



Following are what I call the lost chapters of Shadowed by Grace. Originally, I envisioned the series as a contemporary romantic suspense intertwined through three books, while each book focused on one aspect of the Monuments Men in Europe during WWII. As I wrote, we streamlined the story, and Shadowed by Grace grew to focus only on the efforts of the Monuments Men in Italy during 1944. I love the romance and history of Italy, so it wasn't much of a sacrifice – especially when you consider I was already over word count – imagine how long the story would have been!

So here's what I originally imagined as the opening scene of the contemporary story...and no, I never wrote any more!

Florence, Italy

May 2011

The relentless pounding of the shells...it exhausts. It terrifies. It demoralizes. Yet it serves as the back notes of life. As long as I hear, I live.

The music of the words flowed through Rachelle Catlett's mind as she gingerly lifted the page in the journal. The white gloves she wore seemed insufficient to protect the nearly seventy-year-old pages. If the whole volume was written with such prose, then the search for the information she hoped to find would be worth it. If only she could find the details necessary to recreate the scenes, the history.

"Hey, Rachelle. Gonna join us?" Alberto sang her name in his Italian accent as he waggled his eyebrows. The picture of Italian romance wrapped in a good-looking package had half the women on the team giggling, but she tried to ignore him.

She waved a gloved hand. "I can't come now. Need to read a bit more."

"That dusty volume? Its secrets aren't going anywhere. But the food..." he kissed his fingers to his lips. "The food will not wait."

"Another time." When she didn't have the pressure of a deadline pushing her to recreate the historic events. When she'd signed on for the short-term position, it had seemed the perfect way to spend the spring semester. Take a sabbatical and escape to the Tuscan countryside.

She'd seen enough movies to know the beauty and location would feed her soul. The job seemed like the perfect solution to escape for a bit and put some much-needed distance between Matt and her. Some place where their paths wouldn't intersect without effort. And if she located an under-told story, all the better. Then she'd have fodder for a series of articles that might get her noticed for a tenure track position at some university in the States. With a tight job market, she needed every advantage she could create.

As she glanced around the musty smelling room, she tried to imagine what her friends

would think. To sit in an archives that wouldn't move after turning down dinner with a charming and handsome Italian.

Hopeless.

She heard the word as clearly as if one of her roommates had spoken it out loud.

Maybe, she was hopeless when it came to romance, but the past was where she excelled – especially if it was someone else's past. Nothing suited her better than row after row of bookshelves that practically touched the ceiling and carried a burden of books. The older the tomes, the better. Magic occurred when old stories leapt to life. When the ancient connected with the present. When she turned a page and met someone real.

She eased another page over, and her nose wrinkled. Dust permeated the room and was released when the books were disturbed.

All the room needed to complete the eerie picture was a row of flickering candles lining the walls and tables. The dim light would hint at the secrets buried in the books. Secrets others didn't care about or thought should remain hidden. Yet those secrets had drawn her across the Atlantic Ocean and away from the man who broke her heart.

The oak table she sat at was one of five scattered among the bookshelves. Its surface had worn smooth under years of use, a soft patina reflected in the overhead light.

She turned back to the journal, to the story woven across its pages of a young woman about her own age whose main goal was to survive the battles raging around her. Unlike the ones that waged inside Rachele, this young woman had to outlive the very real bombs and bullets of World War II. What Rachele had studied in class and in books, this young woman had experienced.

And the beauty in those written words drew Rachele to the girl. She had to know more,

understand the heart of this woman who was more poet than mere survivor.

Hours later Rachelle leaned back in the chair and stretched. Her stomach growled. Why had she'd turned down Alberto? Even a quick bite would have done her good. She glanced at her wristwatch. Ten o'clock. She'd need to hurry before she turned into a pumpkin that had rooted into the corner of the archives. Nice!

The door opened, and Rachelle startled into a sitting position. Who would come to the library at this hour? Most of the students, even those with heavy dissertation deadlines had abandoned the place shortly after Alberto and his gang left.

A shadow moved through the door, and Rachelle considered throwing herself under the table.

"Rachelle, *bello*, you still here?" Alberto's baritone carried into the room before she could clearly identify him.

"What are you doing here?" Other than scaring her to death.

"Came to walk you to your apartment if you still lingered in this dusty place."

Rachelle shook her head, clearing the out-of-control anxiety, and decided to take him at his word. "I would have been fine."

"This is not one of your American cities. There are Italian men, roaming the streets, on the hunt for the beautiful foreign women."

"I've already been here several weeks, Alberto."

He shrugged in his trademark languid manner. "One can never be too careful."

Was there a hint of something deeper, darker than teasing in his tone? Rachelle set the book to the side. "Thank you for your kindness, sir. I'd be delighted to have the escort, no matter how unnecessary it is."

A smile lit up his face as she gathered her things under his watchful gaze. She brushed a hand across the journal's cover. Part of her wished she could take it home, read it from the comfort of her own bed, but she knew that wasn't possible. Not with the heavy value placed on antiquities – even those that were a mere seventy years old. Instead, she slipped it into her locker, spun the lock, and then wrote a quick note she left on the curator's desk.

She glanced around the room. "I think that's it."

"Good. Let's get you home."

Rachelle grabbed her messenger bag and slung it across her shoulder. Alberto placed his hand at the small of her back as he escorted her from the room and pulled the door shut behind them. A small sound made her turn as he led her down the dark hallway toward the main doors. She inhaled sharply.

Alberto turned to her. "What?"

"Someone's behind us."

"Then let's leave quickly. Give them nothing to watch." Before she could say a word, he shoved her in the back. "Run."

I also imagined two different opening scenes for the hero Scott Lindstrom. In this one, he's at the New York City harbor getting ready to board the ship that will carry him to Europe and start him on the journey to Italy. However, as we peek in on the scene, things aren't going quite as he'd planned...read and you'll see why.

January 1944

Elaine scooted ahead of Scott Lindstrom as they worked their way through the troops. He loved the way her delicate form danced through the tight spaces, an elegant chase that revealed the years of dance lessons her privileged upbringing had provided. Finding some privacy would have worked much better anywhere but the pier. Yet before they arrived Elaine had barely met his eyes. Scott refused to brace for the worst. Elaine had been his fiancée for six months, but when he'd suggested marrying before he left for Italy, she'd scoffed.

She would not have a rushed wedding. Those things took time to plan. Who knew?

As he took another sharp jab to the ribs, he tugged Elaine's arm, halting her progress. "Elaine, honey, this is ridiculous. I can kiss you right here."

As if to reinforce his statement, a soldier and his gal not five feet away locked lips like there'd be no tomorrow. Maybe there wouldn't for that private. Scott didn't harbor those concerns, not with his assignment to the Monuments Men. Instead, he carried the fear Elaine wouldn't wait for him to return. The clouds in her eyes hadn't cleared since the day he informed her he'd enlisted.

She looked everywhere but at him, and he took a finger and gently tipped her chin until she had to meet his gaze. "Elaine..."

“Fine, if this is the way you want things.” She huffed a burst of air. “Scott, I need to give this back to you.” She tugged the glove off her left hand, then man-handed his grandmother’s engagement ring from her ring finger. “I can’t do this.”

He stared at the ring, mesmerized to see it held toward him rather than gracing her slender finger. “Can’t do what?”

“Look at me, Scott.” She waited until he complied. “There’s no way we would work. It was a pipe dream. Something I wanted to believe. But Daddy helped me see that with this crazy enlisting...well, you’ll never have any chance of creating wealth.”

“I’m a museum curator.”

“Exactly. Not a soldier. This...” She brushed a hand against the front of his uniform. “This is not you. Yet you did it without talking to me.”

“You knew about the committee. How did you expect me to sit through meetings about how important it was to save the art and architecture in Europe and not act?” She had to know him better than that. He wasn’t the type to wait for someone else to do what he could do. With his art degree and museum experience, he fit the specialized bill the Army needed. Not just the Army, though. That’s what he had such a hard time getting Elaine and her high society family and friends to understand. If something wasn’t done in Europe, more than lives would be lost in the war. The very underpinnings of Western culture, its art and architecture, its very heart, would be destroyed or disappear.

“All that is your passion, Scott, not mine. I won’t wait while you go play soldier. A fool’s errand if I’ve ever seen one.” Someone bumped into her and she grimaced. Glad to know something rattled her. “You can go and you can do whatever this is. That’s fine. But don’t expect me to buy your vision.”

“Then why say you’d marry me?”

“You weren’t in the grip of the war.” She tucked the ring into his jacket pocket. “You need someone who cares about the same things you care about. That’s not me.” Elaine gave him a small smile, reached up to place a kiss on his cheek, then stepped back. “Good-bye, Scott. Try to stay safe.”

“Good-bye.” The word hung in the space between them, too small to capture her and pull her back. Instead, he stood in the press of bodies as she slipped away disappearing from view behind the broad shoulders of too many soldiers. Only the bright purple feather on her hat bobbed in view. He’d known separation was imminent, but had expected it to be temporary. Now the vision of his future when he returned shimmered like a mirage that faded to nothingness.

A long horn sounded again. Soldiers pressed against him as they moved toward the gangplank. Scott patted his pocket, feeling the outline of his grandmother’s ring before he joined the ranks of those climbing onto the *RMS Queen Mary*.

He had to push his battered heart to the background. Now he’d steel himself and focus on the things that really mattered: saving historic art and finding one artist before it was too late.

If he failed at that, he might not come home. There would be nothing left for him.

In the end I cut this scene because it didn’t fit the timeline. I had to jump from here to the action months later in May. It no longer fit, so it got cut.

This scene I loved. It was the first one I wrote for Mr. Scott. I love the personality and fortitude he demonstrates. I love the way it showed one of the roles of the Monuments Men. However, the more I researched, the more I realized...the Monuments Men weren't established in Italy in February 1944. It just wouldn't have been possible for him to be there. Yet, arguments like this raged before the Allies bombed Monte Cassino. Historians continue to debate whether it was justified. I tried to capture both sides in this scene.

February 1944

“You can't bomb Monte Cassino.”

Scott strode to the front of the room, the words fresh on his lips. Maybe he'd left all his common sense in Washington. No, he'd just decided to fight for the things that mattered since Elaine had left him at the New York City pier. He marched deeper into a debate best left to the generals. One more moment in the middle of a war that left Scott praying for the courage to voice what no one in the crowded war room wanted to say or hear. This exemplified why he'd abandoned everything he'd built in Washington, D.C., for a war zone.

“Excuse me, soldier. Did I hear you correctly?” The one star looked at him, jaw firm and unyielding.

“That monastery has stood since Saint Benedict first moved there in 528 A.D.” Scott swallowed, but firmed his stance. This was too important to waver, even if these exact types of actions were what had caused his fiancée to hand back the ring when he enlisted. She'd called it foolhardy. He called it committed. What else could he do? Chase her when the Army said move?

“Do you understand how rich the history is to such a place? How irreplaceable if destroyed?”

“My men can’t be replaced either.” The man chewed his cigar at a furious tempo.

“This abbey has already been rebuilt three times.”

“They’ll rebuild again.” The man leaned forward on beefy forearms, his presence a clear indication of why he’d risen in rank. He wore authority like a natural garment. “I won’t cause my men’s deaths over a pile of historic stones.”

“You can’t be serious.” Scott paced as his frustration escaped his slim hold. How could he get them to understand this pile of stones was an ancient monastery of immeasurable worth? Whatever a person’s religious convictions, one couldn’t ignore the rich history it had experienced in no small part due to its proximity to Rome, the seat of the Catholic Church.

“Lindstrom, have a seat.” The British voice was clipped and insistent.

Scott glanced around the room, noting the hardened jaws and shadowed eyes. The Battle for Monte Cassino and the surrounding area had raged through the winter weeks, a bitter fight of fits and starts with heavy losses. With each day, more Allied soldiers were killed or injured by an entrenched German army that refused to give ground easily. The price had already run high in terms of men. Sentiment raced toward the objective of doing whatever it took to remove the Germans and move the Allied troops out of these God-forsaken mountains of Italy.

They might not like it, but he had a task, too. One that should be simple to execute, but when the real war hit Washington and New York ideals, the collision was violent.

He lifted his chin and straightened his spine. “Sirs, Monte Cassino is covered by General Eisenhower’s memo. This is exactly the type of artistic and historical site that his memo instructed us to honor to our utmost ability. Last I checked, we didn’t have any intelligence that placed Germans within the monastery’s walls.”

Colonel Bartholomew snorted. “It isn’t as though they’d stand to the side and wave a flag so we could count their noses. What I know is our men, American and British, are getting slaughtered sitting on the mountainside, while the Germans take pot-shots at us from their fortified positions. One of those is that pile of rock you think is more valuable than the boys fighting for your freedom.”

Major General Keyes had watched the exchange like it was some peace-time tennis match. He steepled his fingers in front of his face, then shook his head. “I think we need to consider our steps carefully. What if the Germans use the ruins to further fortify their position? It would provide a perfect defensible position, almost impossible to pick a part. On none of my fly-overs have I seen any indication that Germans actually occupy the abbey.”

“Other generals have insisted they saw exactly that.” The British officer studied Scott.

“Well, then, they’ve looked so hard they’re seeing what isn’t really there.” General Keyes approached the map of the region that hung on the wall. Pushpins of all colors dotted the board. “I can guarantee one thing: if we destroy the abbey, General Kesselring will instruct the Germans to move in. They’ll be further entrenched than they are now.”

“If they aren’t already there.” Colonel Bartholomew had the look of a bulldog with a bone he would not release.

The argument roared around him, and Scott swallowed back his anger and frustration. Maybe Eleanor had been right. He’d been a fool to accept a lowly position in the Army on a wild adventure to save art. He should have stayed in his curator slot, kept his beautiful fiancée. He’d already lost too much. He had to regain control before the MPs came in and hauled him off to the camp brig. He couldn’t fulfill his mission from there, but he still had one argument – maybe the one that would sway the big-wigs. “What if civilians are sheltered there?”

Colonel Bartholomew shook his head. “No civilians would choose to be that close to the battle.”

“They would because the monastery is church property and has provided shelter countless times in the past.” Scott scrubbed his face, feeling the battle slip from his hands. “The population would expect to find safety inside its walls.”

“Look, you’re an art curator not a military genius. Leave the battle plans to us. You can come in after the fact and save whatever’s left. I will not value the lives of my men less than some piece of inanimate, ancient architecture.”

“And don’t forget General Toker’s memo.” The one-star reentered the fray. “He says no engineers could navigate around, over or through those 150 foot high, ten feet wide walls. His men are the ones that will have to actually take the monastery.”

The debate continued but Scott retreated to the back wall and watched. Only then did he notice a small woman tucked in a corner, as if hiding. She wasn’t in uniform, and he couldn’t imagine how she belonged. He’d only been in country a few weeks, and already he was weary of the deprivation. How would a woman handle the same issues? What he wouldn’t give for a hot shower and a good meal. Then he thought of the Italian refugees. God had given him so much compared to them.

He pulled his attention back to the debate. Nothing he’d said had penetrated the battle weary men in the room. Within days, planes would zoom over the historic abbey and drop bombs on it until it was obliterated. If they were lucky, he would be wrong about the civilians. But he wasn’t wrong about the value of the site.

Of that he was certain.

Here's a scene from the very beginning when I imagined the heroine as an Italian woman. Rachel insisted she was the heroine, so Gianna disappeared. If you've read the book, this scene may feel familiar to you. Can anyone tell me why?

May 1943

The soft colors of the Tuscan countryside bathed in spring light clashed with the whistling of artillery shells flying overhead. Gianna Adamo ducked her chin and tried to pretend the sound came from far over the hills that surrounded Montegufoni. But when the drone of planes added to the underlying crescendo of noise, she fought the urge to lift her skirts, kick off her shoes, and run for the castle's portico.

She sucked in a steadying breath and whispered a prayer.

Surely God would protect the ancient castle, if not for the sake of tradition and the hundreds who sought shelter there, then for the priceless art stored inside. When the superintendent had approached the Englishman about securing some of the famed Uffizi Gallery pieces at the country estate, he'd quickly agreed. Then he'd commissioned her father to be one of the two trusted employees who guarded the artwork.

It all seemed so simple and unnecessary then. Yet Gianna had delighted in watching the paintings she'd studied from a distance fill rooms of the castle. A Botticelli stacked next to an Allori. Famed pieces created at the direction of the Medici family over the centuries and now historic pieces of Florentine and Italian art and culture.

All in the castle.

Occasionally when the enforced time at the castle felt like a prison sentence, she'd turned a piece around to study it in the varying light streaming through the windows. While not studies of light like the upstart Impressionists favored in France, she saw new details with each examination. It only served to fuel her love for her city and its culture.

Then the surrender came. But the Germans refused to leave. When the paintings were delivered, nobody would have dared to dream the peaceful countryside would be transformed into a battlefield between the Nazis and the approaching Anglo-American armies. Such thoughts seemed ridiculous in the light of the riches Tuscany harbored.

After the Italians laid down their arms in September, she'd naively hoped the Nazis would quietly leave Italy. Let the country return to its affairs with little resistance. Let Italians breath freely without Fascist or Nazis to monitor each breath. Instead, the Germans had fought to retain control of every inch of the Italian countryside. Any hopes her home city of Firenze would be spared evaporated.

Gianna lifted her face to the sky, letting the sun kiss her face. She closed her eyes and imagined a kiss from her Savior's throne room. Italy had need of many such kisses if anything were to rise from the rubble of war.

"Gianna Maria?" Her mother's contralto voice carried from nearer the castle. Another shell rocketed through the air, obliterating whatever words her mother said.

Father, protect us. One more night.

"Gianna." Urgency rocketed through her mother's voice.

Gianna shielded her eyes, then opened them, chin still tipped toward the heavens. "Over here, *Madre*."

"*Bella*, you must come inside." Her mother stumbled around a hedgerow, as another shell

whined through the air.

She wanted to argue, point out to her mother that no matter where she went, only one shell was required to end her life. Even the thick walls of the Medieval castle would be insufficient. One needed only to wander the roads lacing Tuscany to see that.

“*Si.*” No need to tempt fate standing out alone as the sun moved across the sky. Her daydreams and wishes would not return things to the past. She filled her days studying the paintings, sculptures and frescoes that filled Firenze. Her own efforts formed the thinnest reflection of the Masters. Ever since her father had relocated the family to the thick-walled castle, her days felt empty. Without pursuits.

Yet how many could say they slept with Masters in their rooms?

An odd twist of fate for one who had studied them from a distance.

If only the superintendent was right, and the Masters would be safely ensconced in the castle, yet another group of guests that graced the great home through its several hundred year history.

Gianna sucked in a breath and whispered a prayer. Then she straightened her spine and set her gaze toward the hills for one last look. As yet, the rumbles stayed beyond the hills she could see.

She prayed it stayed that way. Too many families sought refuge within the walls of the Montefugoni. If anything happened here, the refugees would be set adrift once again to dodge the combating armies. She shuddered at the thought of what that would mean for the old men and women, and for the young children. Many had barely made it here.

And now even as she longed for a moment’s peace, she knew her family filled an important role. Protecting the art masterpieces, but also providing shelter to the displaced. It

didn't matter whether they were long-family friends from the area or strangers who had stumbled up the drive. They were here, and they would be cared for to the best of her ability.

If only there were ample stores of food.

“Gianna.”

She turned from the horizon back to the grounds of Montefugoni. The castle had stood for hundreds of years. Surely it had hundreds more years of grand history to experience. Some of its grandeur lay obscured behind the tent village that had erupted at its feet. The refugees needed some place to lay their heads, but Papa had refused to give them access to the Masters they might not appreciate. So the old paintings lined the walls, while the people lined the grounds.

A baby's wail carried on the breeze, a welcome change from the humming artillery.

Papa promised that if the battle approached, he would shepherd all those lingering outside into the cellar. Gianna had no reason to doubt his intentions. She only prayed they had ample time if it was needed.

The tent city wound around the castle, at times causing her to catch her breath at the sight. An undulating mass of canvas and really any cloth that was long and wide enough to provide a bit of shelter and modicum of privacy. Something wound around her ankles, and Gianna startled. She looked down to find a small black and white kitten twining itself around her feet.

“*Ciao.*” She leaned over and picked up the ball of fur. “Where did you come from?”

In a time when there was inadequate food to provide more than a vegetable based soup, she should leave the little ball of fur on the ground and walk away. But she couldn't. Instead, she tucked the kitten under her chin and stroked its soft fur as she wound through the crowd. The baby whimpered, but other than that, the people remained unusually quiet.

It was as if a stillness, a knowing, had swept over the mass. A certainty that this could be the time the artillery swung their direction. A bracing seemed to have calmed even the children, as if they could be quiet enough maybe this angel of death would sweep over leaving them untouched.

Gianna tried to smile at those who met her gaze, but the solemn expressions shrouded in dread forced her to look away. What did she have to offer?

Nothing of value.

“*Signorina*, please. When will it stop?”

Gianna looked into the eyes of the weary peasant woman. In her black dress and sturdy shoes with her grey hair pulled back in a tight bun, the woman looked ageless and exhausted. “I don’t know.” She mumbled the words as she pulled away from the woman’s grasp. *Father, I have nothing to offer them. Yet they are here.*

So many.

The need so great.

So overwhelming.

She turned to the only task she could do...helping her mother and the others in the kitchen. The kitten wiggled against her hold, and she eased down to release him. He scampered away as another shell whizzed across the sky. He pounced under a lilac bush, batting at a branch. Gianna knelt for a closer look, and then caught her breath when her gaze collided with a set of dark eyes.

“Hello there.”

The urchin stared at her without a word.

“Are you all right?”

The child nodded, but stuck two fingers in her mouth as if to plug any words. Though quiet, the child appeared fine. The kitten ran right into the girl's knee and bounced back on his hindquarters, shaking his head as if to clear it. The child reached down and picked up the kitten, and a soft smile bloomed on her face.

“Well, have fun with the kitten.” Gianna really had to move. Her mother would lecture her about all the ways she allowed herself to be distracted when there was so much work to do.

Work. She tapped down her frustration. With all their “guests” the work never ended. And the responsibility never eased. Maybe after she'd sliced dozens of loaves of bread, she would slip away again. This time to spend time with the paintings.

That fed her soul in a way that mirrored yet was different from her strolls.

To see the interpretations others had for events, whether Biblical scenes, depictions of the Saints, or life itself, added a layer to the way she viewed history. And in those revelations, the true gift of art shimmered.

To take an idea, and spin it on its axis.

To take a thought and give it dimensions unseen.

To take a music note and give it visual wings.

Someday, if the war ended and if Italy survived, someday she would teach the secrets revealed in the paintings to others. Use them as a tool to illuminate the glories of creation and ultimately the Creator.

“Gianna.”

She quickened her steps at her mother's harassed tone. Until then, she would slice bread and serve those God has placed in her path. And pray for the time that her dreams would take flight and move from the realm of imagination to reality.