



“Utterly splendid.”  
—KATHRYN STOCKETT

*The  
Shoemaker's  
Wife*

*a novel*

ADRIANA  
TRIGIANI

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

*the*  
SHOEMAKER'S  
WIFE  
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ADRIANA TRIGIANI



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## Dedication



IN MEMORY OF MONSIGNOR DON ANDREA SPADA WHO LOVED THE  
MOUNTAIN

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PART ONE

*The Italian Alps*

# Chapter 1

## A GOLD RING

### *Un Anello d'oro*

The scalloped hem of Caterina Lazzari's blue velvet coat grazed the fresh-fallen snow, leaving a pale pink path on the bricks as she walked across the empty piazza. The only sound was the soft, rhythmic sweep of her footsteps, like hands dusting flour across an old wooden cutting board.

All around her, the Italian Alps loomed like silver daggers against a pewter sky. The rising winter sun, a pinprick of gold buried in the expanse of gray, barely flickered. In the first light of morning, dressed in blue, Caterina looked like a bird.

She turned, exhaling a long breath into the cold winter air.

"Ciro?" she called out. "Eduardo!"

She heard her sons' laughter echo across the empty colonnade, but couldn't place them. She surveyed the columns of the open portico. This wasn't a morning for hide-and-seek, or for playing games. She called to them again. Her mind swam with all she had accomplished, big chores and small errands, attending to a slew of overwhelming details, documents filed and keys returned, all the while stretching the few lire she had left to meet her obligations.

The first stage of widowhood is paperwork.

Caterina had never imagined she would be standing here alone, on the first day of 1905, with nothing before her but the small hope of eventual reinvention. Every single promise made to her had been broken.

Caterina looked up as a window on the second floor of the shoe shop opened and an old woman shook a rag rug out into the cold air. Caterina

caught her eye. The woman looked away, pulled the rug back inside, and slammed the window shut.

Her younger son, *Ciro*, peered around one of the columns. His blue-green eyes were the exact color of his father's, as deep and clear as the water of *Sestri Levante*. At ten years old, he was a replica of *Carlo Lazzari*, with big hands and feet and thick sandy brown hair. He was the strongest boy in *Vilminore*. When the village children went down into the valley to collect sticks bundled to sell for kindling, *Ciro* always had the heaviest haul strapped to his back because he could carry it.

*Caterina* felt a pang whenever she looked at him; in *Ciro's* face was all she had lost and would never recover. "Here." She pointed to the ground beside her black leather boot. "Now."

*Ciro* picked up his father's leather duffel and, running to his mother, called to his brother, who hid behind the statuary.

*Eduardo*, at eleven, resembled his mother's people, the *Montini* family, dark-eyed, tall, and willowy. He too picked up his satchel and ran to join them.

At the foot of the mountain, in the city of *Bergamo*, where *Caterina* had been born thirty-two years ago, the *Montini* family had set up a printing press that churned out linen writing paper, engraved calling cards, and small books in a shop on *Via Borgo Palazzo*. They had a house and a garden. As she closed her eyes, she saw her parents sitting at an alfresco table under their grape arbor, eating ricotta and honey sandwiches on thick, fresh bread. *Caterina* remembered all they were and all they had.

The boys dropped their suitcases in the snow.

"Sorry, Mama," *Ciro* said. He looked up at his mother and knew for certain that she was the most beautiful woman in the world. Her skin had the scent of peaches and felt like satin. His mother's long hair fell into soft, romantic waves, and ever since he could remember, as he lay in her arms, he had twisted a lock until it became a single shiny black rope.

"You look pretty," *Ciro* said earnestly. Whenever *Caterina* was sad, he tried to cheer her up with compliments.

*Caterina* smiled. "Every son thinks his mother is beautiful." Her cheeks turned pink in the cold as the tip of her aquiline nose turned bright red. "Even when she isn't."

Caterina fished in her purse for a small mirror and a chamois puff. The tip of red disappeared as she powdered it. She pursed her lips and looked down at her boys with a critical eye. She straightened Eduardo's collar, and pulled Ciro's coat sleeve over his wrist. The coat was too small for him, and no amount of pulling would add the two inches at the cuff to make it fit properly. "You just keep growing, Ciro."

"I'm sorry, Mama."

She remembered when she had their coats made for them, along with pincord trousers and white cotton shirts. There had been tufted blankets in their cribs when they were born, a layette of soft cotton gowns with pearl buttons. Wooden toys. Picture books. Her sons had long outgrown the clothes, and there was no replacing them.

Eduardo had one pair of wool pants and a coat given to him by a neighbor. Ciro wore the clean but ill-fitting clothes of his father, the hems on the work pants three inches deep, tacked with ragged stitches because sewing was not one of Caterina's talents. Ciro's belt was tightened on the last grommet, but still too loose to function properly.

"Where are we going, Mama?" Ciro asked as he followed his mother.

"She told you a hundred times. You don't listen." Eduardo lifted his brother's duffel and carried it.

"You must listen *for* him," Caterina reminded Eduardo.

"We're going to stay at the convent of San Nicola."

"Why do we have to live with nuns?" Ciro complained.

Caterina turned and faced her sons. They looked up at her, hoping for an explanation that would make sense of all the mysterious goings-on of the past few days. They weren't even sure what questions to ask, or what information they needed to know, but they were certain there must have been some reason behind Mama's strange behavior. She had been anxious. She wept through the night when she thought her sons were asleep. She had written lots of letters, more in the last week than they could ever remember her writing.

Caterina knew that if she shared the truth, she would have failed them. A good mother should never knowingly fail her children, not when she is all they have left in the world. Besides, in the years to come, Ciro would remember only the facts, while Eduardo would paint them with a soft brush. Neither version would be true, so what did it matter?

Caterina could not bear the responsibility of making every decision alone. In the fog of grief, she had to be sensible, and think of every possible alternative for her boys. In her mental state, she could not take care of her sons, and she knew it. She made lists of names, recalling every contact in her family's past and her husband's, any name that might be helpful. She scanned the list, knowing many of them probably needed as much help as she did. Years of poverty had depleted the region, and forced many to move down to Bergamo and Milan in search of work.

After much thought, she remembered that her father had printed missals for every parish in the Lombardy region, and as far south as Milan. He had donated his services as an indulgence to the Holy Roman Church, expecting no payment in return. Caterina used the old favor to secure a place for her sons with the sisters of San Nicola.

Caterina placed a hand on each of their shoulders.

"Listen to me. This is the most important thing I will ever tell you. Do as you're told. Do whatever the nuns ask you to do. Do it well. You must also do more than they ask of you. Anticipate. Look around. Do chores *before* the sisters ask.

"When Sister asks you to gather wood, do it immediately. No complaining! Help one another—make yourselves indispensable.

"Chop the wood, carry it inside, and build the fire without asking. Check the damper before lighting the kindling. And when the fire is out, clean the ash pit and close the flue. Sweep up so it looks like a picture. Prepare the hearth for the next fire with dry logs and kindling. Put the broom and the dustpan and the poker away. Don't wait for Sister to remind you.

"Make yourselves useful and stay out of trouble. Be pious and pray. Sit in the front pew during mass and sit at the farthest end of the bench during dinner. Take your portions last, and never seconds. You are there because of their kindness, not because I could pay them to keep you. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Mama," Eduardo said.

Caterina placed her hand on Eduardo's face and smiled. He put his arm around his mother's waist and held on tight. Then she pulled *Ciro* close. Her soft coat felt good against his face. "I know you can be good."

"I can't," *Ciro* sputtered, as he pulled away from his mother's embrace, "and I won't."