

# Under the Stars

~Sarah Lamonde ~

**Scenic rugged mountains, delicately adorned with large olive trees and shrubbery,** bordered our modest little farmhouse in San Lorenzo, Italy. Every day we watched our sheep graze as the sun shone down and caressed our cheeks with its golden rays. The sky was so majestic that to have a grasp of it would be to have a grasp of heaven. Every sunrise I arose to the rooster's cock-a-doodle-doo and the rambunctious laughter of my brothers as they played soccer in the back yard. As I paced across my room and numbly made my way to the kitchen, I could smell the rich aroma of the coffee my mother made religiously every morning.



San Lorenzo, Italy,

My dwelling at times resembled a raucous beehive filled with zealous workers collaborating in the daily chores. Today, however, my little home wouldn't be buzzing with its usual activity. I had been dreading August 4th and its arrival for several weeks. It came to the point that I didn't want to go to bed at night for it would signify that another day had come and gone, inching me closer and closer to the dire day. You see, I was now a young woman of seventeen and the time had come for me to be wed.

My father, Domenico, had arranged for me to be married to a humble shoemaker named Giacomo and assured me that we would be wed a few weeks after he returned from Rome on August 4th. This day, was to be the first time we met and I was not looking forward to my first encounter with him. I had heard about him from friends and acquaintances; they all gave me similar descriptions of him. He's quite shy some said. He keeps rather a lot to himself another told me.

My mother made me dress in my best clothes and made a neat French braid in my hair, embellished with soft pink silk ribbons. I forced a smile on my face as I unwillingly opened the door to an eager faced Giacomo that Sunday night. He was awkwardly tall, with a small bony frame and long extending limbs. His hair was mousy brown and his eyes were gray and washed out by his pale, pasty complexion. For three hours I was trapped in unappealing, pointless conversation about the riotous fluctuations in the shoe trade these days. Although he was a mere three years my senior, I could have sworn

I had only one week to hatch a plan to escape the gloomy, monotonous life that lay ahead of me as a shoemaker's wife. I knew my family would not agree

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with my rebellious intentions and my actions would smudge the family name in the little rural community of San Lorenzo. I loved my mama, papa, and two young brothers but I knew I would be unable to live a lie. An existence with Giacomo, the shoemaker, would not be an existence worth living. I knew whom I could turn to in this moment of desperation; he was the same shoulder I had cried on and the same arms that had comforted me for as long as I can remember. Luca had been my best friend since the age of one when our mothers used to bathe us together, we still played tag in the surrounding fields.

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that I was talking to an elder, having already lost his zest for life, with no aspirations or dreams for the future. He even belittled me and made several degrading comments about how I was a mere woman. I smirked and made a firm resolution; I would not subdue to his patriarchal ideals and become his helpless, insignificant housewife.

That night, after Giacomo departed, I met Luca in the field that stood between my farm and his, and together we sat on the lush grass until the early hours of the morn. I told him about the hardships that lay ahead and wept quietly as he stroked my back and assured me that no washout would cast a shadow on my bright life's path. It was then that Luca told me about his wish to move to prosperous and modern Rome to seek work and a future that his family farm could not sustain. He took my hand.

## FOOTPRINTS

Staring into his hazel eyes, I listened attentively as he told me how much he loved me and wished I would escape these weed riddled fields with him. My heart rejoiced as I envisioned a joyous life with Luca in Rome.

The next day I arose earlier than usual to bathe and dress. It was a momentous and sanctioned day in the Mezzaluna family. Every year for as long as I can remember, the whole family made the pilgrimage to the city to take the annual family picture. This tradition had been alive ever since Papa got his first raise and was able to afford these time surpassing memories. It would also be the last buggy ride to the photographer's I would ever take with my family.



That evening as they slept, I lay a soft kiss on each of their foreheads and left them each a letter, explaining my vain actions and promising it wouldn't be the last they saw of me. Luca met me at midnight under the stars, and together we fled hand in hand not knowing what would lay ahead in our tumultuous life's path.

**Arranged marriage seems to be an archaic tradition to most of us, falling away like the yellowed tattered pages of an aged book.** It is however omnipresent in the lives of countless men and women in our cosmopolitan city of Montreal as well as across the globe. Within Muslim and Hindu religious backgrounds, arranged marriages are being forced into the lives of several Turkish, Indian, Fijian, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan and Filipino adolescents and young adults. The cultural sects practicing marriage by proxy enforce

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the denouncement of true love in order to benefit the social status of the family unit. Many marriages are arranged without the consent of the bride or groom, or where he/she has little opportunity to go against the wishes of his/her parents. Although this human rights' infringement is deemed unacceptable by most modern minds, it still shatters the lives of innumerable victims. It is important that we decide whether all members of the collective youth are entitled to the same basic human rights, regardless of background. Whether we like it or not, forced marriages are a reality. Great action has not been taken to defend those succumbing to marriage by proxy due to "ethnic sensitivity" and fear of inciting racial hatred. We must acknowledge that some cultural practices do lead to the oppression of our youth. It is a difficult dilemma, but the plight of those who are forced into marriages demands attention. How many adolescent girls have had their hand given away to a humble shoemaker awaiting a marriage from which she will have **no escape?**

Source: <http://www.pastornetr.net.au/alt/feb97/arranged.html>

# Reflection

The creative process of this book was probably most intriguing to me. Although during the initial work periods, using a computer program that was foreign to me was trying, I soon grew accustomed to its functions. Designing my own layout was a great learning experience. Presentation really is everything and the main purpose of the layout is to draw in the reader with a well placed photo and captivating call-outs. I greatly enjoy expressing myself through literature and this book offered a great opportunity to share my words with others.

The writing process was at times strenuous. You see, since my photograph was so old it was difficult to accumulate any concrete facts to build a story on. No one in my family seemed to know who the black and white characters standing before them were. Although immortally captured through the art of photography, they had fallen away from the minds of their descendants. I desperately wanted to bring life back to these silent figures staring back at me. After a substantial amount of pondering, I envisioned what life would have been like for these seemingly stern people of generations past.

Partaking in the making of this book has been a great hands-on learning experience. I have acquired a great sense of appreciation for books and the numerous hours spent perfecting every page. For every page I turn, I take into account the effort that the whole publishing process entails. I am very grateful to have been given the opportunity to participate in this project and watch the stories of other monochrome characters, similar to my own, flourish into tales of love, loss, struggle and gain.