

Excerpt from *Springtime in Siena*:

1.

STUDYING MY YOUNGER SELF as I might any artifact from a curious era (and we're talking Seventies!), I observe that although not bad to look at—handsome, in fact—he is of his time: slender, hirsute, given to queasy color combinations, eager to build a better world. So eager, in fact, that he pursues a teaching career straight into the heart of futility, from which he looks for consolation to—in the lingo of the day—“lifestyle.” Hoping to glimpse a spark of promise, I place him under different lights and compare him to other exemplars, but can only shake my head. Ruefully but honestly, I'm forced to conclude: Not only is this person not *destined*, he is not even *eligible* for the future he covets; the future that in fact has turned out to be his—that is, mine.

Because in 1974 I managed to turn things around. At 28, I didn't matter. A junior member of the art history faculty at Adams U. in Washington, D.C., I felt distinctly talked-out and ready to vary my routine by heading up a semester's study abroad with 17 undergrads.

It was during that sojourn in Siena, Italy, in the verdant springtime of my youth that I decided to count in the affairs of the world—to be someone who mattered. Under the tutelage first of a disastrous affair, and then by falling in love, I began

to focus the scattered strands of self, to bend them in one coherent direction. I exerted my will, at a time—in the kingdom of love and peace—when that index of one’s love of life was suspect. Through *will* I abandoned the lifestyle that debarred me from the world’s respect; through *will* achieved the critical mass that’s carried me through to where I am at the present day, pretty well known, I think, throughout the museum world.

This, then, is my memoir of how I grew up. I mean it neither as how-to guide nor celebration of ego, and if it’s frank, it has to be.

Rest assured, no one was harmed in the writing of it.

2.

ON A JANUARY SUNDAY I rode a charter bus in solitary splendor from Siena, the city of 50,000 in central Tuscany where I'd established myself days earlier, to Florence to meet my *Springtime in Siena* group.

Before going to the train station I dashed through an exhibition at the *Uffizi* of Doré's illustrations to Dante. An Englishwoman was going around the walls with a younger man. She wondered aloud whether the voluptuous *Paolo and Francesca*—lovers condemned to circle each other, forever unable to touch—illustrated *l'Inferno* or *il Paradiso*.

"It's sexual," her companion learnedly lisped. "Must be the *Paradiso*."

Wrong!

Still laughing, I got to the *Stazione Termini* scant moments before my group's scheduled 2:00 o'clock arrival. The board in the waiting room told me at which *binario* its train would arrive. In the clangorous, glass-roofed shed I found the platform but no sign of the train, though gigantic steel springs at the tracks' end introduced an antic possibility of disaster. Plenty of people were waiting, among them a young man standing with the *contrapposto* stance and compressed energy of Michelangelo's *David*. Hips cocked, he peered alertly up the tracks, a day-pack slung at his shoulder, a bag leaning against his shin like Goliath's head. He wore, and wore well, Levis and a leather jacket.

Without willing it, I walked closer to this kid. Had nothing in mind save a vague desire to see if his face could be as sexy as the rest of him. I didn't know of any place we could go; I

never patronized men's rooms. Possibly the station chapel? Except that in Italy a species of black-veiled widow tends to infest them. Besides, the train was due any moment.

Still, I was curious what he would do if I made my intentions—however fallacious—clear. So I took up my stance ten feet behind him and stared at his shaggy dark head.

The crowd milled, the pushcart vendor of *affreschi* bawled for trade, P.A. announcements overlaid one another incomprehensibly, on other tracks trains pulled in or pulled out—and within a minute Einstein's "spooky action at a distance" happened: My kid scratched his ear, swung around flipping hair off his handsome features and drilled fine brown eyes straight into mine.

My crotch knotted. I could see that he knew exactly what he wanted. In response I beetled my brow, thrust out my lip—glowered at him with that seeming disgust men use to signal interest in one another—and nodded towards the chapel. He lightly let down his pack—disarmed himself, as it were—showed his teeth and *laughed*.

My nod went spastic, and probably fear swamped my face, for only then did I recognize him: This was no willing pickup in that glorious dawn of gay self-respect, when youth joyously gave itself away. No, this was *Jack* somebody, an Adams U. junior who, I remembered too late, had planned to tour the Continent on his own before joining up with the group.

He laughed again, probably at the effort of lock-down clamping my jaws and reddening my cheeks. I hate being seen at a loss.

"*Ciao, Jack,*" I said as we shook hands. Fortunately my voice had its usual crust of authority. "Or should I call you *Giacomo? Benvenuto in Italia.*"

"*Hey, professore.*"

"How were your travels?"

“Pretty hot,” he began with a malicious grin.

Told him to hold the fort while I went to find a magazine.

I had a rule against sleeping with my students. It was a rule more honored in the breach than in the observance (no pun intended), since while I avoided those enrolled in my courses I made hay elsewhere in the student body. Not that my own students lost out: Though my performance in bed was generally congratulated, I know I was really at my best in the classroom.

In the waiting room, light washed off the travertine walls as I surveyed a magazine rack with the posture—entirely dissociating himself—of someone looking over a used car. For, shrouded in the chiaroscuro of a Caravaggio martyr, Richard Nixon peered out from the covers of *TIME*, *Newsweek*, *L'Espresso*, *Der Stern*, *The Economist*. He had the long nose of a liar and furtive eyes which sincerely wished to duck the issue. Watergate was more than six months away from working itself out, but its awesome end—*his* end—was inevitable. I was half sorry to find myself posted so far away as the moment of the kill approached, for I sensed it would end that dark period which started the afternoon Kennedy died and lasted through the corrosive adventure known as Viet Nam and give rise to new energies and opportunities.

Jack touched my shoulder.

“It’s here.”

“Super,” I said. “Let’s go face the music.”

Buying *TIME* and *Newsweek*, I rolled them into a baton and marched to the platform—briskly, lest Jack say anything more.

### 3.

ONLY TWO MALES, Jack and Michael the Viet Nam vet, had enrolled in the group; for whatever reasons, Italy exerts a stronger attraction on American women than men. But on the platform the first thing I noticed was an unexpected but welcome extra boy standing tall and handsome among the girls. A last-minute addition? His open face, looking provocatively aside, reminded me of Donatello's *St. George* (whose features Michelangelo filched for his *David*).

But the last steps broke the spell, and I recognized Briana, one of our art history majors. Briana! Not Donatello after all, but Botticelli—*The Birth of Venus'* robust blossoming nude. Briana had a fine, strong figure (high-school field hockey champion, I later learned), good bones and a marvelous glow of health, what only the greatest masters achieve in giving their creations the semblance of life.

Gary—I said to myself—*it's not your style to undress the girls. What's going on?*

I greeted the women and then sorted out Michael. A combat veteran 23 years old, he was the group's elder. Dangerous red suffused his face as he glared at a vendor for what he dared sell his girlfriend, Katie: a styrofoam cup filled with *caffé* to the level of an inch.

"*Signore!*" Michael demanded, his ponytail bouncing in indignation as the vendor dealt with new customers. "*Uno momento!*"

Katie, a sapling-thin beauty with high cheekbones and perfect pallor, looked on with mournful doe's eyes. Why she was with us and not on the runways of Milan that were her

ambition was a mystery. Obeying Daddy's precepts about getting an education first? Why she was with Michael and not someone more presentable was probably to make Daddy apoplectic.

"Hey, Michael," I said, "that passes for a full cup, believe it or not."

"He *cheated* us, he sees we're American and —"

"Taste it," I urged. "It's strong. Espresso. You wouldn't want more."

Michael held it out to Katie, she took a sip, and with a moralist's face — his brow bulging out beneath the absurd long hair — he awaited her judgment. People always exclaimed at his gentleness, but I knew he really wanted to kill us all.

Katie registered approval and Michael, relenting, rewarded me with a soul handshake (the rage then). And as I found was usual with him, he began to find things funny. Why not? He was Irony's favorite, caught by the draft at 18 a high-school dropout, now set to enjoy a semester in Italy as part of his architecture studies courtesy of the latest GI Bill.

His lady love smiled at him, and was about to smile at me when I abruptly turned around. Katie had been in my Impressionism class and I remembered her habit of commanding "*Smile!*" to anyone not already grinning like an idiot. But in the Seventies people did that. People would go up to serious-looking persons and say, "*Smile!*" Everybody felt they had to keep up the love-and-peace crap.

I herded the group to the coach through a sun-gilt plaza filled with burping motor scooters, shiny little cars and the complaints of flower sellers, the kids having to goose-step so as not to trip on their bellbottoms. (I was already outfitted with a new Italian wardrobe featuring slender-legged pants and sharp-toed shoes.)

Our bus moved down broad streets, crossed the Arno,

passed the Pitti Palace and swung onto the *Superstrada*. Landscape began to roll past in blurred textures woven by cultivation continuous since Etruscan times. Rows of grapevines writhed up worn hills to the ancient stone structures surmounting them, and brown thickets lined the valley watercourses. The mistiness that is the very element of Europe's atmosphere softened the glittering sunshine. As we sped towards them, the Chianti Hills appeared to levitate and become bruised clouds.

Enclosed by glass, made spectators of their own destinies again, as if they were watching TV, and with motion imparting a reassuring throb to their crotches, the kids began to relax. They made primping visits to the *gabinetto* in the rear and lounged back in their seats. Hairbrushes came out for elaborate repairs (it was Farrah Fawcett-Majors' heyday) and chatter arose as from a cocktail party at the second round of drinks.

Up the aisle, Michael huddled over Katie as she tried to wring warmth from her long fingers. Across from me Jack sat with his heels on the seat, clasping his knees and looking out the window. He'd taken off his jacket, and the bunched sleeve of his T-shirt revealed an untanned stretch of arm that looked remarkably nude. Then he slumped against the window and challenged me. I ignored him. Instead I turned the memory of my mistaken first sight of Briana this way and that, like a locket: *Me* responding to a *woman*? What was the meaning of *that*?

When we passed beneath Monteriggione, a fortified hill town for centuries at issue between Florence and Siena, I stood up, putatively to point it out, but really to get another glimpse of her. I had some difficulty distinguishing hers from the dozen other blonde heads until she turned her eyes from Monteriggione to me in what struck me, despite the Nordic

quality of her beauty, as the Latin manner, the whole liquid eye arched and upward-aiming. I sat down again, much struck.

Siena presides over Tuscany from where three hills meet. Huge churches crown the lower two, while her cathedral—the *Duomo*—rises atop the highest. The city is built entirely of stone and ruddy brick. In the Middle Ages she parlayed her position on the *Via Francigena*—the pilgrim road to Rome—into wool and banking businesses, and vied with Florence for power and riches until 1348, when plague ravaged the Sienese while sparing (comparatively) the Florentines. Two centuries later Florence conquered Siena, finishing her as a force in history and flash-freezing her appearance in time.

Although Siena possesses magnificent views, she vouchsafes only fugitive glimpses of herself to those approaching; the swell of hills protects her. Her famous *Piazza del Campo* lies hidden in the center beneath the mighty *Torre del Mangia* that pierces the sky 300 feet overhead. As our bus moved effortfully uphill, climbing past gas stations, garden plots, boxy villas, terra-cotta apartment houses, we could just see the travertine tip of the *Torre's* finial. The weather began to change and the sky closed up as we reached *Porta Camollia* on the ancient city walls, where massive gates bleached white by time stood open (until after the First World War they closed every night). The bus rumbled through.

Inside the walls, we had a brief prospect of the whole weathered city rumpled like a quilt. Churches and towers sprang free from the dense fabric with a perspective somehow jammed, as in medieval illuminations that make a man tall as a steeple. A rent in the clouds dropped other-worldly light onto the green-and-white-striped marble *Duomo*, making its dome a fluted Oriental hat. Then the rent healed and rain began to fall.

The coach lumbered down a narrow street and started to turn into the even narrower *vicola* where stood the ancient Donato family *palazzo*. As usual, Prof. Donato was to teach the group its local history course, and he and his wife were kindly laying on a light *collazione* while I handed out the rooming assignments.

But the bus could not turn the corner. Its side scraped. The kids drew back appalled as stone glazed with 800 years of soot swam up to their windows.

“*Madonna!*” said the driver through bared teeth. He reversed, but scraped again. “*Manacc’!*” he growled, a word so bad he didn’t dare finish it.

An Alfa-Romeo Giulietta rushed us head on. Its driver leaned on the horn. The bus driver shrugged, cursed, sawed forwards and backwards. *Scrape!* The Giulietta’s driver removed his sunglasses in an ineffably theatrical gesture. Our driver eloquently threw up his hands. The Giulietta jerked backwards out of sight, then its driver reappeared on foot and, cupping his hands (and getting wet), guided the bus. We shot free of the turn and the drivers exchanged friendly waves. The episode had just that combination of aggression and cooperation that to me is the hallmark of the Italian character.

Upstairs in the Donatos’ apartment—the 30 rooms of the *palazzo* they were reduced to—I paired off the women in *pensioni* and with host families. From excitedly babbling about the flight to Luxembourg and the slow crawl over the Alps and the rigors of changing trains in Milan, they grew quiet and apprehensive, craning at the cold grandeur that surrounded them, at crystal chandeliers whose droplets of light seemed reluctant to fall; at gods leering from the ceiling; at Prof. Donato’s gleaming, sculptural head. Especially they shrank from Signora Donato’s surveillance through enormous glasses of the type also favored by Sophia Loren. Without protest they

allowed me to see them to their taxis or, in the case of those assigned rooms in the *centro città*, hand them a map and point the way. Separated from the group, pushed out into the rain dragging their baggage, they went as to the slaughter, bellbottoms dragging on wet stone.

Jack and Michael I sent to the Soviet-style apartment complex in suburban Acquacalda where Adams U. men always lodged. Our landlady there had beds available in two rooms already occupied by single students, so both would have the benefit of an Italian roommate. One was a medical student and the other, a Communist, a student of economics. In the event, the Communist refused to room with an American. He made a scene when Jack came in with his friendly smile. The first solution tried was to exchange Jack for Michael, but Michael's Army fatigue jacket sparked a worse uproar.

Beds were reassigned, and Jack and Michael ended up together.

Excerpt from *The Man Who Owned New York*:

1.

EDITH WHARTON DIED the other day.

I always wondered what she made of him the Press 30 years ago dubbed *The Man Who Owned New York*, and regretted that she never treated of his sensational story in her nuanced fiction. Now she never will. But an outlander (and one with a beautiful daughter) fighting for the colossal Manhattan real-estate fortune stolen from his forebears, the sanctimonious squatters wheeling up their legal artillery, while the city's social bastions rock in resistance and capitulation—Wharton would have made a great thing of it. Even Henry James might have found sufficiently evocative the return to New York of a Tory family exiled since the Revolutionary War in the person of a rangy Kansas farmer.

Now James and Wharton both have gone without making use of him or his story. If it's not to be forgotten, it seems left to me. I was there, a figure on the periphery but placed so as to see the whole, and it happened that I—or rather, my crime (*oh, my gaudy crime!*)—resolved the episode. An account will also serve as my spiritual autobiography, for without *The Man Who Owned New York* I might never have found my own true path.

IT WAS A PULL at the doorbell that precipitated me into the affair.

The doorbell in question belonged to the rectory of All Angels, the old church that stoppers the maw of Wall Street at Broadway. At 11:00 o'clock of the forenoon, on Wednesday, November 6, 1907, in only the second month of my first (and decidedly plum) parish assignment, I was at my desk outside Father Day's office. Supposedly I was double-checking his calculations for a Greenwich Street store lease, but in truth I was admiring how fallen leaves complement crumbling grave markers, their soft, sodden colors melting into the half-dissolved stone. Perhaps I was also daydreaming about my future; five weeks in it proved New York the loneliest place I'd ever known.

Then the doorbell rang.

Usually Mrs. Brown or one of her maids answered it, but for some reason *I* bounded downstairs. Through the etched glass I saw the silhouette of a man wearing a homburg hat. Intending to send him round to the tradesmen's entrance in back, I opened the door and from the side came a frightening white flash: *Floomp!* The photographer retreated down the steps with his contraption, while the man in the homburg said, "Father Day?"

"What is this? Who are you? Did that man take my *photograph?*"

"Hopkins of *The World,*" he replied, naming the city's most scurrilous newspaper. "May I come in, Father Day?"

"The rector is busy," I said. "I'm Father Stackpole, his secretary, and *no*, you may *not* come in."

"All right, Rover Boy, all right," said Hopkins. "Keep your shirt on."

My voice shook as I repeated my name, for his

spontaneous appellation infuriated me. Heroes of juvenile fiction, the Rover Boys were the epitome of clean-cut, blue-eyed, manly all-American youth, resourceful foes of wrongdoers and miscreants. And *Dick Rover* happened to have been my nickname at Groton, Yale, even Divinity. In my schooldays I took it in good part—behind the mockery lay envy, especially of my playing-field prowess—but as an ordained minister of the cloth I thought it impertinence coming from a stranger.

“Well, Reverend, Mr. Denton Slaughter of Ellinwood, Kansas came by *The World* this morning to tell us how All Angels Church stole his family’s farm in Manhattan more than a century ago. According to him, everything your church *says* it owns really belongs to *him*, and he’s here to collect.”

“Stuff and nonsense!” I snapped with disdain. *Floomp!* “Good *day*, gentlemen.”

“Thanks, Dick,” said Hopkins as I slammed the door shut.

I returned upstairs and reported the incident to Father Day, ending by asking, “Could there be any truth to such a claim?”

Rocking his chair back, Father Day removed the green eyeshade he customarily wore at his desk. Stroking the black eye thus revealed (suffered, he told me, kneeling in private devotions), he sought the answer in the opulence of his office, which like the rest of the rectory resembled an exclusive men’s club. Its walls were paneled in walnut, Tiffany windows muffled Broadway’s noise, there was a bronze Saint-Gaudens overmantel, a choice Burne-Jones *Holy Family* and gleaming mahogany furniture made by the Herter Brothers.

Sighing, he joined his palms in a steeple atop the dome of his stomach.

“Exactly *how* All Angels comes to be so richly endowed, we cannot know with certainty, Albert,” he pronounced. “Tradition tells us it’s to Queen Anne’s munificence we’re

beholden, but the exact truth seems lost to the mists of time.”

“Yes, Father, but—”

“Never mind that we work like slaves to make proper eleemosynary use of it, naturally our property makes us a target for every kind of sharper. The person you speak of is evidently one of them, unless, indeed, he’s but the dupe of a larger conspiracy.”

“Yes, but if—”

“Money and property go, in the end, to the virtuous. That is the happy truth on which our country is founded, Albert— why America comes every day closer to being the earthly paradise.”

“But—”

The steeple collapsed and Father Day’s manner took on the austerity that reminded me he would one day be a bishop. Rocking his stocky body forward, he clapped the eyeshade to his brow and reached for the ground lease he’d been marking up when I interrupted.

“Father Stackpole, we have work to do!”

## 2.

OVER THE SOUP at lunch, I braved Father Day’s frown to relate my Press encounter to our colleagues, Fathers Andrews and Morris.

“‘Stuff and nonsense,’ I told them, and they left.”

“How on earth could such a notion arise?” asked Father Morris with a sniff.

“Isn’t this a claim that recurs?” suggested corpulent Father Andrews, who had been at All Angels since before I was born.

“There are indeed occasional letters,” Father Day confirmed. “Missives scrawled from such places as *Iowa* or *Ohio*—however you pronounce it—claiming ownership of our demesne on the basis of obscure family legends.”

“How do we respond to them?” I asked.

“Why, they go to Sullivan & Cromwell, of course,” he answered, naming our attorneys. “How *they* shut them up, I have no idea. But they do it. Rest assured, what All Angels possesses no pretended claimant will tear away from it.”

“*Laches*,” murmured Father Andrews.

“*Laches*?” I repeated. “What an odd word. What does it mean?”

In silence a maid removed the soup bowls, and Mrs. Brown herself placed the roast before Father Day. Lunch was our most substantial meal. The rector complimented Mrs. Brown, then answered my question before taking up the more congenial task of carving.

“*Laches* means the right to dispute someone’s possession of property lapses with time. In New York State, I believe after 15 years.”

“Unless possession is due to fraud,” noted Father Andrews, “in which case there is no—*um*—statute of limitations.”

Father Day’s knife and fork clattered to the tabletop, and he stared balefully.

“The matter is *moot*,” he said, uttering the *t* in so final a manner as to spray the roast. “It’s true there’s an unfortunate murkiness to the record. During the Revolutionary War, confusion reigned, for even as George Washington was

expelling the British from the city, our Episcopalian predecessors were giving the boot to the Church of England. And the fire of 1793 destroyed not only the church but its archives. But though we cannot document exactly *how* All Angels comes to own 200 acres of lower Manhattan, after 125 years' uninterrupted possession, and in the absence of any evidence of wrongdoing, we are *quite* safe."

Father Day resumed carving and we passed the plates. As we ate, he reverted more cheerfully to his favorite topic.

"As I was telling Albert this morning, money—land—*property* have a natural affinity for the good. They come to us as though they know the way by heart. And thank goodness for it! Only last week, Morgan was able to stop the Panic—save the *country*—by advancing the Treasury 50 million from his own pocket! The affinity of money to virtue, to *power*, is *most* beneficial to society."

He shook his head in admiration. How he would have loved to have J.P. Morgan as a parishioner! But Morgan, alas, was faithful to the Stuyvesant Square congregation of St. George's.

"There are seeming exceptions," he continued, "rich men who appear villainous. But as if by magic—though really by the iron laws of economics—money works its transformative powers. For example, rough tales are told of Mr. Rockefeller in the Pennsylvania oil fields years ago—but see him today! The sweetest, most philanthropic gentleman! I regret that he worships with the Baptists, but that is his affair. And Mr. Carnegie! Quite the rapscallion in his time, they say, but today so rich and generous!

"This affinity brings us heavy duties, to be sure. As the good amass ever more wealth, so increases the irksomeness of finding ways of using it for the benefit of those we have always with us—to wit, the poor. It's our duty to do so,

however – to a due degree: Not so much as to impede wealth’s multiplication, which its concentration so materially assists.”

He paused to chew and swallow.

“We need merely look about us to see this concentration of wealth expressed in the skyscrapers lifting our neighborhood higher year by year (closer to heaven, as I like to think), until – how tall is the Singer Building to be?”

The skeleton of the Singer Building’s new tower clawed at the sky a few blocks to the north. Widening on high like a torchiere, it already rose higher than the Flatiron Building, previously tallest in the world.

“Forty-seven stories,” I offered.

“*For-ty sev-en sto-ries!*” sang Father Day. “On land leased from All Angels for 99 years. I negotiated the deal myself, though of course the Vestry reviewed it. Over the next century the Singer Building will produce *millions* with which to carry on our good works.”

“More churches?” I asked. “More chapels?”

“Above all, the new Cathedral of St. John the Divine, the largest gothic church in the world!”

There was a pause before Father Morris inquired, “But, Father Day, are the poor to blame for their poverty? Surely it takes money to make money?”

“More proof of its love for the good!” retorted the rector. “Its growth amplifies the original, hard-won results of enterprise.”

“Only the other day our Warden, Mr. Shoatsbury, was telling me about *his* start in business. Seems he was a Western Union boy in the day before stock tickers – the fastest lad in New York – and whenever news came in, he ran it like the wind to its destination, no matter the weather, and eventually his effort caught someone’s eye, and so on and so forth. He happened to mention that his net worth today exceeds *one*

*hundred million dollars. A better man I never met.*

That afternoon I was drafting routine letters raising office rents on Fulton Street when I heard Father Day's private telephone ring repeatedly, I guessed with calls from our Vestrymen. His voice took on an edge of frustration.

He called me in.

"Albert, would you please go out and find a copy of *The World*? The extra edition."

"Certainly, Father Day."

This novel assignment (*The Herald-Tribune* and *Wall Street Journal* made up our usual budget of news) was easy to accomplish, for a newsy was bawling "Extra! Extra!" at the bottom of our very steps.

I handed over two cents — and goggled:

## **ALL ANGELS ESTATE QUESTIONED**

**"AM RIGHTFUL HEIR TO HEART OF CITY,"**

**DECLARES D. SLAUGHTER OF KANSAS**

**Church Theft Detailed—Enormous Wealth At Stake**

**Farmer Claims 200 Acres Valued At**

**\$1,000,000,000**

**Billion-Dollar Inheritance Makes Man**

***Richest In World!***

Beneath, printed in thick black strokes by the crude photographic reproduction of the day, was the picture of an enraged prig in a clerical collar. That was myself. The caption read 'Rover Boy' Throws Out Our Reporter.

These headlines, screaming with the conviction of print, I placed in front of Father Day.

“*Dammit*,” he ejaculated. He skimmed the articles, then quoted, with his customary hint of mockery, “‘close resemblance to Dick Rover.’ Indeed, Dick’s the fair-haired one? All right, Albert, I’m handing this matter over to you.”

“Father?”

With distaste he folded the newspaper and held it across his leather-topped desk.

“I have neither the time nor the temper, whereas this fairy tale appears to pique your curiosity, and clearly you’ve a rapport with the Press. Take care of it—forthwith. Father Morris can take your desk in the meantime. Nip it in the bud, is my advice.”

“Father?”

In exasperation he threw the newspaper at me.

“It’s all yours, Rover Boy.”

— *SPRINGTIME IN SIENA*, by Steven Key Meyers —

*Springtime in Siena*

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