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## The Golden Dawn

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## The Golden Dawn

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It was late. It was night. It was dark. It was his first journey to the south and he was eight. "The next stop is Milan," they announced. Young Carlo tossed impatiently in his seat and thought for a second before asking his father a question.

"Where are we going, dad?"

"I told you. We are going to Laureana to see your grandma."

"Why?"

"She is very old and I want you to meet her before..."

"She's going to die soon, dad?"

"Oh, I did not mean that she is dying now."

"And when she's going to die?"

"I don't know. Nobody knows. When you die, you die."

"Are we there yet?"

"We are just now arriving in Milan. Let's eat now. Then, you'll go to sleep and, when you wake up, we'll be there."

That was not good news. Milan was at least twelve hours away from Reggio Calabria. So, young Carlo had to spend the night on the train.

He found consolation in a sumptuous dinner that his mother prepared the night before. She prepared some spaghetti with tomato sauce and four stuffed eggplants. His father, Vincenzo, ate in silence. That was the longest time young Carlo had ever spent with his father alone, and he did not know how to start a conversation. But he had a great question:

"Why haven't you ever talked to me about God, dad?"

"What God?" Vincenzo replied without hesitating

“How can I talk to God, dad?” the boy asked.

Vincenzo rolled his eyes and told him to put his hands together, get on his knees, concentrate, and pray. The boy paused for a second and then followed his father’s instructions. But suddenly a feeling—like that he felt when he had told a lie to his mom—pervaded him, and so he got off his knees and back up on his feet. His father chuckled, looked into the little boy’s big brown eyes and with a satisfied tone said to him, “Only slaves get on their knees and pray. Besides, I do not like the idea that a god constantly watches us, at any time of the day and the night, and it will never stop watching us because when we die he will allegedly be there. That’s why I never talked to you about God, Carlo. I don’t think there is a god, Carlo, and if there was one, I am not sure I’d be happy about it. Do you understand me?” Carlo nodded and continued eating his spaghetti. Then he sat the fork down, picked up a napkin, wiped his mouth, and asked another question: “What about grandma? Does she believe in God?” Vincenzo hesitated a few seconds and then replied, “Why don’t you ask her? We are almost there anyway.” “I can’t wait” said the boy and continued eating his spaghetti.

Carlo was excited because he had never seen his antediluvian grandmother. Carlo’s mother, Maria, refused to go with them. “She is a cynical bitch,” she said recounting an anecdote that occurred in 1966. She told Carlo about a certain Francesco Impusino from Polistena who was engaged to Rosa Maria Morabito. Francesco promised to marry Rosa Maria as soon as he was discharged from the army. He was fulfilling military duty in Palermo, Sicily. Francesco was discharged on a day in April 1966, but he never went back to Laureana because he did not intend to marry his fiancée Rosa Maria. A few months later, he sent a letter to his mother. The letter said: “Dear Mom, I’m in Milannow. I found a job as a carpenter in a small company here in the city. I won’t come back, but it’s not that I don’t wanna marry Rosa, I just want some time for myself.” Francesco’s mother, Concetta, was desperate and told Grandma Carmela what was happening to her. Grandma Carmela promised Concetta to take care of this matter in return for two pigs, four hens, and forty pounds of corn. It is said that Grandma Carmela sent a letter to Francesco and, a week later, Francesco went straight back to Laureana and married Rosa Maria.

Nevertheless, Young Carlo wanted to meet her—after all, she was his grandma and he knew very little about her. She had a prosthetic right arm, but he did not know what happened to her, and neither did his mom. So, he asked his father and he told him that his grandma’s forearm was amputated after she burnt it in a cauldron in which she was cooking chicken stew with potatoes and peas. Well, at that time, Carlo did not know anything about necrosis and subsequent decay of body tissues caused by an infection, but he knew that they would not amputate a person’s arm due to immersion into boiling chicken stew.

That journey seemed interminable, but finally their train arrived in Laureana the next morning at 6:16 a.m. When they arrived at the station, Carlo went to the toilet. He held his pee on the train because he was afraid of the toilet. When he flushed it seemed to him that the suction might suck him down into the drain hole along with the toilet paper. His father was waiting for him outside the bathroom and was talking to a very attractive

young woman who looked like Sophia Loren. The woman pointed at a sign on the near wall that read WELCOME TO THE SOUTH.

Carlo came out of the bathroom and followed his father. “Who is that woman, dad?” asked Carlo. And with a defensive tone Vincenzo replied, “I don’t know her. I just asked her which direction the bus station is.” Then, he grabbed Carlo’s hand and they walked through a long corridor illuminated by a parallel series of two old neon lights located along the ceiling, one pair every eleven steps—well, eleven of young Carlo’s steps. The boy intended to count the lights and then ask his father to guess the number at the end of the corridor. But at the eleventh neon light, he turned around and saw the same young woman to whom his father was chatting walking into the Men’s Room. Carlo was going to tell his father about this oddness, but they were already at the end of the passageway—and he lost count of the neon lights.

Once they exited the train station, the father and the boy walked to the bus terminal. Granny Carmela lived in the periphery of Laureana. They got on the bus and sat in the front row behind the driver. The bus smelt like old people’s sweat. There was a peculiar old man sitting in the front row next to them wearing a worn-out suit and a pair of sneakers without socks, carrying a black kitten and a few eggs in a household basket. Sitting beside him, there was a fat old woman. Her body was jiggly and she had a big mole on her face—fuzzy, of course—and her sideburns grew like a man’s. Granny Carmela was there waiting at the bus stop. She welcomed them with a smile and she kissed young Carlo on his cheeks. Then, the three of them walked onto an oak-tree-lined road that led to Granny Carmela’s modest abode. As they were getting closer to the house, all the colors became muted because of the lithe and dense tree branches. She lived in the countryside of Laureana in an old cabin with no electricity and no gas. In the following days, Granny Carmela would take Carlo into the woods to collect hazelnut tree branches and logs for the fireplace. And to illuminate the cozy living room, they used candles. She also took the boy to a place by the Vacale River where she used to find mandrakes. Carlo did not know what they were; to his young eyes, they were just strange roots that looked like a person in miniature. Vincenzo was always in the house reading medical books and medical journals. He was a private person. During the Great War he ate a cat.

One night, Vincenzo fell to sleep on the couch, after he had read a boring article on organ transplants. Carlo woke up in his dark room brought out of his dreams by a noise downstairs. He was dreaming of his arrival in Laureana, precisely when he went to the bathroom. But when he got out of the bathroom, this time his father was not there. He saw the attractive woman who looked like Sophia Loren. She approached him, but she did not speak. She pointed at the same sign that read WELCOME TO THE SOUTH, he looked up, turned around, and she was gone.

Interested in that noise downstairs, he put his slippers on, but he realized that they were making too much noise and so he took them off, took a candle, lit it up, and walked out of the room barefoot. He moved cautiously down a crackling staircase that was softly illuminated by the candle that he was clutching in his little hand. When he got in the

living room, he tiptoed around his dormant father and went into the kitchen. He realized that the sound was coming from the basement. He was scared, but his curiosity prevailed, and he continued down to the basement. He groped for the handrail and carefully began to descend. The basement was dark and damp. The boy's feet were cold and he was shivering—but perhaps it was not because of the damp floor.

Behind the door there was a room. The door was left ajar and Carlo peeped through the crack. Grandma was there—in the middle of the room stirring up a large cauldron that was boiling on top of a popping fire. She was wearing a long dark gown with short sleeves and a large pocket at her chest. That was the strange sound: the bubbling mixture in the cauldron and Granny Carmela whispering incomprehensible rigmaroles. Young Carlo choked back his shock, only to see that she was aware of his presence. Her eyes were shining like the eyes of nocturnal animals. “I know you're there” she hissed appraising him. “Come in, Carlo.” And without turning back to see the boy, she continued, “I knew you'd come. It was all foretold. Come here, child.”

Young Carlo was paralyzed, standing behind the door, and with a stammering voice said, “Nonna...I am going straight back to bed.”

“No, please come in. I have something for you.” Granny Carmela took her shawl and tossed it quickly around her shoulder and over her arm, and walk toward the door where she saw those big eyes.

“Come in” she said to the boy inviting him in, “come, come closer. Don't be afraid.”

The boy walked in and sat on the chair next to the cauldron and curiously asked,

“Nonna, what happened to your arm?”

“Oh, nothing, I hurt myself when I was a little girl—but don't worry about my arm. I have something for you.” She told the boy that he was the chosen one in the family and handed him a book.

The boy tried to read the author's name aloud, “Crowle...Eliast” but could not pronounce it. The book was entitled *The Book of the Law: The Golden Dawn*.

“What am I going to do with this book, nonna? I do not care about the Law.” Also, she gave him a manuscript bound in a black hard cover with no title, which contained strange lexica, figures, and instructions; she told him not to worry that in due time he would understand, and a certain Rocco would contact him. Rocco was the son of Concetta, an old acquaintance of Carlo's grandma. When Concetta died, Rocco moved to New York and opened an Italian restaurant, *La Cucina di Rocco*.

The boy said goodnight and walked out and went upstairs into his room, sat on the edge of his bed and glanced at the books. He did not know what to do with those books and put them in a drawer next to his underwear and socks and went to sleep.

After sixth days in Laureana, they were ready to go back to Turin. Granny Carmela bade them farewell, and they headed downtown to the train station. They took the 12:45 p.m. Express to Turin. That night on the train, Carlo had the weirdest experience of his life: while he was sleeping, he felt something pulling his pajamas. He woke up and saw several hands coming from the gap between the wall and the edge of his cot. He jumped off the bed and turned on the light; the hands were gone. He tried to wake up his father,

who told him to go back to sleep. Was that real or just a nightmare? Carlo went back to bed and covered his head with the naphthalene-scented blanket; however, Vincenzo got up to calm Carlo. Vincenzo turned on the light and told the boy that he would leave it on all night; only then, Carlo uncovered one eye sliding down the blanket a bit to look at his father. The father said: “Have a good night,” and a good night it was.

The next day they arrived home. It was a placid autumn day and a group of children were playing soccer outside in the piazza. Later in the evening while they were dining, Carlo recounted his frightening train incident to his mother, but she did not believe him. The telephone rang; Vincenzo picked up the receiver and held it for a few seconds against his ear—“Nonna died!” he announced.

Later that year, Carlo’s father died too. His death, so they said, was caused by an aortic aneurysm. Carlo saw him at the morgue before they put him in the casket. His body was livid and putrid; his skin was dry and flaky, peeling off like an onion. They buried him in a small cemetery located in the periphery of Turin. Carlo never visited him because he did not miss him at all.

Twenty years later, Carlo moved to New York City. When he first arrived in Manhattan, he had déjà vu—it felt like that day he went to Calabria, but this time he traveled by plane and he was welcomed by Rocco. He lived in Green Point, Brooklyn, where he rented a room at the YMCA. Rocco lived in Manhattan and still ran the restaurant where Carlo worked as a waiter. Rocco knew Carlo’s grandma before he migrated to America. He asked Carlo if he was interested in joining the circle, but Carlo told him that he was not interested.

One night, Carlo was working on the night shift at the restaurant. At the end of his shift, Rocco and Carlo sat at a table and drank a glass of wine.

“You see this bottle?” Rocco said “Your grandma gave it to me long time ago and asked me to save it for you.”

“What sort of wine is that, Rocco” Carlo curiously inquired.

“This is vino della Calabria, Carletto!”

Carlo scowled at him and said, “I told you many times not to call me Carletto. I am not a kid!”

Carlo drank the wine and became sick before he could finish the second glass. He ran downstairs to the employees’ washroom to vomit. The pot had crusty formations of brownish bowel-twisted stuff all around the rim, and the walls were flaky, peeling off like the skin of a cadaver, which reminded him of his father at the morgue. While he was bent over the pot, he saw a large number of cockroaches crawling on the floor and up and down the beer kegs. He quickly freshened up and rinsed his mouth with a sip of water that left a metallic taste in his mouth. Then, he changed his clothes, which stank like vomit, and he walked out of the restaurant toward Times Square.

He saw a Nativity Scene outside a church. It reminded him of the one that Carlo’s mom used to set up every year in December until she misplaced the miniature of baby Jesus and so decided to set up a Christmas tree—Carlo never told her that she did not misplace

baby Jesus. He burnt it.

As Carlo walked toward the subway station, he walked through smelly sidewalk steam; the smoke was rising into the sky defying gravity like a phantasm. He looked up to watch it ascending and then slowly dispersing into the air, noticing the clock on the Paramount building. It was almost 2:00 a.m.—it was time to head back to Brooklyn. He took the subway back to Brooklyn and got off a couple of stops before Green Point, just to make sure he would not vomit on the G Train. But also he loved to walk by the East River and see the reflection of Manhattan on the water, and then straight down onto 14<sup>Th</sup> Street by the Green Point Terminal Warehouse. Then, he retired in his cozy, cockroach-infested room to study the grimoire.

Finally, April came and Carlo took a few days off to go upstate New York to find a good location. Rocco warned him that he should not work alone:

“Had your grandma been alive, she would not have approved it.”

“Don’t worry Rocco because I am experienced enough to complete my opus.”

“But look what happened to your father.”

“I am the chosen one Rocco—have you forgotten?”

Carlo searched the right place for months. It was too narrow or too dirty or too near to inhabited areas. One night, Carlo drove up to the hills onto a secluded street in an isolated area and saw, in the dark, a sinister establishment. It was an abandoned all-girl school. He furtively got in through a big hole in the fence and rapidly entered the deserted building. The place smelt like coagulated blood and stale urine. He turned on his flashlight and looked around. In the middle of an atrium there was a gate standing in front of a trapdoor that led to a dark and narrow passageway. He went down and walked through a corridor. At the end of the corridor, there was what he had been looking for—a spacious room that measured more or less sixteen by twenty meters.

The next day, Carlo went back and cleaned the room with fresh stream water, but the smell of urine did not go away. He took a bath and then wore a black robe. With a rope and a chisel, he traced the circles on the floor. He traced two concentric circles with a diameter of six and seven meters, and then it took him one hour to engrave the lexica, the protective pentacles, the seals, and the runes. It was not enough because he needed sixteen eye bolts and sixteen meters of copper wire, which he found in a local hardware store. He screwed the bolts into the ground along the circumferences of the circles and ran the wire through the bolt’s eyes, but he left an open edge because one is not supposed to jump over the circle. Outside, it was a placid night, and the moon was smiling, or at least its craters made it look that way.

Carlo entered the circle and placed his paraphernalia down neatly. He had the black book that his grandma gave him when he was eight as well as a grimoire, the mandrake that he had meticulously polished, a blade, the stick made out of the cherry tree branch, a dagger, an amanita muscaria, eight ounces of blood in a small ceramic bowl, and a wafer that he stole from a church. Then, he sealed the edge of the circle and drank the blood mixed with the amanita muscaria. He began before the psychoactive constituents of the muscaria kicked in because he wanted to be in control of himself—he did not want to run

the risk of mispronouncing them. He read his grimoire aloud: “Sator, Arepo, Tenet, Opera, Rotas. I petition the abyss— Belphegor, Astaroth, Beelzebub, Oh Mighty Lords, I compel you all.”

Carlo made his speech and waited a few minutes—but nothing happened. The silence in the room and the smell of urine made him unsettled—and the amanita was starting to kick in now. Suddenly, when he was about to sheathe back his blade, he was blinded by something that felt like sand in his eyes. He threw Carlo out of the circle and attacked him like an insolent foe— that wasn’t contemplated in the grimoire!—but Carlo managed to hit him with his dagger.

Carlo must have wounded him, although he didn’t understand how such a creature could be hurt. Nevertheless, he ran upstairs. The trapdoor was shut, but not locked. He felt that fiendish presence behind him and he knew that he was not going to make it. He kicked the trapdoor open and kept on running. He ran out of the building—and outside was the dawn.