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Excerpts from *The Poet, The Count, and The Peddler*

In Florence, Italy, in 1321 a young man sat silently on a grassy bank at the edge of the Arno River. A white rose with its tender petals perfectly in place floated by in the gentle waters. His heart leaped in ecstasy. As he reached for the rose, a shadow loomed at his side. Startled, he turned and looked directly into the dark eyes of the poet Dante Alighieri, who whispered, “Always remember the darkest places in hell are reserved for those who maintain their neutrality in times of moral crisis.”

CHAPTER ONE

Challenge Institutions! Challenge Theologies! Challenge Traditions!

Mario Ferrara
 CHAPTER SEVENTY-ONE

Beneath a faded red, green, and white canvas awning at 231 Elizabeth Street, a stoop-shouldered old man smiled and gently closed the front door to Ferrara’s Grocery and Bakery. Moments later, weighed down by a cracked and torn, brown leather bag, he paused and then sighed as he struggled with a rickety old pushcart. Despite increased arthritic pain, the peddler was determined to press on and complete the journey to Battery Park at the south end of Manhattan Island.

Slowly pushing his peddler’s cart, he weaved his way through the narrow, brick and mortar, jam-packed streets of colorful Little Italy. Walking the cobblestone pavement step-by-step, block-by-block, he inhaled—to his delight—the bountiful aroma of basil, garlic, and imported cheeses wafting from kitchens and delicatessens.

CHAPTER ONE

A rising sun had created brilliant prisms of light, reflecting off towering glass edifices. New York City residents were just beginning to stir.

In an exclusive section of uptown Manhattan, an everyday ritual was in progress. A slightly bent-over man wearing a black and scarlet warm-up suit was crossing Sixty-second Street toward Central Park to begin his morning walk when out of the blinding light came a speeding truck. A moment later the white delivery van quickly disappeared into the sun glow leaving the fragile creature to die on city pavement.

CHAPTER FORTY-NINE