

The blond, blue-eyed, square-jawed, impeccably close-shaven medic was pleased to tell me his name: Frank Lamb.

Lamb like what's born from a sheep, *agnello*. Or like the first part of what he'd heard was a certain type of *booze* in this part of the world, an Italian sort of champagne, lam-boo-so, lam-boo-ski, who cared what you call it? He was looking forward to having some. It was only a matter of liberating whatever town had the best *package store*, and *bam*, he was going to be a happy guy, for a change. All he'd had so far in Italy by way of the national beverage was one sip from a bottle of something so thick and dark red, well, never mind what it looked like, or what it tasted like.

I was his first-ever opera singer, his first laywoman wearing the clothing of a nun, not counting a veil, his first survivor of a burial—sorry about the bombing, and, best of all, his first mother of a heroic partisan. But that was the thing about Italy. You think you know what to expect and all you get are surprises, at every turn.

I was not to call him a doctor. He was a long-distance truck driver, hailing out of Seattle in the state of Washington—not the Washington where the government was, but the other one, the big one, West Coast, the Pacific Ocean, a real state. When you said the one where the government was, you had to also say *District of Columbia*. It was complicated. Even Americans didn't fully understand it.

I was his first-ever patient, in addition to the other firsts.

I was not to apologize for all the vomiting. The tricky part about head injuries was that so many of the symptoms took a while to kick in.

I probably hadn't broken anything. It seemed to him that all my bones were in one piece. If my skull had been fractured, even with a crack the width of a hair, it was a pretty good bet I would not be just a little away from holding up my part of a conversation with him. Which he felt certain I was.

Heads were pretty good with self-repair. Faces, too. Also jaws. And eyes especially. Eye bruises always look worse than they are. The reason why injuries to the head should cause vomiting, he didn't know, but probably, actual physicians didn't know, either.

Could I try to stay awake? It was a shame they couldn't allow civilian visitors. But this was a military place. Regulations were regulations. Wherever they'd taken my friends—well, don't worry, they'd be safe.

At least we had a roof. Well, most of one. Good thing it wasn't raining.

It was terrific I hadn't been cut up. No abrasions, no broken skin. Ice would be the perfect thing. Too bad there wasn't ice in this *dump*.

Poor Italy. Did I know that Mussolini was on the cover of the most famous magazine in America, *Life*? This was maybe five or six years ago. Lots of Americans had thought that he was *fabulous*.

Surely I knew that back in my hometown, my son had blown up four German artillery trucks, a tank, and a bunker, before going into hiding. Everyone was talking about it.

He wasn't giving away any military secrets here, but he felt it was only fair to let me know, friendly-like, that the American Army had some anxieties about Italians with guns and explosives, even though everyone was on the same side now.

You could see the rationale. You could imagine a bunch of generals sitting around in some other *palazzo*, nicer than this one, newer, asking questions like, "Hey, how are we supposed to know the locals won't start aiming those weapons of theirs at us?"

It was only the up-ups who were wary of locals. With the GIs it was a different story. A GI was at the bottom of the ranks, like himself. GIs were of the opinion that they could use all the help they could get.

Guiseppe had a brigade, right? All trained sharpshooters, right? And ex-Italian Army, right? Experienced Adriatic fishermen, right? Fishermen who knew a few things about harpoons, right?

He would enjoy it if, when I was able to talk, I'd talk about my son. Wasn't it astonishing that American officers would get all worked up about armed, non-uniformed Italians, when they were all pointing guns at the exact same target? It made you wonder. He personally would especially be delighted to hear how Guiseppe was getting his guns.

Probably what they had for guns were Berettas. That was his guess. There was probably a storehouse somewhere. Someone's cellar? One of those fishermen's huts near the beach?

Did they have a clubhouse, the brigade? A place where they met, spent some time, privately? A sort of headquarters, in other words.

Here. Time to take the cloths off. Wasn't that better?