

The Slap:
An account of the Outrage of
Anagni

by

Dominico Caetani

Translated to English by G. L. Carroll, Ph. D.

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Anagni, Italy, September 7, 1303

Dominico hurried into his master's chambers with a flagon of wine, eager to show his seriousness for the honor of serving under such a great warrior. He poured two goblets and brought them to the two men sitting in the cool September evening breeze wafting through the open window. Engaged in conversation, the two men ignored him. Dominico waited patiently for his master to take the proffered goblet, thinking this might be some sort of test.

"I know that look, Robert," Marco said. "Every soldier gets it when he is away from his home and family for too long."

"It has been six years," Dominico's master said. Dressed in a simple tunic, Robert was a head taller than Marco and far more thickly muscled, easily the largest man Dominico had ever seen. His fiery red hair was neatly groomed and trimmed to shoulder length.

"You should ask Boniface for a month of leave," Marco said.

"I did. He refused."

"I'm not surprised. I fear his feud with the French king will come to some sort of conclusion sooner rather than later. You've heard the rumors. Guillaume de Nogaret, Philip le Bel's chief advisor, has been recruiting mercenaries all summer in Tuscany. There will be blood before winter, mark my words."

"What of the reports of an army gathering in the nearby villages?"

"Unconfirmed," Marco replied. "Besides, how large an army could be raised on mere promises of gold? A few hundred? He would need twenty times that many men to breach the city walls and even if they did manage to get in, this palace was built to withstand everything but siege engines, which they won't have."

"Your wine, Sir," Dominico said when the conversation lagged and Robert looked up at him expectantly.

His master's face grew suddenly dark. Dominico took a frightened step backwards as Robert stood.

"Address me by my name, boy. Do you see golden spurs on my boots? I am no knight with lands and a title, and you are not my squire. You are a student learner apprenticed to me as a favor to your recently widowed mother of House Caetani. Do you understand what that means?"

"Yes, Sir," Dominico didn't realize his mistake until the words were fully out of his mouth.

"Don't you dare say it again, boy!" his master chided, stabbing a finger in his chest.

"I understand," Dominico stammered.

"I'm not sure you do. It means you are a Caetani. Great nephew of Pope Boniface VIII. It means you were selected to be my apprentice because of your name, not because of your vast potential to be a great warrior." Robert pinched his scrawny bicep. "And certainly not for your

incredible strength. You would do well to remember that. While I am teaching you the fighting arts, you are to address me as 'Robert,' not 'lord' or 'sir.' I will address you as 'boy.'”

Dominico stared back into his master's piercing blue eyes and simply nodded, afraid to speak. Afraid he might inadvertently offend his master again.

“I am not someone to be revered because I have an ostentatious title, or demanding of respect because of my great wealth. I am just a man. Like you. Like Marco, here. Respect and loyalty are earned, boy. They are not a birthright or privilege of office. They cannot be bought. Look at Marco.”

Dominico obediently turned and gazed at Marco, who put his feet up on the windowsill and leaned back in his chair as he sipped wine from his goblet.

“Do you know why he is Captain of the Palace Guard, why his men follow him without question?”

“No,” Dominico managed.

“Is it because of his name?”

“No. He is a Colonna. House Colonna lost its power and prestige when it was destroyed by my uncle . . .”

Robert cut him off. “Surely it is because he is wealthy and bought the office, then.”

“No,” Dominico stammered. “He has nothing. The Colonnas lost everything at the battle of Palestrina.”

“What then?” Robert asked with his hands on his hips.

Dominico stared back at his master, answerless.

“It is because of his reputation, boy. He is the best at what he does. He has earned the respect and loyalty of his men by his actions. Do you understand?”

“I think so,” Dominico said.

“The day men lose respect for their leader is the day they begin to abandon him.”

* * *

The next morning, Dominico woke to the sound of shouting outside. He threw open the second story window of his master's chambers and looked out upon the courtyard below. The eastern sky was just beginning to lighten, the sun not yet above the horizon. A rider galloped by on horseback shouting, “Alarm! Alarm!”

Robert appeared at Dominico's side. “What is it, man?” he called down to the rider.

“We are betrayed!” the guard shouted up. “The western gate is open! An army is upon the city!”

Dominico leaned out the window, straining to look in the direction of the western gate. In the predawn sky a cloud of dust rose above a column of riders advancing toward the Papal Palace. More men followed on foot. He looked back at Robert who saw it, too.

“Go to Marco, boy. Tell him what you’ve seen then return to me here.”

Dominico bolted from the room, his heart pounding in his chest. Two doors down, the door to Marco’s chambers was open. He strode out fully dressed before Dominico got there, already issuing orders to his officers. After informing Marco of the invading army, he was sent back to Robert with orders to meet in the Hall of the Exchequer. Dominico returned to find Robert dressing for battle. Over his underclothes he had already donned a quilted woolen doublet.

“Boy, my mail.”

Dominico helped his master don his heavy chain mail shirt then a surcoat of pure white. He laced thick leather bracers on his forearms then belted Robert’s sword tightly around his waist. Robert drew the sword in a smooth motion, holding the longsword out to examine the blade. It was made of steel of a slight golden color with ornate carvings of twining rose vines on the pommel and crossbar. Though it was Dominico’s job to care for the sword, it seemed indestructible, never once requiring to be sharpened or oiled like his master’s other weapons. He had yet to see so much as a ding on its razor sharp edges despite constant use.

After Robert sheathed his sword, he thrust his shield into Dominico’s hands. “Follow me, boy.”

Dominico obediently followed his master to the Hall of the Exchequer where Boniface’s throne stood against the far wall. His great uncle was there, sitting at a long table and surrounded by attendants. Robert moved to an out of the way place against a wall near the entrance. Dominico was shouldered aside by Marco striding into the room.

Boniface stood as his Captain of the Guard approached, the ocean of attendants parting like the Red Sea before Moses. Boniface was dressed in simple clothes, not the elaborate and expensive papal vestments or even his white housedress. It was one of the few times Dominico had seen his head bare.

Marco knelt before the Holy Father and kissed the Fishermen’s Ring on his outstretched hand before rising.

“What is happening?” Boniface asked.

“It appears a sizable army has gained entrance to the city and is surrounding the palace, Your Holiness,” Marco reported. “They apparently bribed several of my men at the gates.”

“Who are they?” Boniface demanded.

“Mercenaries by the looks of them. They appear to be lead by Guillaume de Nogaret and my cousin, Sciarra. My men are in place and the palace is secure. We can handle anything that rabble can muster. Shall I go outside and meet with them?”

“Not if there is another Colonna out there,” Boniface replied with a touch of anger in his voice. “Robert will go. He can be very intimidating. Go and make sure that my palace will not be breached as easily as your city gates.”

Marco bowed then spun on his heels and marched from the room.

Boniface beckoned Robert forward. “Find out why they are here, Robert. Then send them away.”

“At once, Your Holiness,” Robert replied with a slight bow, then turned and strode from the room.

Carrying Robert’s heavy shield, Dominico struggled to keep up as he followed Robert downstairs to the massive front doors of the palace. Marco was there with about ten of his men, all heavily armed with pikes and spears. Runners brought buckets of water and left them on the floor a few yards from the massive doors.

“He isn’t pleased that your cousin is out there,” Robert said to Marco.

“Nor am I. It seems Sciarra is bent on revenge for what Boniface did to our family at Palestrina.” He looked Robert up and down. “Shall some of my men accompany you?”

“No. Dominico will come.”

Marco snorted and gave Dominico an encouraging slap on the shoulder.

“Me?” Dominico stammered, his stomach suddenly churning. “I don’t know anything about battle.”

“I must appear to be a fearsome, incorruptible knight. To do that I need a squire, boy.”

“But you said I was just a . . .”

“Today you are a squire.” To Marco he said, “Close the doors behind us. When my squire knocks three times, let us in.”

Marco nodded and signaled to his men who lifted the heavy iron bar securing the doors.

“Stay near the door with your mouth shut, squire. Stand tall and act brave no matter what happens. When I signal get that door open. Understand?”

Dominico nodded, frightened beyond words at the prospect of going to battle as his master’s squire.

Captain Marco’s men pulled the massive doors inward just enough to allow Robert’s broad shoulders through the opening. Dominico followed tentatively, his feet shuffling on the stone floor as he struggled under the weight of his master’s heavy shield. Squinting in the bright morning sunlight, he jumped at the sound of the doors slamming shut behind him. Stunned at what he saw, he involuntarily retreated until his back was against the doors.

Armed men both mounted and on foot surrounded the entire complex of palace buildings. There had to be hundreds, thousands of them. They carried weapons of every description: swords, pikes, spears, bows, and crossbows. They were dressed in makeshift leather armor,

whatever they had cobbled together. This was no army of fearsome, battled-hardened knights. The riders had no squires, no bannermen. They were mercenaries as Marco had said, an angry mob of sworn enemies of House Caetani drawn by the promise of plundering the papal palace. There were enough of them to overrun the palace in a matter of minutes.

Dominico watched Robert take in the scene with his chin held high, his hand on his sword hilt, completely unintimidated by the opposing army who clashed their weapons together and shouted chants of “Long live the King of France!” and “Long live Colonna!”

“What is the meaning of this?” Robert shouted above the din.

Several men rode forward under the royal banner of gilded lilies on a field of blue and dismounted. Accompanied by a dozen armed men, the best dressed of them came forward and motioned for quiet, then climbed the steps to stand before Robert.

“I am Guillaume de Nogaret, Royal Advisor for . . .”

“I know who you are,” Robert interrupted the man. “Why are you here?”

“I wish to see Benedetto Caetani,” Nogaret stammered.

“I know no one by that name,” Robert replied.

“Anagni is the ancestral home of House Caetani, is it not?” Nogaret said, sweeping a hand at the surrounding buildings. “And we are standing at the entrance of the Caetani Palace?”

Robert eyed Nogaret menacingly. “You will give him due respect.”

“Fine,” Nogaret said. “Bring out Pope Boniface VIII.”

Robert crossed his arms across his massive chest. “Nonsense,” he replied dismissively. “The Holy Father is meditating in prayer and cannot be disturbed. Come back tomorrow. Perhaps the Holy Father will find time to see you later in the week.”

A second man strode forward to Nogaret’s side, red-faced with anger. With dark hair, dark eyes, and a square chin, he had the features of a member of House Colonna. “We have come by order of the King of France!” the second man shouted at Robert. “We will be heard!”

“Sciarra,” Nogaret warned the other man.

Robert eyed Sciarra Colonna up and down before replying. “Not today. The Holy Father is in deep meditation and cannot be disturbed.” Robert stabbed a finger in the red-faced Colonna’s chest. “Not even by a king.”

Incensed, Sciarra’s hand moved to his sword.

Robert’s hand was quicker, moving to his sword hilt in an instant. “That would be ill advised,” he warned with a terrifyingly menacing look that Dominico had never seen before.

“Sciarra,” Nogaret intervened, forcing him back a step. “Please, let me handle this.”

Nogaret turned back to Robert. "Inform Benedetto that I have come by order of King Philip IV of France. I will escort him to Lyons where he will be brought before a general council for deposition."

Nogaret held out a rolled parchment with a large red seal. Robert took the parchment and handed it back to Dominico without looking at it.

"If he does not come willingly," Nogaret continued, "I am prepared to take him by force."

"Also ill advised," Robert said, re-crossing his arms over his chest. "I am his sworn Protector. As long as I still draw breath, you will not take him. Go back to Paris and tell your king that his plan to depose Pope Boniface has failed. I suggest you do it quickly while His Holiness is still in a forgiving mood."

"So be it," Nogaret said. He motioned to his captain who ordered his men forward. "Arrest this man and break down this door."

Dominico watched his master confidently stand his ground, unintimidated by the dozen armed men cautiously advancing up the stone steps with spears and halberds. Two of the men grabbed Robert by his arms, one on each side, intent on pulling him aside. He shrugged them off as if they were small children and sent them tumbling down the steps where they landed heavily at Nogaret's feet.

Four more rushed forward leveling their spears at Robert and looking like they planned to skewer him. Again Robert held his ground, eyeing the four with a fierce grin. He made no move to defend himself until the bravest of the four lunged with his spear aimed at Robert's chest. Quicker than Dominico thought it possible for a man to move, his master spun into the spear and wrenched it free. Reversing the thrust, he jammed the butt of the spear backwards into the surprised man's chest. The man careened backwards from the force of the blow, taking two others down with him. Robert snapped the spear in half across his knee.

Dominico found himself snickering at how easily his master had gotten the upper hand. His smile faded when eight more men raised their spears at the command of their embarrassed captain. With a tight wedge of steel points advancing, Robert unexpectedly waded into the group using the two halves of the spear as clubs. He deflected a spear thrust and slipped between two others, their sharp tips slicing through his surcoat but glancing off his chain mail. The wedge of spearmen quickly crumbled under Robert's punishing blows to their arms and heads. Within moments eight more of Nogaret's army were down.

The captain and two more of his men came forward with drawn swords. Robert tossed the two halves of his spear at the wounded men scrambling to get out of their way. Only when Robert faced off opposite the three swordsmen on the wide stone platform at the top of the steps did he draw his own sword. Its polished surface gleamed of gold in the morning sunlight.

Robert immediately went on the offensive, quickly disarming the two lesser swordsmen and sending them scurrying away clutching at gashes in their leather armored sword arms. The captain advanced with a furious offensive flurry aimed at putting Robert on the defensive. With speed and skill the like Dominico had never before seen, his master out fought the captain,

finally knocking the off-balance man backwards with a backhanded fist to his face. He slapped down hard on his arse. When he slowly rose he was stunned to find his sword in Robert's hand. The captain warily backed down the steps, barking out orders as he wiped blood from his nose. Men with crossbows and short bows ran forward.

Robert spun and wrenched his shield from Dominico's shaking hands. "Get the door open," he hissed.

Keeping an eye on the archers who were taking aim, Dominico pounded on the door three times with his fist.

"I warned you that force would be ill advised," Robert yelled at Nogaret before raising his shield.

Dominico ducked down as crossbow bolts thudded into the door above his head. Then the door gave way and strong hands yanked Dominico inward. Robert calmly backed inside the palace as another volley thumped into his heavy wooden shield. Marco's men quickly closed and barred the door.

"That went well," Marco commented to Robert.

"Better than I had hoped," Robert replied.

Robert plucked the parchment from Dominico's grasp then thrust his shield into his shaking hands. He stumbled under the weight then hurried after his master as Robert strode away.

"Master," Dominico said as they rounded a corner. "You could have killed those men yet you intentionally let them live."

"One thoroughly beaten man is worth ten dead men. Word will spread. In an hour every man in that rabble out there will fear me."

"But surely you should have killed their captain. Leaderless, the army might have . . ."

"I did far worse than kill him. Remember your lesson last night?"

Dominico smiled as he began to understand what Robert had been trying to teach him. By leaving the captain alive he would still be in command yet he would no longer have the respect of his men.

They entered the Hall of the Exchequer where his uncle waited, now dressed in his white cassock and skullcap. Advisors and cardinals in their red caps attended him. Robert went to a knee then stood, offering up the sealed parchment.

"King Philip sent Guillaume de Nogaret who intends to take you in chains to Lyons where you will be brought before a general council . . ."

"And compelled to abdicate," Boniface finished. "All to prevent me from excommunicating Philip by promulgating Super Petri Solio."

As Boniface and his cardinals conferred, Dominico followed Robert to a corner of the room.

"Shouldn't we be helping with the defense of the palace?" Dominico asked.

“My place is here,” Robert replied. “Marco will call for me if I am needed.”

Runners came and went with news of the attack on the palace. Nogaret’s army hacked at the wooden shutters and doors of the palace buildings with swords and hatchets only to be met with falling debris and arrows launched from narrow windows above their heads. They tried using oil and fire to burn their way through the wooden barriers but buckets of water from above doused the fires and arrows targeted anyone coming forth with a torch. In the one place where they did manage to breach a shuttered window, those who dared enter were rapidly and efficiently cut down, their bodies hung up in the window while Marco’s men closed the breach by constructing wooden barriers much stronger than the shutters.

The assault dragged on through the morning and into the afternoon with no further breaches. It seemed Marco’s defense was well thought out and expertly executed. For every new tactic used by the Nogaret’s army, there was a ready response from Captain Marco’s men. Nogaret’s army on the other hand was tiring. They had ridden all night to arrive here at dawn and now the late summer sun was beating down on them in their battle gear. At one-thirty in the afternoon, Captain Marco himself arrived with news that the invaders had retreated out of bow range.

“Nogaret has issued his terms. He requires a response by three o’clock at which time the attack will continue.”

Boniface huffed and turned to two of his cardinals.

“What are his terms?” a particularly frightened cardinal asked Marco.

“No surprise. Restoration of House Colonna, abdication, and the surrender of Boniface’s person.”

“None of which I will ever do,” Boniface said over his shoulder. To a servant he barked, “Bring me food. I am hungry.”

* * *

As it neared three o’clock, Dominico followed his master to the main doors to deliver his uncle’s response to Nogaret. The prospect of facing the invaders who had been losing badly all day made Dominico nervous that they might just be shot on sight. It seemed to bother Robert not at all. Dutifully carrying Robert’s shield, he again followed his master outside, the massive doors slamming shut behind him.

Robert stood tall as he eyed the invaders, looking every bit like a brave knight ready to fight to the death. The nastiest looking knot of men Dominico had ever seen huddled behind makeshift barriers of overturned wagons and crates and barrels, crossbows bristling from every gap. Guillaume de Nogaret approached on foot with Sciarra Colonna on his heels. Nogaret’s captain was nowhere to be seen.

“Bring out Boniface,” Nogaret demanded after a moment.

“The Holy Father rejects your terms,” Robert replied loudly, eyeing the invaders. “He implores you to abandon this folly and promises to absolve the sins of all who lay down their weapons. Those who continue to fight will be condemned.”

Nogaret nodded as if that was the answer he had expected to hear. He turned to leave then abruptly turned back to Robert. "I have twenty bows aimed at you. I could shoot you down with a wave of my hand," Nogaret said.

Nogaret began slowly raising his right hand that had been resting at his side. Faster than a lightning strike, Robert's sword was out, the flat of his golden blade resting on Nogaret's forearm before he lifted it higher than his belt.

"That would be a mistake," Robert warned Nogaret menacingly, making eye contact with the man for the first time.

Nogaret's eyes went wide for a moment then he relaxed his arm. "You are a Frenchman. Why do you protect this madman? He is drunk with power."

"I am the Protector," Robert replied impassively.

"After I force him to abdicate you will be nothing. A man of your skill and stature would be handsomely rewarded for your service to the King. If you were to step aside . . ."

"You will not take him as long as I draw breath," Robert interrupted.

Dominico knocked on the door at Robert's signal and together they backed inside the palace. A roar went up outside as the attack began again in earnest. Marco barked out orders to his men and strode away. Robert grunted then motioned for Dominico to follow.

Back in the Hall of the Exchequer, Boniface continued to confer with his cardinals, their numbers dwindling. Dominico waited beside his master for hours as the battle raged outside. The defenders were holding out valiantly but the mood among the whispering cardinals gradually changed from hope to despair. They quietly discussed the possibility that Marco would betray them to his cousin. He was a Colonna after all. Their mutterings eventually questioned Robert's loyalty as well. How could a Frenchman be relied upon to protect Boniface if the invaders broke into the palace? Why isn't he helping the palace defenders repel the invaders? Dominico noted the growing number of dark glances from several cardinals when they thought Robert wasn't looking their way.

A runner ran into the hall breathless, looked around, then ran to Robert. Dominico didn't hear the runner's mumbled message but picked up Robert's shield when Robert motioned for him to follow. They were led to a room with tall, narrow, North-facing windows. Marco and a squad of his archers were there. Several were nursing wounds.

"Ah, Robert," Marco greeted him. "I could use your help dispatching a dozen or so archers taking cover about seventy yards out. There is a particularly nasty group of men with axes busily chopping away at the doors directly below us. Every time my archers take aim at them, they are at the mercy of a volley of well aimed arrows."

Dominico was sent running to Robert's quarters where he opened a long wooden chest. Wrapped in soft oilcloth he found the longest longbow he had ever seen, nearly as tall as himself. He snatched up a quiver of long arrows and ran back to his master who quickly strung the

massive longbow. He knew his master was expert with a sword but was surprised that he was skilled with the longbow as well.

Dominico watched in awe as Marco's men drew the shutters open and Robert took aim. Robert's massive arms rippled with incredible strength as he drew back the bowstring. The first arrow nearly took the head off of one of the enemy archers. Nine more arrows followed quickly after the first and were just as deadly. Robert used two more on the last two enemy archers who chose to turn and run rather than return fire. Robert's final two shots dropped them, hitting moving targets at a distance that seemed impossible to Dominico.

When Robert stepped back from the window, Marco ordered his archers to open fire on the attackers below. Dominico heard the screams of the dying men outside as he followed Robert out into the corridor.

When they arrived back in the Hall of the Exchequer, Robert was summoned to the feet of Boniface who sat on his throne wearing the full accouterments of his office. Robert knelt and reverently kissed the Fisherman's Ring on Boniface's hand as Dominico watched from a corner.

"Rise, my Protector," Boniface commanded. His face grew grim as he gazed at Robert, meeting his eyes. "My cardinals have doubts that Marco will not betray us to his cousin before the end."

"If there is treachery in the heart of anyone, it is not Marco."

"You know this for certain? You think you know the man but do you truly know his heart?"

"Marco is no traitor," Robert said flatly.

"I pray you are right. But if not, I need to know that you are committed to protect me against your own countrymen."

"I am your Protector. I took a vow to give my own life to save yours."

"Yes, you did. Yet they have doubts," Boniface said, a hand motioning to his cardinals.

"They have doubts because my vow does not extend to them." Robert glanced menacingly toward the table where the remaining five cardinals sat. None of them met his eyes.

"I seek reassurance that you are committed to your vow."

"What reassurance can I give? I am here. I fight with sword and bow. I don't hide like a craven in a corner hoping others will save me." Robert glanced at the cardinals again.

"Indeed, but I want you to know that if I am captured by that rabble outside I will withhold absolution."

Dominico saw Robert's gaze darken. He noted Robert did not end each sentence with an ingratiating title of respect. He spoke to Boniface as an equal.

"I will fulfill my vow. I will fight this battle myself if I have to and you will fulfill your promise to absolve me." It was a statement of fact, not a request. "You will then grant me leave for two months to visit my wife and daughter."

Boniface blanched. “We have talked about this, Robert. I need you here. If you persist in this request, I will . . .”

“What? Withhold absolution? Go back on your promise?”

“Robert, your vow . . .”

Dominico had never seen his normally impassive master in such a dark mood. He moved a step backwards unconsciously as the tension in the room became palpable. The others in the room felt it too as all heads turned warily toward Robert.

“You desire reassurance that I will honor my vow? Reassure me that you will honor your promise by granting my request for leave.”

Several cardinals gasped at Robert’s arrogance and brazen lack of respect.

Boniface’s face turned red. “I will do no such thing! You will fulfill your vow to protect me or I will . . .”

Robert turned and took a step toward the door.

“How dare you turn your back on me! I have not dismissed you!”

Robert turned and clacked the end of his longbow noisily on the floor, his other hand finding the hilt of his sword. “Answer me this, Your Holiness: what gives you the right to toy with men’s lives so callously?”

Boniface abruptly stood. “I am the Vicar of Jesus Christ!”

Robert’s impassive gaze never wavered. After a moment his face darkened, as if some grave decision had been irrevocably made. “No, Benedetto. You have deluded yourself into believing that is who you are, but you are just a man. And no man has the power you claim.” Robert turned and strode toward the door.

“You think I am just a man? Like you? I am far more . . .”

“No!” Robert again stopped and cut off the red-faced Boniface. “Not like me. There is no honor in you. For years I have stood in the shadows, listening while you plotted and schemed with these so called Holy men,” Robert motioned to the few cardinals who had not fled. “You and your clergymen are a nest of vipers, deceiving and poisoning the hearts of men while only pretending to be their shepherds. When you should be feeding them, guiding them to the light, you are using them, taking their coin in payment for indulgences. In your lust for power, the people you claim to represent before Christ are nothing more than pawns in your political schemes.”

“Judas!” Boniface yelled at Robert’s back as he strode toward the door. “You cannot abandon me in my darkest hour! You made a solemn vow to protect me!”

“Your greed and lust for power brought this war upon you, you can fight it yourself. Your fate is in God’s hands now. I break my vow.”

Boniface looked as though he had just been slapped hard across the cheeks as Robert shouldered his way through the few guards at the doorway.

Dominico heard Robert's shield clatter to the floor noisily, his hands no longer able to hold it. He hurried after his master, following Robert downstairs and through corridors to the adjoining chapel. A knot of Marco's men was busy shoring up a heavy oak door that was being battered from the outside. Robert caught sight of him and pulled him close with a fist knotted in his tunic.

"Get out of here, boy," he said darkly. "Save yourself."

"Where are you going?"

"Home."

Robert shoved him backwards down the corridor where Dominico stumbled and fell to the floor, stunned at the turn of events. Dominico got to his feet and peeked around the corner. Robert ordered Marco's men to unbar the door. He threw the door open, drew his sword, and stepped outside. The attackers ceased their attack and scrambled backwards when they saw the giant warrior unexpectedly emerge. To their surprise Robert didn't attack. He simply walked through them with his sword and bow.

The guards inside were as stunned as the attackers to see Robert simply walk away. The two sides looked at each other for a heartbeat then a cry of victory went up among the enemy. Raising their swords in the air, they rushed through the open door with a shout of victory, quickly overwhelming the few palace guards.

Dominico turned and ran. With nowhere else to go, he ran back upstairs to his uncle. Breathless, he burst into the Hall of the Exchequer. As he fumbled with how to tell his uncle that Robert had betrayed them, he was shouldered aside by Marco who strode into the hall with twenty armed men behind him. While his men closed and barred the double doors, Marco approached Boniface who stood from the table where he had been eating his evening meal.

"Your Holiness, the palace has been breached," he said.

Boniface's face went pale at the sound of fighting in the corridor. "Betrayed like the Savior," he muttered.

Boniface bowed his head for his nephew Francesco to place the tiara on his head. Then he reverently picked up the papal keys in one hand and a cross in the other. He moved unhurriedly, ascending his throne as the enemy began battering on the doors. Sitting down, he said, "At least I shall die as Pope."

Marco and his men were ready as the doors burst open and armed men flooded into the hall, Sciarra Colonna at their head. The fighting was intense but short lived. Marco and his men were quickly overwhelmed and forced to surrender. Boniface's cardinals, servants, and advisors fled in the chaos. Dominico was herded into a corner with Marco and his men where he watched Sciarra Colonna turn to Boniface on his throne at the opposite end of the hall.

Wearing a triumphant grin, Sciarra strode across the room with his sword drawn. His men stepped aside giving him an aisle to the throne. He raised his sword as if to strike Boniface down when Guillaume de Nogaret rushed to him, catching his sword arm. They argued violently for several moments before an angry Sciarra sheathed his sword then reached out and slapped the Holy Father violently across the face with a bare hand. The loud smack of the slap echoed off the walls of the suddenly silent hall. Sciarra stepped down from the throne and spat on the floor.

Nogaret unrolled a scroll and began reading a legal document to Boniface in French. “We will escort you to Lyons where you will be deposed,” Nogaret said after he finished reading what he called the Paris Resolutions, “in chains if you refuse to cooperate.”

Boniface looked down at Nogaret from his throne, his cheek bright red from Sciarra’s slap. “Here is my head. Here is my neck. I will patiently bear that I, lawful pontiff and Vicar of Jesus Christ, stand condemned by heretics.”

After Boniface was stripped of the tiara, the keys, and the cross, and dragged from the hall, Sciarra turned his attention to Marco. Two of the mercenaries grabbed Marco by the arms, separating him from his men. Held firmly against the wall, Marco waited with his chin held high as his cousin approached with an angry scowl and his sword drawn.

“You dare to defend the man who destroyed our family!” Sciarra spat at Marco’s feet then lashed out with a fist.

“House Colonna is gone. Killing Boniface, or me for that matter, won’t restore it.”

Sciarra sheathed his sword and drew a short dagger from his belt. He held the sharp blade up close to Marco’s face. “I’m not going to kill you, cousin. I’m going to mark you so all that see you will forever know you as a traitor to your own family.”

His head held firmly, Marco held his screams as his cousin drew the blade vertically down the side of his face from his left eyebrow through his eye and his cheek to the corner of his mouth. Sciarra’s men released Marco, letting him drop to the floor. Sciarra spat again then strode out of the room, his men on his heels.

Apparently no longer a threat, Dominico and Marco’s men were left alone. Dominico shambled out of the hall as Marco’s men attended his wound. Everywhere the men of Nogaret’s army ran about crazily, carrying away expensive furnishings and decorations. Sickened by their callous greed, he wandered through the corridors aimlessly, occasionally shoved aside as a plundering mercenary hurried past.

He stopped short at the entrance to the papal library when a strange, burning odor filled his nostrils. The massive ironbound oak door, that was kept securely locked at all times, was open wide. The heavy steel lock mechanism was charred and melted. He entered the room and fell to his knees as he saw the library’s many precious books and parchments that he had helped organize carelessly scattered on the floor in piles, apparently not worth stealing.

Looking up through blurring tears at the sound of movement he saw that a section of the shelved wall was open, revealing a hidden room he had never seen before. A man dressed in

black exited the hidden room carrying a leather bound tome and several parchments. The man eyed Dominico with a triumphant grin as he stuffed his treasure into a cloth bag. Without a word, the man strode around Dominico and out the door, unconcerned about the books and papers he trod underfoot.

* * *

The next day, the townspeople of Anagni, who had been fraternizing with the invading army to avoid having their homes and livelihood pillaged and burned, began grumbling about the treatment of the Holy Father, their fellow townsman and most prominent member of House Caetani. Dominico stood among the townsfolk watching as the mercenary army plundered the papal palace of its fine furnishings, ate its food stores, and emptied its cellar of wine and ale. In the afternoon, Nogaret brought out a nearly naked Boniface, parading his bruised and abused person through the streets sitting backwards on a horse with a bucket on his head as his drunken captors jeered at him.

It was too much for the townsfolk to take. As the mercenary army began to carry off their plunder and their presence dwindled, the outraged burghers of Anagni rallied the townsfolk. Early the next morning, bolstered by four hundred horsemen who had arrived from Rome led by Cardinal Matteo Orsini, Dominico was among the first to storm the palace. Still drunken and sleeping, the remaining mercenary raiders were quickly disarmed and expelled from the city. Guillaume de Nogaret and Sciarra Colonna escaped, evading capture.

Dominico himself found his uncle locked in a cellar lying on the cold floor, naked and shivering. None of Nogaret's men had bothered to bring him food or drink. He brought Boniface a robe, and together with several burghers, carried him to his plundered chambers where he was given food and wine. Cardinal Matteo took charge of his safety and posted guards throughout the palace and on the city walls.

Before leaving with Cardinal Matteo and his horsemen for Rome, Boniface magnanimously decreed a pardon upon Nogaret's men in the custody of the townsfolk, excepting of course those that had plundered church property and refused to return it. But he was only a shell of his former self. The incident had changed him in a way that was hard to describe but very evident. His boldness and air of superiority were gone, as if he knew that he was no longer Pope.

Dominico thought at first that it was Sciarra Colonna's slap across the cheek or blatant mistreatment that had broke his uncle's spirit. Then Robert's words from a few nights ago began to make sense: The day men lose respect for their leader is the day they begin to abandon him. That was it. His uncle had been abandoned and betrayed, first by his townsfolk and relatives who had fraternized with the invading army, then by his trusted Protector, a slap far more agonizing than Sciarra's.