

***The Montessor Hit***  
**by**  
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Tony M. said, “Vincent Corrado, my friend, you honor me with your visit. How was your flight?”

“Too long for my age, but comfortable. You’re looking good, Tony. How you getting along?”

“I’m ready to go back. You bring word from the bosses?”

“Tony, it’s only been a month. These things take time. You popping the judge brought a lot of heat on the families.”

“He needed killing Vincent. It had to be done.”

“Hey, I’m not saying it wasn’t a righteous hit. Some of the bosses, they see it the same way. I’m just saying they’re taking heat.

Everybody’s keeping low, losing a lot of business. You come back they gotta give you up. You understand?”

“What I understand is the bosses are turning into old women.”

“Let me give you some advice. This time you got here? Use it to learn some respect. All right? That’s all I’m gonna say on that subject.

“So, Tony, the man I sent you from the village, he working out

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good?”

“Luchesi? He’s okay. Doesn’t say much.”

“He’s a good man. He does what he’s told. That’s why I sent him to you. And the *palazzo*?”

Tony made a sweeping gesture with his arm. “A don should live so good! You see these walls? Two feet thick. And look at this, a coat of arms. Anybody in Atlantic City ever think Tony Montessor has a coat of arms?”

Tony indicated a crest above the doorway. It depicted a golden

foot crushing a serpent whose fangs were embedded in its heel. The motto: *Nemo me impune lacessit*.

Vincent translated. “Nobody goes unpunished who provokes me.”

“That’s what it says, huh? I like it. Screw with me, you’re dead. My old man used to say that, but he never said anything about a motto or a coat of arms. He never said nothing about a family *palazzo*.”

“He should have. The Montessors are an ancient family.”

“What did he know? His old man was an olive presser. Came to

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America to sell olive oil. What did he care about family?"

"Family's everything. So how long I have to wait before you offer your guest some wine? The Montessor cellar is famous. I bet you didn't know that."

Tony didn't. Nor did he know where it was. "Luchesi, he'll know." They found Luchesi outside in the gardens which had been planted among the foundations of an ancient structure, the original house of Montessor. Luchesi carried a shotgun, broken open, with shells in

both barrels.

"Hey, Luchesi," said Tony, "take us to the wine cellar."

"As you wish, *padrone*." The men followed him to an arched doorway in one of the ruined walls. Tony noticed a mesh bag hanging from Luchesi's belt. Inside were what appeared to be a pair of rabbits. The bottom of the bag was red with fresh blood.

"Vincent, how do you know this man?" asked Tony.

"Twenty years ago, when you were coming up in the streets, I

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brought heat down on the bosses, like you. My family is also from this village, so this is where I came. For five years Luchesi's father served me. They are loyal people."

"*Padrones*, this way." Luchesi fired up a kerosene lantern and led them down a spiral staircase until they came to a cool damp cavern. He raised the lantern. The room was long and narrow, broken by arches on both sides. In the space beneath the arches, sat bins of bottles covered with thick webs of dust and globs of mineral deposits.

Tony broke the neck of a bottle and drank from it. He offered the bottle to Vincent, who took a sip.

"Long life, Tony."

"How could it be otherwise? Nobody gets to Tony Montessor."

The men made their way to the end of the cellar until they came to a massive double door. It was constructed of wood and barred with iron. Each panel bore a cross carved into the wood.

"What's back here?" said Tony.

"The Montessors resting place, *padrone*."

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“Catacombs,” said Vincent.

“Catacombs? My relatives are  
back here?”

“Let them rest in peace, Tony.”

“Hey, what am I hearing,  
Vincent? Afraid of a boneyard?  
That’s not Vincent Corrado. You  
turning into a woman like the  
bosses?”

“Tony, remember what I said  
about respect.”

“Respect? My relatives I owe  
respect. You’re afraid, stay here.”

“Enough, Tony. You lead.”

The men cleared away rubble

and dirt that had built against the  
door. When at last they had it clear,  
they lifted the heavy bar and pulled  
the door open enough to enter.

A dank, musty atmosphere  
greeted them. The light from  
Luchesi’s lantern struggled to cut the  
darkness. They found themselves in a  
long narrow vault between crypts  
piled with bones.

“The Montressors,” said  
Vincent. “They were a large family.”

The lantern sputtered in the  
airless catacomb, casting weird  
shadows among the bones and skulls

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that stared back with black eyeless sockets. The three men went forward into the deep recesses of the catacombs, their footfalls echoing hollowly in the tomb. A white web-work of decay clung to the walls. Among the mounds of bones they saw wine bottles and casks, some split and empty, others intact. Tony said, "The good stuff, huh? No need to lock the liquor cabinet, you keep it back here." He knocked the dust off a wine bottle, opened it and drank.

Luchesi said, "It is not good to be here, *padrone*. We are under the

river by now."

Vincent hacked a cough. "The damp," he said. "A family affliction."

"We go on," said Tony.

They descended past a series of low arches into the deepest crypt until they arrived at a narrow space, the remotest region of the catacombs. Piles of bones lined both sides, but the farthest wall was uncluttered.

"The end," said Vincent. He turned back.

"Wait," said Tony. "This wall. Luchesi, get the light up. It's not the original. See? There's an arch

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around it.” He described the outer arch with a sweep of his hand.

“Something got sealed off.”

“Fortunato,” whispered Luchesi. He crossed himself quickly.

“Who?” said Tony.

“There’s a story in the village,” said Vincent, “a legend, that a guy named Fortunato insulted one of your ancestors. This Montessor was not someone to mess with. He tricked Fortunato down here and sealed him up alive.”

“Behind this wall?” said Tony.

“It is what the people believe,”

said Luchesi.

Tony said, “Damn! Walled him up alive for an insult.” He raised the bottle. “To the Montressors! Nomo something or other. Screw with Montessor, you’re dead. Isn’t that right Fortunato?”

He slapped the wall and felt something wet and sticky on the cold stone. Tony held his hand to the light. Blood smeared his palm. Peering at the wall, he saw a narrow trickle of blood oozing down. “The hell’s this?”

“The rabbits,” said Luchesi.

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“Maybe I brushed them against the wall.”

“I didn’t see you at the wall,” said Tony.

“There can be no other explanation, *padrone*.”

“Yeah, Tony. You start thinking ghosts and you’ll go nuts. What, it’s Fortunato? That was two centuries ago. Any blood he had is dust. C’mon before we all go crazy.”

“Yeah,” said Tony. “I’m sick of this place.”

They emerged from the dank catacombs into twilight. Luchesi

returned to his home in the village. Tony and Vincent Corrado shared a bottle of the Montessor wine.

“Something’s not right about that blood,” said Tony.

“Know what it reminds me of?” said Vincent. “The time Dom Napoli and Joey Tuna clipped the big Irishman. They stuffed him in a grease drum and dropped it in the river. The thing is, they didn’t take his piece. His finger mighta been around the trigger because he starts to bloat and the gun fires. Drills a hole in the drum. Next thing you know,

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cops're following gas bubbles to the body."

"Tough piece of luck."

"Yeah. Only Tuna didn't see it as luck. He swore it was the Irishman screwing with him. Never mind he's a stiff. Even at the end, he believed it was the Irishman sticking the needle in him. Don't you start believing in ghosts, too."

"Tuna wasn't wired right to start with. Fortunato's dead two hundred years. You said so."

"Just don't let it get to you, Tony."

Vincent left to pay his own respects in his family cemetery. Tony drank more wine, thinking about the Irishman and Fortunato, mixing them up in his mind. Homicide cops claim to speak for the dead, but what business did anybody have speaking for a guy like the Irishman? You hit him to silence him. Somebody finds the body it's like an unhit. Fortunato, too. Montessoro silenced him for insults, but that blood on the wall, like an 'X' marking the tomb, was another insult from a guy who deserved to be silenced. Leave it there, it's an unhit.

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Maybe nobody sees it for another century, but it's there unless he, Tony Montessor, takes care of it.

The moon had been up an hour when Tony returned to the wine cellar. He found Luchesi's lantern and descended the stairs unsteadily. At the bottom, he collected several bottles before opening the wooden door. Inside, he headed to the deepest part of the catacomb, past the bones of his ancestors, deep into the tomb until he reached the wall. The air was so thick and foul, the lantern flame shrunk to a glow. In the dim light, the

rivulet of blood was barely visible.

"Think you can screw with me?" Tony said to the wall. He smashed a bottle of wine against it and watched it wash away the blood. Business taken care of, he sat down on a pile of stones.

"So this is how it is, Fortunato. You mess with a Montessor, you're dead. Right?" He took a drink from the bottle, feeling the power of the wine burn through him. "What did you do to him, Fortunato? All he needed was to put a shiv in you. Why this? Did he want you to know he did

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it? To think about it?” Tony drained the bottle and shattered it against the wall. “Bottom line, Fortunato, you screwed with a Montessor.”

The lantern sputtered. Tony’s head reeled from the wine. He knew he had to leave or he could be lost in the catacombs. He stood up, but the floor seemed to rise and fall, the walls of the tomb beating like a heart. He took a step forward, stumbled. The flame went out and he fell against the wall in the total darkness.

“*P*adrone, padrone.”

Tony Montessor swam to consciousness, somebody shaking him awake. His face felt cold against the damp ground. He opened his eyes to Luchesi, holding a flashlight and the ever-present shotgun. Luchesi helped him up.

“We have looked for you since morning, *padrone*. Your head. You have hurt yourself?”

Tony felt a tender knot on his forehead and some blood that had clotted around a small gash. “It’s nothing,” he said.

“But your shirt.”

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Tony looked at his shirt. It was wet and plastered to his body with blood. “Jesus!” He touched his forehead again, disbelieving.

Luchesi played the flashlight nervously around the catacomb. As the beam swept across the wall of Fortunato’s tomb, Tony gave a strangled cry and staggered back. “My God! The wall!”

The wall streamed with blood, more black than red. Thick rivers filled the mortar channels and oozed over the stones.

“Fortunato!”

“*Padrone*, that can’t be. Come, we must get you help.”

“No,” yelled Tony. “It’s Fortunato! He’s screwing with me.” He slammed Luchesi against the wall. The shotgun and flashlight clattered to the floor. Tony seized the gun. “Get out,” he said.

“Yes, *padrone*.” Luchesi scabbled down the dark catacomb.

Tony turned to the bloody wall. “I’m coming for you Fortunato. Nobody screws with me!”

He rammed the gun butt against the wall, his rage giving him strength.

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The blow dislodged a stone from its crumbly mortar. Another blow and the stone fell into the recess. He hit the wall again and again, splintering the stock, knocking stones loose with each assault, until the hole was large enough for his head and shoulders. Sweat coursed down his body. Turning the gun, he fired both barrels into the recess. The gun jumped out of his hands and the explosion boomed off the walls. His ears rang from the noise. Tony attacked the remains of the wall with his bare hands, throwing stones out of his way,

until he had an opening large enough to enter.

Empty!

A pair of ancient manacles hung from the wall, but no corpse. In his bewilderment, he failed to hear Luchesi approach from behind.

“I am sorry, *padrone*.”

A hard shove in his back propelled him forward. Before Tony could react, Luchesi snapped the manacles over his wrists.

Tony, trying to keep his cool, said, “What is this, Luchesi? You screw with me, you’re dead. Dead!

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You hear me?" He turned as far as the chains would let him. Not one but two shadowy figures stood in the opening.

Luchesi said, "Should I replace the stones, *padrone*?"

"Okay, good joke," said Tony.

"We can all go have a good laugh."

"A very good laugh, Tony."

Tony recognized the voice.

"Vincent? Vincent Corrado, my friend?"

"Actually, it is Vincent Corrado di Fortunato. Fortunato was my ancestor. Twenty years ago I learned

his fate and discovered his bones here where yours will be."

"For the love of God, Vincent."

"Yes, for the love of God, Montessor."

Luchesi laid a tier of stones, applied fresh mortar and laid another tier. Tony Montessor's scream died among the bones of his ancestors.

Luchesi found Vincent in the cemetery above the village. He stood over a tombstone that was newer than the surrounding ones. The name on the stone was "Fortunato."

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“Family honor is everything,”  
said Vincent. “The job is finished?”

“As you directed, *padrone*.”

“Good! I have informed the  
bosses of your service. They are  
pleased. They will soon be making  
money again. When you reach  
America you will have their  
gratitude.”

“And your ancestor, *padrone*?”

“He can rest in peace. The  
score is even with Montessor.”

-- THE END --