

Excerpt from

THE GRANDFATHER CLAUSE

A Novel by Philip A. Genovese, Jr.

Waverly Place Arms

Greenwich Village, New York City

Fabrizio Benedetto lived in the tradition of the most successful and long-lived Mafia Dons. By fashioning a quiet life, shunning the outward signs of wealth and power, and insisting upon the same loyalty to tradition from his captains and soldiers, the Napolo Family had survived and prospered into the new millennium. Miraculously, not one Napolo Family associate had yet to cooperate with the authorities and enter the witness protection program. Many attributed this to Benedetto's unflinching enforcement of the traditional codes of conduct. A closer look would reveal his uncanny ability for staying one step ahead of frustrated investigators, allowing the Napolo Family to escape all but the most trifling prosecutorial efforts. As a result, the Family was also able to evade the ruinous media attention salaciously reserved for organized crime trials.

And so it was, until the sensational events of the last couple days.

"Not too good, this morning," the sturdy day nurse, Mrs. Wilkins, said as she ripped apart the Velcro fastening to remove the blood pressure cuff from Fabrizio Benedetto's arm. "And you look tired. You should rest."

The Don looked at her with the special contempt he saved for all his medical caretakers. Mrs. Wilkins knew the look and often took the opportunity to remind him that it wasn't her presence that had made him sick but the reverse series of events that required it. However, she knew that today was not the day to initiate a round of spirited persiflage.

"Do you read the newspapers, Mrs. Wilkins?" He asked without looking at her.

"When I get the chance." Her back to him, wrapping the rubber tubing around the rolled pressure cuff.

"You watch TV or listen to the radio?"

"Yes, of course," said Mrs. Wilkins, turning around.

“Then you know that friends of mine were killed yesterday. Some of them I’ve known since they were young boys.” Glancing up at her. “Do you really think that I can rest?” Catching her eyes. “Do you think I will?”

Mrs. Wilkins looked down at her patient. She knew all too well of his reputation but had become familiar with him as just another old man, failing from age, bad lungs, and weak heart muscles, bound to his wheelchair lest a few dozen steps sap the day’s strength from him. But now, as she listened to his voice and looked past his tired, watery eyes she sensed the capacities of a younger and stronger man. A man of serious intent. A man capable of the things she had heard.

“I understand, but I still think you should rest.”

Fabrizio Benedetto shook his head at her persistence. “I have to go to the park. I need you to take me there. Will that make you afraid?”

“Should I be?”

“Maybe.”

“Are *you*?”

“A little.”

“Then why are you going.”

“Because I have to. I have no choice. But my men will be watching and they’ll protect us, if they have to.”

“I’m just a fat old lady. Why would anyone want to hurt me?”

Benedetto’s eyes twinkled. “I could give them plenty of reasons.”

Mrs. Wilkins laughed.

Benedetto became serious again. “The newspapers and TV will be waiting for me downstairs. That will help to make it safer. But they’ll be asking questions and taking my picture and you’ll be on the front page with me. Does that bother you?”

Mrs. Wilkins shrugged. “My grandchildren will probably think it’s cool or phat or whatever they say now. But why are you going out? Why are you letting them do this?”

“I need to show my enemies and my friends that I am not afraid, that I will not hide, that I am still strong. I need to carry on, like I am expected to.” Looking away. “And I need to meet someone in the elevator, to talk in private, when we come back.”

“Okay, Mr. Benedetto, let’s go for a walk. I’ll get a blanket for your lap.”

“No. Just my brown jacket, please. We’ll leave the wheelchair in the lobby.”