve for the siblings until the Gestapo's raid a half-year later.

Atalia survives the war by claiming to the SS during the roundup that she is a Christian, an allegation confirmed by the three Dominican priests, including Monsignor Quatrocchi, who are also arrested inside the brothel but later released. She is taken to Gestapo headquarters in Via Tasso by SS-Captain Priebke who rapes her in the staff car on the way. There she is offered the chance to star in some German comfort (pornographic) films being made at Cinecittà studios, a reprieve from the cattle train to Auschwitz. Here is where her character begins to develop.

Atalia survives the Dachau concentration camp and immigrates to Canada as a displaced person along with her fake husband and child, a mute orphan the couple picks up along the way. When her husband turns out to have been a fugitive war criminal and is mysteriously murdered along with their daughter in Vancouver, Atalia's life hits bottom. In the concentration camp, she wanted to live. In Vancouver, after the murder of her adopted daughter she only wants to die. Instead, she faces up to her reality and moves to Toronto to create the Holocaust Survivor's Association, an alternative to suicide.

Atalia tells her brother that acting is her life's work and being a whore is the role she interprets. She believes that everyone in the core of his or her being is a whore (e.g., everyone has a price), regardless of profession or social status in life. One only needs to be tested to prove it.

Atalia is also a winner since she rises from the wreckage of her life to reinvent herself in a positive and productive way. She has learned compassion through suffering. She emerges as

a tough Jewish matron who urges her troubled brother to face up to his past and thereby claim ownership of his future.

Jacob Mortillaro

Like his son Adam and daughter Atalia, Jacob is also a survivor. He abandons his origins in the Jewish ghetto of Rome – along with his family – and reinvents himself in America. He never looks back.

Jacob begins the story as a tenor with the Teatro Dell'Opera di Roma. He is an opportunist who engages in love affairs behind his wife's back. He is in love, or at least in lust, with Lucrezia Malatesta, a Jewish-Italian soprano. When Lucrezia travels to America with her husband, Manfredi, in 1939 to star in the opera Aida, Jacob follows on their invitation, hoping to resume their affair.

Jacob's first year in New York is an eye opener for him on the issue of racism in the American entertainment industry, something that did not exist in Italy before 1938. While acting in the role of Radamès in the Metropolitan Opera's 1940 production of Aida, he falls in love with Lorena Sanchez, a young Negro woman who is Lucrezia's understudy. When they are later compelled to flee New York through a conjunction of circumstances, Jacob gives up grand opera to pursue a career in jazz. He and Lorena open the Blue Diamond Club in San Francisco and join Bob Hope, Marlene Dietrich and others in a frontline USO troupe entertaining soldiers during the war years. They become immensely successful but remain childless.

When Lorena passes away, Jacob wills his entire estate to Adamo and Atalia and his abandoned wife Anna, whom he names as his sole heirs. Jacob never finds out the exact fates of his Italian family although while on tour in the European Theatre of Operations, he discovers the fate of the Jewish ghetto of Rome. He and Lorena cancel their planned junket to Italy in 1945 and return home instead. Both Jacob and Lorena are opportunists who don't let personal or family obligations hold them back.

Jacob's diaries serve as a dramatic device to introduce facts and interpret the origin of the German bonds for the reader.

Manfredi

Manfred Alberto Rothschild is a member of the Italian branch of the Rothschild banking clan. He is an Oxford-educated wheeler-dealer moving Jewish capital out of Europe as Germany and Italy ramp up for the Holocaust. He heavily invests his and his clients' money in a Nazi war bond issue that is underwritten by First National Bank of New York.

Manfredi is an arts patron but not an artiste. He is a generous man who is loyal to his friends. He has raised Lucrezia up from the gutter to become a major star of grand opera; however, their pre-war junket to New York is mainly to facilitate the bonds purchase in conjunction with Jewish underworld interests.

Manfredi's associates include Bernardo Nogara who is 'God's Banker,' that is, head of the Vatican Bank, Martin Bormann who is Hitler's banker and protégé, and a consortium of Jewish gangsters in New York. One night on a New Jersey beach while handing over a briefcase filled with bonds intended for Bormann to a landing party from a German submarine, he is forced aboard the U-boat and never returns. Nino Torturicci, who is nominally Lucrezia's agent but is actually Manfredi's bodyguard and go-fer, is killed in a

subsequent exchange of gunfire on the beach. Jacob is then left in possession of the Nazi bonds that Nino was to have turned over to the New York Mob. The bonds become a curse on Jacob and his heirs.

Manufredi serves as a viewpoint character for, in his own words, ‘the cabal of financiers that runs the world.’ Like Nogara and Bormann, Manufredi believes that money is neutral, regardless of its origins. The best time to ‘grow’ money, he tells Jacob, is in times of crisis. He will benefit from the impending world war by facilitating the transfer of Jewish capital, ‘wetting his beak’ a little with each transaction. He epitomizes everything that the Rothschild banking establishment has stood for in the last two hundred years.

Lucrezia Malatesta

The beautiful Jewish-Italian diva can shatter a crystal goblet using only her vocal chords. She is as spoiled and vain as she is talented. Jacob is attracted to Lucrezia but their relationship ends when he takes up with her understudy, Lorena Sanchez. After Lucrezia tears a vocal cord during the opening performance of Aida and the same evening trips on her own gown and breaks an ankle, Lorena replaces her in the leading role. Lucrezia lies in bed with hot towels wrapped around her neck and her leg in plaster, tossing china cups and plates at everyone. Soon after Manufredi disappears, she dies of an alcohol and barbiturate overdose.

Lorena Sanchez

Seventeen-year-old Lorena is the up-and-coming ‘Dominican Diva.’ Her exotic blue eyes and café-au-lait complexion enchant Jacob and inspire him to write Gershwin-style tunes for her to perform. Together they make the acquaintance of Billie Holiday and other recording artists who encourage Lorena to pursue a jazz career with Jacob as her composer and piano accompanist. Lorena’s and Jacob’s affair is the only relationship that long endures.

Although the Met bills her as an opera diva from Spain after Lucrezia’s accident, Americans are not fooled. When the theatre’s management receives racist threats and its director finds a burning cross on his lawn, she is removed from the role of Aida. Lorena is his muse and the catalyst for Jacob Mortillaro to reinvent himself as Jackson Moore in America.

Like Jacob, Lorena is an opportunist who in the beginning of the story sleeps with him to further her art and career. He mentors her and, after Lucrezia’s accident, plays Radamès opposite her Aida, turning in the best performance of his entire career.

Sister Magdalena

‘Maggie’ is principal of the Catholic elementary school in the Vancouver parish where Adam has been exiled. She is a farm girl from Saskatchewan who attended Concordia University in Montreal where she fell in love with a philandering philosopher. When the romance went south, she joined a religious order to deal with her guilt feelings and avoid having to go back to the farm. Maggie is a sporty, capable woman, quite the opposite of Adamo (now calling himself ‘Adam’) who is a couch potato that can’t screw in a light bulb. After ten years of a working friendship they end up in bed together. Afterwards, her possessiveness and controlling nature begin to undermine their new relationship. Nonetheless, both she and Adam each think of leaving the religious life together although they never share these thoughts with one another.

While Adam is preparing his thesis on the lost Jewish Library of Rome, Maggie makes a disparaging remark about Jews being Christ killers. This signals a turning point in their romance that is confirmed when she later encounters his sister Atalia in Adam's apartment and mistakes her for a prostitute.

Maggie's treason (e.g., trust is the basis of all successful relationships) leads to Adam's misfortune after he inherits the Nazi bonds from his father. Her theft of the Nazi-Hudal files, and later of one of the bonds that she delivers to the auxiliary bishop, sets the story on a crisis bearing.

Kathleen Jordan

Kathleen is a middle-aged Native woman from Haida Gwaii who is trying to raise a troublesome grandson in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES), the skid road neighbourhood where Adam is mugged. She is a tragic character in that she was removed from her village as a small child under a misguided government policy designed to turn Natives into Whites. She was abused in the Indian Residential School system administered by the Anglican and Roman Catholic authorities on behalf of the Canadian government, a system wherein the abducted children lost their native language and their roots in the aboriginal community. Running away at age 12, she was rejected by her village and started a downward slide into drug use and prostitution. When her own daughter died of a drug overdose in the DTES, Kathleen knew she had to clean up her act if she was going to raise her grandson. Her character is central to the short story 'What the Corpse Said' in the 'Marsha's Way' short story collection. It is not repeated in the novel.

Like Jacob and Atalia, and eventually Adam, Kathleen has already taken control of her life, insofar as she can, by the time she meets Adam. She later becomes the moral axis of the story, as demonstrated by her burning of the Nazi bonds and the tainted cash money in the denouement of the closing chapters. She brings the open-minded attitude and strength of character to Adam's life that was lacking with Maggie who was intolerant and ignorant of suffering and therefore unable to understand or empathize with Adam's struggles. Kathleen is Adam's other half and a primary catalyst, along with Atalia's re-emergence in his life, for his change. Kathleen is the vehicle that brings love and happiness to his future. Like Atalia, she has 'been there, done that.'

Bishop Alois Hudal

Google him.

Beatrice Cenci

The ghost of Beatrice Cenci haunts the narrative. Beatrice was a fifteenth century figure who was raped by her father, the notorious Count Francesco Cenci. The lecherous Count enjoyed a history of arrest on charges of violent assault and sexual abuse but was sufficiently rich to pay his way out of trouble since the Vatican always needed money. The States of the Church, which consisted of all central Italy from sea to sea with Rome as its capital, was extremely corrupt. When Cenci's wife and children conspired to murder him and did a bad job of it, the Pope used their desperate act as an opportunity to acquire all of the family's considerable wealth. To do this, he condemned the innocent Beatrice and her mother to a brutal death.

Beatrice's legend is represented in literature (Shelley and Moravia both wrote plays on the trial), painting and sculpture. The ancient Cenci Palace still stands near the Jewish Ghetto of Rome and is reputed to be haunted.

Beatrice shows up at several points in the story as the imaginary lover of a troubled parishioner who confesses his adultery to Adam. After the man's suicide, Adam publishes a treatise in a law journal on the case of Beatrice Cenci that is included as a full chapter in the novel. The treatise is a veiled commentary on the status of women and the application of canon law, which was the civil law before 1870, in the former States of the Church.

PART THREE

Themes explored in the story

- Racism and the role that cultural assumptions and myths play in everyday life. The theme of racism infuses the story arc that ranges from the Holocaust to the treatment of African-Americans and Canadian aboriginal people. Early in the story, twelve-year-old seminarian Pietro Monfrinoli takes Adam to his secret spot in the Tuscan hills above the village of Garfagnana where the mummified body of an African-American infantryman lies in a crèche in the rock. He explains to Adam that the Allies brought gorillas from Africa to fight the Germans. That's why Italy lost the war. In the end, Adam's long-term friendship and short love affair with Sister Magdalena goes south when she expresses anti-Semitic sentiments.
- The moral dilemma of compromise under duress and the acceptance of evil. Can one allow him/herself to be vanquished – caused to act involuntarily or against one's will – without also negating his/her value system? Does the God of Abraham accept compromises with Evil? If so, then under what circumstances? Anna Mortillaro's dilemma illustrates this theme. Adam struggles with the similar issue of having had to lie in order to conceal his origins in the ghetto. If he tells the truth, then bad consequences will flow back to him as well as to Monsignor Quatrocchi who shelters the boy from the Gestapo. Monsignor Quatrocchi fears for the fate of his immortal soul after cooperating in the Nazi-Hudal ratline.
- Original sin, guilt and redemption. A Jew as well as a Christian, Adam is doubly burdened with the guilt of original sin, that is, the sin of having been born. The Jews are still awaiting the arrival of a Redeemer while the Christians accuse them of having already killed Him. Adam finds himself marooned in a spiritual no-man's-land.
- Survivor Syndrome. Not only does he suffer the guilt of having survived the Nazi purges by concealing his Jewish identity when his entire community perished at Auschwitz, but as a priest he later aids the Nazi mass murderers in escaping retribution. Adam thinks himself the last of his family until he reunites with his sister, a turning point in the story and a catalyst for overcoming his survivor's complex and resolving his guilty conscience.

- Trust as a basis for all successful relationships. Adam's life is endangered when Sister Magdalena steals the Nazi-Hudal files and one of the bonds and then turns them over to the bishop in a fit of spite. Although Adam may have cheated on her with a prostitute (unfaithful) as she wrongly imagines, he was trustworthy and remained loyal to her; whereas she in turn was disloyal and violated the trust. On the other hand, when Adam later places his trust in Kathleen, she remains firm.
- The hypocrisy of organized religion. The Catholic Church backs the Axis Powers in the hope of recovering its former temporal kingdom on the Italian peninsula. Later, it secretly aids the Nazi mass murderers in escaping justice while professing to have been anti-Nazi and pro-Allies all along, the historical record notwithstanding. Later, the Church wants the Nazi war bonds in order to blackmail the German government so that it can pay off massive sexual abuse lawsuit settlements. As it once did with Hitler and Mussolini, it currently maintains Concordats with many countries that neutralize the human rights and democratic freedoms of Catholics in those countries and promotes a Dictatorship-Without-Borders, that is, a Tyranny of God.
- Union with God through union with man/woman. Adam discovers that if God is Love, then love between humans, including sexualized love, is central to union with God. He learns that the Church's insistence on celibacy is only a ploy to consolidate its material wealth and the cause of much emotional and spiritual suffering among its loyal functionaries who are forced to seek outlets for their basic human needs. Adam is haunted by the voice of his mentor, Monsignor Quatrocchi (Don Peppino), that he remembers hearing while hiding inside a wardrobe in a Jewish whorehouse on the day of the Gestapo raid.
- The neutrality of money. The Church, the Nazis, and the Italian Mafias espouse the same philosophy, that is, money is neutral, neither good nor intrinsically evil. It doesn't matter if wealth comes from prying gold fillings from the mouths of murdered Jews, the looting of national treasuries, illegal drug trafficking, or the manufacture of fake relics. The Church and its hierarchy do not run on 'Ave Marias' as Father Pietro Monfrinoli assures Adam before attempting to murder him.
- The banality of evil. After the horrors are over, nobody accepts responsibility. They were all just following orders and therefore innocent of any wrongdoing. This is

Priebke's argument at his 1996 trial. The Italian court finds him not guilty, for the reason of acting under orders, in spite of the Nuremberg Principle IV, disallowing such pleas. The principle can be paraphrased as follows: "It is not an acceptable excuse to say *I was only following my superior's orders.*" Adam, who is a lawyer as well as a priest, cannot accept the court's decision to exonerate Priebke, nor can he excuse himself for having collaborated with the fugitive Nazis after his family and coreligionists perished in the ovens of the Third Reich, even though he and his cohorts acted under orders from Pope Pius XII.

- Denial versus truth and reconciliation. The historical SS-Captain Priebke died in 2013 at age 100, a media celebrity denying to the world that the Holocaust ever happened. Meanwhile, a former head of the Inquisition and German army veteran was elected Pope Benedict XVI. He eventually resigned amid allegations of having shielded clergy accused of crimes, mainly the sexual abuse of children on a massive scale during his time as Cardinal and head of the modern-day Inquisition. The Church needs the Nazi gold bonds to pay off these sexual abuse settlements and avoid bankruptcy, and never begs humanity – or God – for forgiveness.

PART FOUR

Study Questions & Resources

1. The author uses the point of view of an omniscient narrator in telling the story, alluding to the omniscience of God in the narrative. This is a 19th century writing convention. Do you think it is an effective approach to a contemporary novel? Why? Why not?
2. Do the events fit with what is happening in the historical timeline and background to events? What liberties has the author taken with the historical record?
3. What are some minor themes developed in the novel, other than those cited in Part Three of this Guide?
4. How is the topic of guilt treated in the story?
5. How is the issue of choice treated in the story?
6. What is the role of compromise, both voluntary and under duress, and how does it impact the story?
7. What is the first inciting incident of the story and where does it occur in the narrative?
8. Define Anna's dilemma. Is she merely a victim of circumstance or the author of her own misfortune? What role does 'go with the flow' play in the story? What are its consequences?
9. What role does 'destiny' play in one's life and how does it impact personal responsibility for the individual choices one makes? Is an individual accountable for anything? If so, to what, to whom? How is this theme expressed in the story?
10. What is 'survivor's syndrome' and what role does it play in the story?
11. How does Sister Magdalena rationalize the expression of her sexual impulses? How does she avoid 'sinning' and, at the same time, expiate what she does consider sinful?
12. Comment on the difference between 'faithful' and 'loyal' as these concepts are expressed in the story. Was Maggie's theft of Adam's wartime files and the war bond, and her delivery of these items to the bishop, an act of disloyalty, despite his perceived unfaithfulness to her? Explain.
13. What was the US Army's official policy toward German prisoners of war, particularly the SS, and how was it applied by fighting units?
14. Do you agree or disagree with the American soldiers' ad hoc execution of the SS guards at Dachau? Explain why. Explain why not.
15. Do you agree or disagree that the issuers and guarantors of the Nazi war bonds have a moral, if not a legal, obligation to pay the bondholders on the maturity date? If agree, on what basis? If disagree, on what basis?
16. What is meant by the phrase 'the banality of evil' and what is its origin?
17. What is guilt by association and how does it impact the story?

18. Give some examples of the 'neutrality of money.' How can monetary proceeds of illegal or morally compromised activities be redeemed? Or is it simply a matter of perception? Present arguments for and against money laundering.
19. Are there some sins (as Father Rocco suggests) that are so horrendous they can never merit forgiveness? Suggest some criteria.
20. Compare and contrast 'racism' as it was/is experienced in North America with its European expression and the Nazis' Final Solution. The timeline is open-ended.
21. To what extent have male-female relations become commercial exercises, as Atalia implies in recounting her life story? Where is the line drawn?
22. To what extent do today's organized religions violate their own professed principles? Give examples.
23. What roles do love, and especially sex, play in achieving enlightenment, that is, a personal awareness of the greater meaning of life?
24. What is the meaning of 'family' as expressed in the story?
25. Does one's entire universe die with him/her, as Atalia suggests? What is your view?
26. Although Adam comes to suspect that there is no God, how is it that he recovers his faith?
27. Comment on the outcome of the Priebke trial (Rome, 1996). Were the laws and subsequent charges applied *ex-post-facto* as Priebke insisted? Note that prior to the Nuremberg Trials, there were no existing international agreements or laws governing the crimes that the defendants were charged with and punished for. Some analysts consider this a gross miscarriage of justice and an exercise in revenge, e.g., holding individuals responsible for violating statutes that did not exist at the time of the alleged crimes. Note that the Priebke trial and its outcome is historical fact (not fiction). Did the outcome of the Priebke trial redress the issue of vengeance versus justice, or has Italy shown itself to be a safe haven wherein the statute of limitations on Murder One has long ago run out? What is your opinion?
28. If society under Nazi control became transformed into inhuman 'masses' capable of inflicting the most dreadful violence without a second thought (e.g., the banality of evil), how does this compare with the depersonalisation and unfeeling, non-compassionate way of thinking inherent in Catholic Church policy, especially in its collaboration with Nazism-Fascism during the first half of the 20th Century?
29. In the context of the novel, how does the Church position itself, and what is its perceived role, vis-à-vis a restructured Nazi-Fascist society: the people, the nobles (the SS), the victims? How does Don Peppino's vision of the new society (the collaboration of Church and State that he terms 'a tyranny of God') contribute to this transformation?
30. What was Mussolini's concept of 'corporatism' and how does it dovetail with Don Peppino's vision of the Church's role in a new world order? What is today's reality?
31. What was the rationality behind the Church's assistance to thousands of Axis war criminals in the years following the defeat?

32. Do dark deeds and sinister motives reside in the human soul, or were the Holocaust and WWII simply an anomaly of human history? What, if any, is the message for the future?

Further Reading

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AUTHOR CONTACT

Author Website: www.francescorizzuto.com

Contact Email: francesco.rizzuto.author@gmail.com

Twitter: @chuletito1946

Wattpad: @Francesco_Rizzuto

