



CHOSEN DAUGHTERS

16th Century Italy

Weight of a Flame

THE PASSION OF OLYMPIA MORATA

SIMONETTA CARR

Weight of a Flame



Wings Like a Dove

by Christine Farenhorst

Dr. Oma

by Ethel Herr

Against the Tide

by Hope Irvin Marston

A Cup of Cold Water

by Christine Farenhorst

Weight of a Flame

by Simonetta Carr

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SIMONETTA CARR



P U B L I S H I N G

P.O. BOX 817 • PHILLIPSBURG • NEW JERSEY 08865-0817

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Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Carr, Simonetta.

Weight of a flame : the passion of Olympia Morata / Simonetta Carr.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-1-59638-158-2 (pbk.)

I. Title.

PZ7.C2314We 2011

[Fic]--dc23

2011016917

To my daughter Renaissance
and my granddaughter Charlize

*[God] gave me a mind and a talent to be so aflame
for my studies that no one can divert me from them.*

—Olympia Morata

*From Olympus
God sends to mortals the heavenly
as a model for wisdom.*

—Jerome Angenoust, from an epitaph for Olympia Morata



Olympia's journey from Ferrara to Heidelberg

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I must first express my gratitude to Melissa Craig at P&R for suggesting this venture and for sharing my enthusiasm for this inspiring character of our church history. I am also grateful to my editor, Heather Armstrong, for her kind advisement.

I have so many other people to thank: author Starr Meade, *Modern Reformation* editor in chief Eric Landry, and educator Laura Smith for their encouraging reviews; my friends Kris Moberly, Madeline Taylor, and Aly Brown, who read every chapter and offered valuable comments; and particularly Heather Chisholm-Chait and Dianna Ippolito, who read every draft and answered countless questions. I couldn't have done this without them.

I am grateful for all the help my children have given me, especially Dustin, David, Jonathan, Kevin, and Renaissance, who have read and critiqued some of the chapters. I thank my son Raphael for helping me to imagine what a twelve-year-old boy would have been thinking if he had to spend several months in a cellar during a violent siege. I am also thankful to my niece Arianna Sforzini, who helped me with some of the toughest translations from Latin.

I am very grateful to Dr. Francesco Scafuri, historical researcher for the city of Ferrara, Italy, for taking time to meet with me and to share precious information on the floor plans of middle-class houses in the sixteenth century;

to Giovanni Kezich, director at Museo degli Usi e Costumi della Gente Trentina of Trento, Italy, for his accurate historical descriptions of the roads most probably taken by Olympia and Andreas on their way to Germany; and to my friends Emanuele Taglietti and Katia Petronelli for their patience in answering countless questions about Ferrara.

Last, my loving thanks to my husband, Tom, who supported me through months of writing and research, and to my church family at Christ URC of Santee, California, for constant encouragement and excitement for this project.

WHO'S WHO IN THE STORY

Albert II (1522–57): Margrave of Brandenburg-Ansbach-Kulmbach, he was later known as Alcibiades. A nominal Protestant, he fought either for or against the emperor, often switching to the most promising side. When he claimed by force some territories he considered his due reward, a league formed to crush him. This included his former friend Maurice, elector of Saxony. During a fierce battle at Sievershausen on July 9, 1553, Albert was put to flight, while Maurice lost his life. Banned from his country, Albert took refuge in France, where he entered the service of King Henry II. He died at Pforzheim on January 8, 1557.

Angenoust, Jerome (d. 1596): Scholar and politician. After his studies in Heidelberg, he became councilor in Paris. He was sympathetic to the Huguenots.

Bolsec, Jerome-Hermes (d. 1584): Former Roman Catholic who sought refuge at the court of Ferrara while he studied medicine. He moved to Geneva as a physician. There he ran into a controversy with John Calvin over predestination. He was banished from Geneva for misbehavior. He wrote defamatory biographies of Calvin

and Theodore Beza. He had some influence in the fall of some Protestants from favor at the court of Ferrara, including John and Françoise Sinapius. Some think he was responsible for the rumors that caused Olympia's ban from the Ferrara court.

Calvin, John (1509–64): French theologian. His book *Institutes of the Christian Religion* became the framework for Protestant theology in the sixteenth century.

Carafa, Carlo (1476–1559): Became a Catholic cardinal in 1536. In 1542, he was put in charge of the Roman Inquisition, which he pursued with passion. He became pope in 1555 as Paul IV. Carafa believed that as a representative of God on earth, he had unlimited power even over other rulers. His violence against Protestants and Jews was so fierce that people decapitated his statue and published an anti-eulogy with the words, "He hated peace on earth, our prayers he contested, ruined the church and its people, Heaven and men offended."

Catullus, Gaius Valerius (84–54 BC): Roman poet famous for his compositions on love.

Charles V, Emperor (1500–58): Great-grandson of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain and heir to the Spanish throne. He became emperor of the Holy Roman Empire in 1530. He suffered great conflicts with the Protestant princes in Germany and with the Turks at the borders of the empire. In 1555, he abdicated his titles, giving his Spanish empire to his son, Philip II of Spain. His brother Ferdinand succeeded him as emperor-elect.

Cicero, Marcus Tullius (106–43 BC): Roman philosopher, statesman, and lawyer, considered one of Rome's great-

est orators. Around Olympia's time, Cicero's works were receiving some criticism in scholarly circles. On invitation of the duchess, Olympia gave three dissertations on Cicero's *Paradoxes*.

Cremer, Johannes: Rector of the Latin school, former priest, relative of Andreas. Olympia first met him in Ferrara.

Curione, Celio Secondo (Curio) (1503–69): Professor of humanistic studies in Italy and Fulvio's best friend. He wrote several satirical books on the Roman Catholic Church. Wanted for his Protestant beliefs, he escaped to Switzerland in 1542. He taught rhetoric, first in Lausanne, then in Basel. He corresponded faithfully with Olympia and published her works after her death.

Da Messisbugo, Cristoforo (d. 1548): Became a count in 1533. He served at the court of Ferrara as meat carver and head steward. He is the author of a book titled *Banchetti, composizioni di vivande et apparecchio generale*.

De Boussiron, Françoise (d. 1553): Daughter of the lord of Grand-Ry in Poitou, married John Sinapius. In Ferrara, she stood up for her Calvinist convictions regarding worship and the Lord's Supper. She kept in close correspondence with John Calvin, who sent advice in various situations. She died of measles in her husband's arms.

De Parthenay, Anne: Daughter of Madame de Soubise, Renée's governess. A strong Calvinist, she persuaded her husband, Anton de Pons, to embrace the Protestant faith. After her death, however, Anton returned to the Roman Catholic religion.

De Soubise: Madame de Soubise's name was Michelle du Fresne; she was also known as Michelle de Saubonne.

She served at the French court as maid of honor and secretary to Queen Anne de Bretagne, Renée's mother. A Protestant humanist, she introduced many poets to the queen. She married John IV de Parthenay, lord of Parc de Soubise. At the death of Queen Anne, she became governess to Renée, and followed her to Italy in 1528. In 1536, she was sent back to France, where she continued to promote the Protestant cause, together with her family.

Della Rovere, Lavinia: Olympia's dearest friend.

D'Este, Anna (1531–1607): First daughter of Ercole and Renée. In 1548, she married Francis, Duke of Guise, a Roman Catholic who became a fierce persecutor of Protestants in France. We don't know whether Olympia's letter had any effect on Anna. When Francis was killed in 1563, Anna blamed the leader of the French Huguenots, Gaspard de Coligny, for the murder and sought his execution, but the king's council declared him innocent. In 1566, she married Jacques de Savoie, duke of Nemours and Genevois. She had ten children from the two marriages combined. The Guises' search for revenge on Coligny led to the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre. Anna was a close friend of Queen Catherine de Medici. After the death of her second husband in 1585, she spent her last years as superintendante de la maison of Queen Marie de' Medici.

D'Este, Alfonso II (1533–97): First son of Ercole and Renée. Duke of Ferrara from 1559 to 1597. He was a great sponsor of arts, literature, and music. He participated in several papal battles, including a cru-

sade against the Turks. The enormous expenditures for these battles and for reconstruction of Ferrara and parts of the castle after a disastrous earthquake in 1570 greatly reduced the duchy's treasury. After three marriages with no children, Alfonso died in 1597 and the church did not recognize any of his relatives as legitimate heirs. In 1598, the Este family had to leave their beloved city and castle to live in the nearby Duchy of Modena.

D'Este, Eleonora (1537–81): Fourth child of Ercole and Renée.

D'Este, Ercole II (1508–59): Duke of Ferrara, Modena, and Reggio from 1534 to 1559.

D'Este, Lucrezia (1535–98): Third child of Ercole and Renée. She became duchess of Urbino after her marriage in 1570 to Francesco Maria II della Rovere.

D'Este, Luigi (1538–86): Youngest child of Ercole and Renée. He became bishop of Ferrara and later archbishop of Auch.

De Navarre, Marguerite (1492–1549): Also known as Marguerite d'Angouleme. Queen consort of Henry II of Navarre. She was a patron of humanists and reformers and an author. She was the mother of Jeanne d'Albret, an important Protestant leader in France.

Fanini, Fanino (1520–50): Baker from Faenza, Italy. He was married with two children. He became a Protestant and worked actively to spread the gospel in his region. He was arrested in 1546 and forced to recant. Unable to live with his burden of guilt, he continued his work of evangelization until he was arrested again in 1549. He was imprisoned and executed in 1550.

Fugger, Anton (1493–1560): Nephew of Jakob Fugger “the rich,” he continued Jakob’s financial empire. Anton was called “prince of the merchants.” He was knighted by Pope Leo X in 1519 and made a count by Emperor Charles V. He financed Charles’s election to emperor.

Grunthler, Andreas (d. 1555): The last name is also spelled Grundler or Grunther. After some humanistic studies in Germany, he achieved a doctorate in medicine in Ferrara. He married Olympia Morata in 1550. He was also a poet and musician.

Hörmann, Georg (1491–1552): Administrator for the banking house of the Fugger family and counselor for King Ferdinand of Bohemia.

Jehannet, Leon de Roquefort: French minstrel at Renée’s court. He publicly refused to kneel in front of a crucifix, and was imprisoned and tortured.

Julius III, Pope (1487–1555): His given name was Giovanni Maria Ciochi del Monte. He became pope in 1550. He resumed the Council of Trent for about a year (1551–52). He supported Mary I’s election to the English throne.

Lindemann, Johannes (1493–1554): Schoolmaster, rector, and senior pastor at St. John’s Church in Schweinfurt. Olympia wrote an elegy for his death and sent it to his widow.

Marot, Clement (1496–1544): French poet. Forced to leave France after the *Affaire des Placards* and sought refuge at the court of Ferrara, where he worked as secretary for Duchess Renée. He put many Psalms to verse in French.

Morata, Olympia Fulvia (1526–55): Main character.

Morato, Emilio (1542–55): Olympia’s brother, youngest child in the Morato family. He followed Olympia and Andreas to Germany and died from a plague a few months after Olympia’s death.

Morato, Fulvio Pellegrino (or Moretto) (1483–1548): Olympia’s father. Note the difference in last name, which is sometimes rendered in the feminine form (Morata) when applied to Olympia. I have chosen to keep the name Morata for Olympia as this is how she is commonly known today. Pellegrino was his given name, Fulvio (“tawny”) a nickname he acquired later and apparently enjoyed. Born in Mantua, Italy, he worked as professor of classical literature in several Italian universities. He is the author of a few books. His best-known book is *Significato dei Colori e de’ Mazzoli* (*On the Meaning of Colors and Flowers*).

Morato, Lucrezia: Olympia’s mother.

Morato, Vittoria: Third of Olympia’s three sisters. The names of the other sisters are unknown. After Olympia’s departure from Italy, Vittoria moved to Rome with Lavinia della Rovere.

Ochino, Bernardino (1487–1564): Originally a Catholic monk, he began preaching many of Luther’s doctrines as early as 1539. In 1545 he officially broke away from the Catholic church and became minister of a Protestant church in Switzerland.

Orsini, Camillo (1491–1559): Father of Paolo Orsini and papal governor of Parma. He was an esteemed *condottiero* (mercenary captain).

Orsini, Paolo: Son of Camillo Orsini and husband of Lavinia della Rovere. He was a *condottiero*.

Paul III, Pope (1468–1549): His given name was Alessandro Farnese. He became pope in 1538 during the Reformation. He began the Council of Trent in 1545 with the intent of reconciling the Protestants and reforming the church. He patronized the Jesuits, the great agents of the Counter-Reformation.

Renée of France (1510–74): Younger daughter of Louis XII of France and Anne, Duchess of Brittany. Married Duke Ercole II d'Este in 1528. Imprisoned by her husband in 1554, she recanted her faith under several threats, including that of placing her daughters in a convent. She reclaimed her Protestant faith after Duke Ercole's death (1559) and returned to France, where she made her castle at Montargis in Loiret a stronghold of the Protestant faith. In 1562, the castle was besieged by her son-in-law, the Duke of Guise. During the wars of religion, she gave refuge to Protestants and Catholics alike.

Sinapius, John (1505–60): Latin name for Johannes Senf or Senff. A professor of Greek in Heidelberg, he studied medicine in Italy and received a doctorate in Ferrara, where he met his wife, Françoise Boussiron. He was a friend of John Calvin, who helped him to gain Françoise's favor. In 1548 he moved to Würzburg, Germany, where he became personal physician and advisor to Bishop Melchior Zobel of Guttenberg. He wrote Calvin of his desire to live "pure and holy *coram Domino* [before the Lord]."

Sinapius, Kilian: Also known as Chilian Senf or Senff. Brother of John Sinapius. Greek scholar, received a doctorate in medicine in Ferrara. He left Italy in 1545 to take

up an appointment as jurisconsult at the *Reichskammergericht* (supreme court of the Holy Roman Empire) in Speyer, Germany.

Sinapius, Theodora (1543–?): Daughter of John and Françoise Sinapius.

Spiera, Francesco (1502–48): Jurist from Cittadella (near Padova), Italy. He became a Protestant and was arrested in 1548. He officially recanted in front of the inquisition. After this, his conscience tormented him to the point that he stopped eating until he died, leaving a wife and eleven children.

Terence (195–159? BC): His full Latin name is Publius Terentius Afer. He was the greatest Roman comic dramatist after Plautus. His six-verse comedies were considered models of pure Latin.

Von Erbach, Elizabeth (1520–64): Protestant countess, wife of George II of Erbach. She was a sister of the elector Palatine, Friedrich III “the Pious.”

Von Erbach, George II (1506–69): Protestant count. He gave hospitality to Andreas, Olympia, and Emilio. His example of devotion and faithfulness to God had a great effect on Olympia.

Von Rieneck, Philip III: Protestant count. He helped Olympia after she was freed from prison.

Zobel, Melchior of Guttenberg (1505–58): Prince-Bishop of Würzburg. John Sinapius was his personal physician.

I

LAST DAYS AT HOME



FERRARA, 1539

“The best velvet,” said Master Pietro, draping a sample of the deep blue fabric around Olympia’s shoulders. It felt warm and comforting against her skin. “The finest I have seen in years,” he continued. “Look how it complements your flaming hair and lily-white complexion!”

As he moved the cloudy mirror close to her face, Olympia’s eyes sparkled with joy and excitement. This was going to be, without a doubt, the most wonderful dress she had ever owned. She looked up at her mother, Lucrezia, waiting for approval.

Avoiding her daughter’s eyes, Lucrezia lingered over the piece, caressing the soft material under her fingers. Her hesitation was not a matter of money, not today. As Olympia moved closer to her, Lucrezia hugged her tightly, stroking her silky hair.

“Yes, I think this will be the best,” she finally said, “elegant and sober. It will give you a decorous and modest appearance.” Olympia saw that her mother was fighting back tears. For a

moment, she wished things could be different, that she could stay home a little longer. *Will I ever see my mother and sisters again?* she wondered. *Will life ever be the same?*

Many happy memories flashed in her mind—times spent playing with her sisters in the garden, her mother’s patient guidance through her first disappointments and pain, the warmth of the hours spent together as a family around the fire. . . . *They said that I will see them often*, she tried to reassure herself.

“Yes, decorous and modest,” repeated Master Pietro. As he paused to admire the girl, his eyes glistened with tenderness and pride. “At the ducal palace! I remember when Olympia was just a little girl, her feet barely reaching the edge of this very chair. Your husband, Dr. Fulvio, came in to buy her a new dress, and he showed me that she could already read—not only fluently but with perfect expression. She was destined to live at court! And Dr. Fulvio is teaching there now as well, no? Much safer, much safer,” he continued, without waiting for Lucrezia’s answer. “The duchess protects those who promote new ideas.”

Olympia smiled. Now she was going to see her father every day. He had been forced to move away from Ferrara for a few years because of his religious beliefs, but now had been allowed to return to teach the duke’s young stepbrothers. Olympia had also been invited, to be a tutor and a companion for the duke’s oldest daughter, Anna d’Este. She remembered the expression on her father’s face as he announced the news to the family. His tawny eyes had brightened as if by an invisible light source. She was determined to keep them shining.

Being admitted at court was a great privilege. Many young people would have done anything just to be allowed to study

there, serving the duke and duchess as a way to earn their education. But she had been invited to tutor Anna! At thirteen years of age! She looked forward to what awaited her, a place of honor and all the things she loved most: books, great teachers, and many uninterrupted hours of study.

“Dr. Fulvio must be so proud,” continued Master Pietro, as he began to measure Olympia’s shoulders, “proud of Olympia and proud of himself. He has worked so hard on her education! Now, her fame has spread all over town. They say that she has imbibed poetry with her mother’s milk. Natural gifts. God’s gifts, no doubt, but her father has cultivated them as rare and precious flowers . . . and, my, how you have grown!” he exclaimed, turning to Olympia as he measured the length of the dress. “We can dress you as a fine lady now! French style, I assume?” he looked again to Lucrezia.

“What else?” interrupted his wife, who was straightening some rolls of linen against the back wall. “The duchess doesn’t approve of other styles, and you know it. French dresses, French food, a large French entourage—I’ve heard that she hasn’t even learned to speak much Italian. But she has been in Italy now for how long, ten years?”

“Ten, yes, or eleven,” replied Master Pietro, placing his ruler on the table. “It seems like yesterday when she arrived. What a magnificent celebration in honor of her wedding!” He paused, as if he could still hear the music of the fifes and drums that had accompanied the long, colorful procession. “Remember the clothes I made for some of the duke’s courtiers? Sumptuous! A work of art. But Duke Ercole, he didn’t seem pleased at all! I heard he almost fainted the first time he saw Duchess Renée. He is so handsome, and she is so, well, so plain.”

“I think she is pretty,” commented Lucrezia, somewhat offended.

“Nobles want it all,” explained Master Pietro, shrugging his shoulders, “power, riches, beauty, fame. Marrying Duchess Renée, Duke Ercole has become a close relative of King Francis, which is quite an achievement! After all, Ferrara is not a large duchy and needs strong allies.”

“*Veríssimo*,” agreed Pietro’s wife, forcefully sweeping some trimmings through the back door, “but I have always said that this duchess is going to bring trouble. With all her talk about a new religion, she is going to stir things up. I know it! And if the pope attacks Ferrara, everything that our dukes have done, starting with good old Duke Borso, may he rest in peace, will go to the wind. I am just an old woman, but believe me, I can see the writing on the wall.”

Olympia listened attentively. She had learned the proud history of Ferrara and how the dukes of the House of Este, one of the oldest ruling families in Italy at that time, had fought fiercely to gain and preserve their independence. Nestled in the Po Valley, just southwest of the point where the river widens its delta to embrace the fertile land before merging into the sea, the Duchy of Ferrara shared its borders with the magnificent Republic of Venice to the east and the Papal States to the south. They were both powerful neighbors who were always looking for territorial expansion.

“You just don’t like the duchess, but you will get used to her, just like you got used to Duchess Lucrezia Borgia—and at first everyone thought *she* was trouble!” Master Pietro smiled. The former duchess, Ercole’s mother, had come to Ferrara preceded by plenty of rumors about a life full of scandal and intrigue. Soon, however, the people had nothing but admi-

ration for the beautiful lady who ruled so well and whose behavior defied all defamatory rumors.

Returning his attention to the roll of velvet, Master Pietro and Olympia's mother continued to discuss styles and materials. "I am undecided between this velvet and the lighter shade of blue satin you showed me earlier," said Lucrezia.

"Velvet is warmer, perfect for this season. But we can use the satin to add subtle accents. See—*magnifico!* Or we can make two gowns, one in velvet and one in satin," he added with a touch of masterful salesmanship.

"One is enough; that's all we can afford," replied Lucrezia. "She has some other good clothes at home, and I am sure that Her Ladyship will provide the wardrobe that she sees most appropriate."

"Ah, there is no doubt about that," commented Pietro's wife, shaking her head. "Her ladies must have a dress for every day of the year! They say that the duke is furious every time he sees how much she is spending. But it's good business for us. She keeps every tailor in Ferrara busy with her commissions."

As Pietro's wife left the room to bring in more cloth, Olympia stayed by her mother, circling her finger on the smooth velvet and watching as it changed from dark to light to dark again. *Were there really problems at court between the duke and duchess?* she wondered as she swirled. She had always admired them both. They appeared so poised and wise. *If the duke disliked Her Ladyship so much, how could her court remain a safe place?*

She looked again at her mother, who seemed unperturbed by the gossip and exhibited the same calm deportment that she had shown through the years, even during the difficult time of her husband's absence. She had always been strong

and was strong again today, as she prepared to let her oldest daughter go after only thirteen years.

The door swung open and Fulvio's joyous voice interrupted Olympia's thoughts. "I thought I would find you two in here," he said. "Is choosing a dress such a laborious task?"

"*Un capolavoro!* We are building a masterpiece," replied Pietro, bringing the velvet closer so that Fulvio could inspect it.

"Blue sets the mind on loftiest things," Fulvio said immediately, smiling. It was a line from a book he had recently published in Venice, titled *On the Meaning of Colors and Flowers*, a treatise based on the writings of classical authors, which had already sold many copies, mostly to women.

"And brown for love doth death despise," chimed in Olympia, running to his side and pointing to his brown coat. She had read all of her father's books, even the more serious ones such as his *Dictionary of Rhymes*.

She loved to please him. Often, she would sit by his side as he taught other students, and her young mind continued to absorb information. Most of all, she loved to see his eyes gleam with pride as she recited for him. At those times, she felt part of his world, sharing with him the thrill of discovering knowledge and truth. It was the same contagious excitement that had been sweeping through Europe over the past century—a reawakened passion for life, beauty, and learning of both the classics and the Scriptures.

"So you are back to teaching at the university, I hear," said Master Pietro. "Your students must be happy! I heard that while you were gone, they refused to study under other teachers."

"Ah, you know how young people are. They were probably just trying to delay their exams!"

“Too much modesty, too much modesty! And now you will be teaching at the palace as well.” Pietro took Fulvio by the arm, swiftly moving to the other side of the room, away from Lucrezia. He didn’t seem concerned that Olympia was near.

“I don’t want to worry Lucrezia,” he said quietly, “but I need to warn you. There will be many Lutherans and Calvinists at court. But watch out. Duke Ercole is not pleased by all of this, and one never knows what the future holds.”

Pulling Fulvio closer, he added, “The best thing to do, if you follow these new doctrines, is to keep quiet. *Silenzio*. You know that I believe just as you do, but no one knows, not even my wife. If *she* knew, the news would spread beyond the Alps,” he teased, laughing out loud at his own joke.

Olympia felt a heavy weight on her chest. Her father never kept quiet. He eagerly discussed Luther’s writings with his friends, and she heard him say that he had openly read excerpts of Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* to his students at the University of Vicenza.

“I will keep it in mind,” answered Fulvio, obviously unconvinced.

“You know very well that, in this country, anyone who disagrees with the pope is left with just three choices,” pressed Pietro. “You can be killed, leave the country, or keep quiet. I don’t think too many choose the first alternative willingly, and a live coward is better than a dead hero.”

“I wouldn’t call those who leave the country cowards,” suggested Fulvio, trying to measure his words. “They leave because they feel they can do more for God’s cause by staying alive to teach others, write, or translate. Luther has proved the importance of the printed word.”

“And the third group? Are we cowards?” prompted Pietro, squinting his eyes with a knowing smile.

“I am not in any position to judge, Pietro,” replied Fulvio, dropping the challenge. “But thank you for your concern. I will be careful.” He smiled, his eyes sparkling with excitement, not fear. Olympia knew that look. Words of caution always fueled his daring fires.

Pietro shook his head. “Don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

“Our protection is from the Lord, not the duchess,” said Fulvio, placing his hand on Pietro’s shoulder. “He is both our fortress and our strength.”

Olympia’s enthusiasm was rekindled. Fulvio always had the uncommon ability to look beyond the moment in any situation. She felt ready. Maybe there were dangers, but with her father by her side she was willing to face them.