The background of the cover is a dramatic seascape at sunset or sunrise. The sky is filled with warm, golden light and scattered clouds. A large, bright full moon is visible in the upper left quadrant. In the foreground, a large, dark silhouette of a multi-masted sailing ship is prominent. In the distance, another smaller sailing ship is visible on the right, and a lighthouse sits on a rocky island. The overall mood is mysterious and adventurous.

NOVEL  
SECOND AFTER  
GOD  
BOOK 1

# PIRATE AND LOVER

Sergiy Zhuravlov  
SUNRAY 2022

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NOVEL  
SECOND AFTER GOD  
BOOK 1  
PIRATE AND LOVER

# Prologue

Alter ab illo Deus  
Second After God  
1360-1419

The story of how a clever and handsome man, Balthasar Cossa, descendant of an ancient family descended from Cornelius Cossa, general and consul of the Roman Empire, pirate and connoisseur of women, becomes Pope.

The novel largely retains the temporal events and names of the main characters.

The author supplements the dry data about the main character and his life companions based on his own imagination.



## **As the seed, so the tribe will be**

How beautiful it is to live and greet the dawn every morning. Here he is, still so far away, but already absorbing

the darkness of the morning messenger. This nimble little fellow chases the night away, and it gives way to him, weakening and passing into twilight. A little longer and there, far, far away on the horizon, the glow flashes. Although the sun has not yet appeared, the observer is in a state of anticipation. All life, from small to large, is waiting for the sun. Some wait to be warmed by its rays, while others wait to be born and see the beauty of the world.

The experienced midwife delivered the babies, who herself had given birth more than once and had delivered the babies of others without counting. So it was before, and so it was this time. As she crossed the threshold, the old woman repeatedly crossed herself, said a prayer, and then set to work.

She lit the Easter candles from the lamp lit under the icon of Our Lady, and read the prayers together with the woman in labor, invoking the Lord's help.

Then the midwife brewed herbs and gave an infusion to the woman in labor. She unfastened her hair and untied all the strings and bands. A little while later she sprinkled holy water on her head, breasts, abdomen and genitals, after which she began to rub the woman in labor.

The old woman had an impeccable reputation. She was meek, but still quick and hardy. To induce labor, the midwife and the expectant mother went about the castle, opening all the doors of the rooms, and opening all the lids of the chests and cupboard doors in the rooms. Thus, symbolically stimulating the opening of the birth canal. Many times up and down the stairs, and only when they got to the church and opened the King's Gate did the contractions begin.

"Push, push, come on," the midwife urged, now groaning, now screaming, the laboring woman. "Well, well, my dear. It's coming, it's coming. Just a little more, push harder. There, there."

The first ray of sunlight slid brightly and irresistibly over the treetops. It touched the dome of the church and began to descend. At one point, the sunlight covered more of the window with the Venetian mosaic. Passing through thousands of multicolored panes of glass, the new day splashed into the temple in bright spots.

“Boy, boy your lordship!” said the midwife excitedly and slapped the baby's bottom.

“Ah-ah-ah,” cried the newborn. And those were the first words uttered by Balthazar Cossa.

The midwife looked closely at the screaming infant, finding no external defects, and spoke admiringly:

“Your Grace, he is healthy and screams like a lion. Take him into your arms,” she handed the newborn to his mother.

The Countess put her son to her breast. The boy ran his mouth over the nipple and immediately fell silent. The mother was crying. Tears of tenderness ran down her cheeks.

“I want him to be a minister of the church,” the mother said with a tremor in her voice.

“And so it will be, your ladyship,” the midwife, nodding her head, confirmed.

And it was in the year 1360 A.D., on the fortieth day after Easter, on the feast of the Ascension.



## **The Island of Ischia**

It was evening, and the August heat was not letting up. All life waited for night to fall, and it's starlight to bring coolness. A ship was approaching the ancestral home of one of Italy's oldest families, the Cossa, on the island of Ischia. The monotonous beating of the drum, at first barely audible, was becoming more and more distinct. With the

sails down and the rhythmic raising and lowering of the oars, the galley looked like a centipede.

Judging by the draft and the waves breaking out, she was heavily laden. Everyone on the island knew that it was Balthasar's older brother Gaspar who had arrived. Balthasar, the youngest of the Cossa family, heard the drum, and immediately forgot all the games of the yard and rushed ashore.

The island of Ischia was not far from Naples. From the height of an eagle's flight, it looked like a badly dressed bull skin - hilly and in some places cut by deep bays. But, washed by the warm waters of the Mediterranean Sea, the piece of land was very attractive.

Though a small island, with only five villages and a few thousand inhabitants. But it had three churches and many hard-working people.

The inhabitants of the island, for the most part, were engaged in agriculture. However, besides farmers, there were also artisans: stone cutters, blacksmiths, carpenters. Here they skillfully dressed hides, weaved nets and fished.

Balthasar's family was ancient and descended from Cornelius Cossa. This man was a famous military leader of the Roman Empire, who shone with feats as early as 294.

Cossa noble pedigree has not brought in any additional income in recent centuries, it did not bring any additional income in the last century. No one of the Cossa family, neither great-grandfather nor grandfather, nor father, had been invited to government positions that promised high dividends for a long time.

It is a sin to speak ill of my parents. But neither mother nor father had much custody of the boys. The mother of the Cossa family was a deeply religious woman and spent most of her time in prayer so that she did not have an hour left for the children.

The father, on the other hand, was not as religious as his wife. Cossa Sr. kept a dozen shops in Naples and had to



go there several times a week, if not every day, in a big sailboat. He did not trust anyone else to handle the trade, as his father had taught him and his father, so he personally delivered the goods, distributed the goods in his shops, and sold the surplus to wholesalers. The consequence was that the eldest son Gaspar had long been engaged in piracy and in his nineteen years had a reputation as a dashing corsair.

Now the father of the family Cossa had to work from morning till night at the merchant warehouses in the port of Naples. He was busy taking sailing and rowing boats from the island every day with food, and everything that passed through their family nest of valiant pirate Gaspar.

The family's fortunes began to grow, the number of shops grew to two dozen, and the father got his own storeroom. A year ago, Cossa Sr. bought a mansion near the port, where he began to live with the servants brought from the island.

The sale of herbs, vegetables, fruit and fish did not take more than a couple of hours, but what was delivered to Ischia by Gaspar took up all daylight hours, and for the visiting merchants it increasingly fell in the evening.

Now the head of the family was hardly ever on Ischia. Therefore, the little Balthasar was entirely left to himself day and night. And by the age of ten, the young man dreamed of continuing the robbery trade started by his older brother.

With all this, his mother taught the boys to read, and he learned to write and counting by visiting his father's office. To the surprise of those around him, the younger Cossa, for all his recklessness and intemperance in all that concerned physical exercise, was zealous for the sciences.

Every morning until noon, he was on his feet and did not sit still. But after the heat of the afternoon, it was as if the boy was replaced. He became meek and sensible. He carefully studied scrolls and handwritten books. Learned to

count by waybills and barn books. And by the age of nine, he was fluently reading in four languages, had good knowledge of history, and had no equal in arithmetic.

Even his father, so as not to count in columns, used to ask his son:

“Balthasar, help me out here. How much money will I get if I sell three hundred and forty-eight pounds of sardines at a price of five drachmas per cantor?”

“That would be, one dinar, and seven and quarter drachmas,” Balthasar answered without thinking.

Italy in the 14th century. 1 cantor = 100 pounds

Balthasar never lacked for playmates:

Neither at the head of the family in Naples, nor at his mother's on the island of Ischia. My father's warehouse was always full of all sorts of metal and wood objects.

Wine barrels and rivets, soot and boards, tar and ropes, nets and cloth, dishes and clothes, weapons and armor. And the docks, where the ships come in, attract boys like the sweets of wasps.

Cossa Jr. was always the mastermind. He was either king, sitting on a barrel, or captain of a pirate ship that had captured a merchant ship. The boys were out before lunch and after the fiesta until late in the evening, scurrying around town, grabbing whatever wasn't good enough.

One day, after arriving from a voyage, the older brother gave the younger one a beautiful silk camisole. The parents were delighted at the sight of the boy. His mother, contemplating the handsome man, wept and suggested that such a beauty be put in his trunk and dressed him for his birthday.

Seven-year-old Balthasar, arbitrarily took the clothes, hid them in a canvas bag, and when he sailed to his father in the city, he put them on and began to flaunt them in front

of his friends. Now he felt both outwardly and inwardly like a ruler.

He ordered the boys to place several barrels in a pyramid against the wall. When his whim was done, he himself climbed up on this rickety structure and sat on a small barrel as on a throne.

After commanding his subjects for a while, at some point, this height did not seem to be enough for him, and he climbed up on the barrel with his feet. But he couldn't resist, the barrels began to roll with a roar, and the little man flew with them. As luck would have it, there was a bar by the wall, with hooks on which sheep or pig carcasses were hung. It was on one of these hooks that the young king stumbled.

He was very lucky that the hook only pierced the cloth and did not reach his body. The fabric burst with a dry crack, extinguishing the velocity of the fall. The camisole, though it saved Balthazar from bruises, was itself thoroughly ruined.

The teenagers, seeing that the father of the noise originator came out of the stall at the rumble, hurried to disappear. And Cossa Jr. prepared to get a scolding.

The boy stood sniffing his nose and rubbing his bruised knees through his torn knickers.

"What happened here?" The father inquired. "Don't lie."

"We were playing king, and I got on the barrels, and they rolled over. I got caught on those hooks and tore the dress that Gaspar had given me."

"Your Majesty," Cossa the elder spoke with a smile on his face, "and high up was your throne."

Delighted that his father was not angry, the boy cheered up and began to babble:

"Yes, my father. He was very high, higher than you."

The father looked at his back, and finding nothing dangerous there, he continued:

“You see, my son, you have just learned a very clear lesson. Everything that happened to you now will be waiting for you in your future life. It always has been and always will be, the higher you go, the shakier the support becomes.”

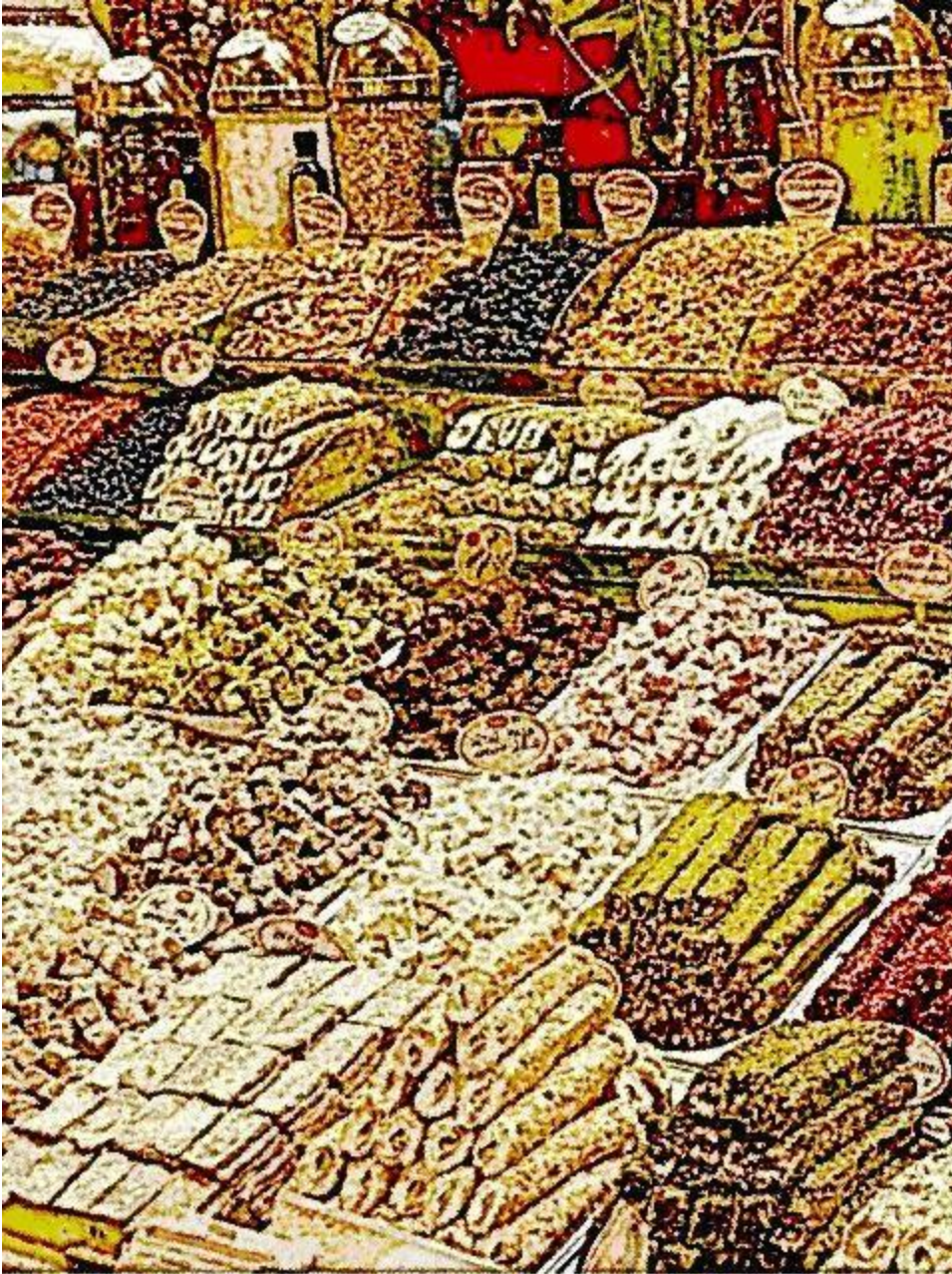
“If you shake the base a little bit, he who is at the top and his entourage will go down. And remember, my son!” Father exclaimed and raised his index finger. “Falling from the pinnacle of power rarely makes a good landing, as you did today.”

Because of his age, Balthasar paid no attention to his father's words. He was more concerned about the corporal punishment or moral humiliation that might now follow. But no such thing happened. His father merely touched the boy's hair, pretending to punish him. Then he hugged him and said:

“Before you do anything, think about whether your ass is going to be sore afterwards.

And then Balthasar could not remember a single occasion when his father was seriously angry with him, or punished him. He was always kind and affectionate, and often indulged all the whims of his youngest son.”

Over the years, he left the boy more and more to himself. He grew up to be willful and impudent, hardy and enterprising, able to get out of any tricky situations. In a word, a leader. He was a jolt to the boys of the port and the island.



## **Oriental Sweets**

On one of those October days, still warm and, as usual, noisy in the port of Naples, an unremarkable ship docked at the main quay near my father's warehouse. But within an hour, word was spreading through the nearest quarters that merchants of the East had arrived, and that they had brought silks, spices, and unusual sweets. Balthasar and

his cronies went briskly to the wharf to see the ship up close.

When the gang of boys approached the ship, the unprecedented aromas of spices and sweets permeated their nostrils. Every one of them turned his nose up and sniffed around to say who smelled what. The smell tickled their noses and, through it, their brains so much that they were eager to taste the ship's provisions. The boys were counting on the possibility that something might fall or crumble, and they might pick it up off the floor as they unloaded it.

Usually, the merchants did not harass the young bums too much, giving them a taste of what had fallen and thus spreading the word about the merchandise. But today, as luck would have it, nothing fell or crumbled. It was getting dark, and a servant came to Balthazar to tell him that his father wanted to see him for supper.

The next day, Balthasar awoke in the middle of the night, awakened by a dream. When the boy awoke, he looked at the night light and immediately forgot what the dream was about. Though, he felt as if he had experienced something terrible.

He remembered the scary stories of the boys, when they sat around the campfire in the dark, and made up all kinds of horror stories. Everyone liked it, especially the one about the devils who stole the souls of sinners and made them squirm on the fire in the throes of hell. Balthasar imagined this picture when he was in the forge, only at the furnace was not a smoky old blacksmith, but a terrible devil with crooked horns, covered with curly black hair like a goodstrakhan sheep, and with bifurcated hooves.

The devil would grab passers-by, sinners or not, though even the righteous were sometimes unrepentant sinners, put his hand in their mouths, and take out white souls with little wings. And then he put them on a spit, and

roasted them on a crucible, as if they were pheasants or quail.

And the afflicted sinners walked away with expressionless faces, as if they had been run over by a cart. Dead men alive, in a word!

Balthasar shuddered and hid himself under the blanket, and immediately, in all its glory, he dreamed of the most terrible story of the gilded carriage.

This carriage, decorated with skulls, rode through Naples, and the devils grabbed the boys who misbehaved at home or in the street. The coachman, a bald-headed devil, also grabbed the boys without getting off the goat. The experienced devil hooked the boys with his long tail, which wrapped around their legs, and then dragged them to himself, and threw them back into the carriage. In it, the roof would open like a mousetrap. Then the carriage would leave, and when it arrived, the girls would get out of the carriage in smart pink dresses, with bows and beautiful red shoes. That story was the worst. No boy could think of anything worse than to turn into a whiny, even if pretty, girl, and live like that for the rest of his life...

Balthasar fell asleep, and he dreamed of nothing like what the devils did to sinners...

With the first cock crows, Balthasar woke up. The sun had not yet risen, but his room was bright enough. The mottled parrot, seeing that the boy opened his eyes, rocked on the suspended perch, reached into the wooden cage with his beak, clutched at it with his legs, and staggered upward toward the dome, helping himself with his beak. When his head was down and his tail up, the feathery said:

“A hundred devils in my liver!” which, in its own dialect, meant good morning, master.

The rat, white as snow on the mountain tops, crawled out of its hole, wiggled its nose, and squealed. It, like the parrot, given to Balthazar by his brother Gaspar, lived in the same spacious cage. The boy reached out, sat down on

the edge of the bed, put his elbows on his knees and rested his head on his hands. Thus, in the pose of a thinker, he sat and thought. Why he had this night vision, he could not take in the current in any way. Something else quite obscure, like a spark from a fire, flashed through the child's brain and faded away again.

Five minutes passed, after which his face brightened. At the same moment he got up, walked over to the cage and opened the door. The parrot began to quickly return himself to his normal position in the same intricate way. And while he was doing this, the boy took hold of the rodent and slammed the door right in front of the talker's nose, to which there was an immediate reaction.

“Better on the paddles than in the cage!”

He smiled, and flicked the parrot's nose lightly. It coughed and squeaked its last breath, rolled its eyes, and imitated a living corpse.

Balthasar did not pay much attention to the customary scene of the feathered man's behavior, but went to the table and rang the bell.

In a minute, the servant came in. He had a fresh towel on his shoulder, a copper basin and a bar of scented soap in one hand, and a silver hand-washing bowl in the other. Having washed himself up to the waist, Balthasar wiped himself dry. He took a silver, gilded vial of fragrant essence and applied a few drops to his dress. The scent of lavender and lily of the valley immediately filled the room.

The boy put on a white shirt with cuffs on the sleeves and collar, pulled on pantaloons, over them brown short pants, and tucked his shirt into them. He wrapped a blue satin ribbon around his armband.

As the sun made its way up the hill, all the boys of yesterday were assembled at the Cossa Sr. stackhouse. They were joined by at least a dozen newcomers. They all wanted something tasty to eat. And knowing the dashing nobleman, they were sure they would.



Balthazar came out of the service door of the warehouse, with a small basket in his hands. Following him, breathing down his neck, his servant Guindaccio piled on top of him. Cossa Jr. walked over to the gang of boys, squatted down, and opened the basket's wicker lid.

A white rat with red ruby eyes appeared. It stood on its hind legs, reached the top of the basket with its front legs, and climbed out quickly. The rat's owner put up his hand and the animal ran along it.

There was a buzz of surprise and fear among the boys at the same time. And Balthazar began to play with a squatting white rat. It went up his shoulder beautifully, then circled his head on the back, went down the other shoulder, and went from hand to hand.

The boys stared wide-eyed at the curiosity.

"Won't it bite?" asked a stately boy, Peter Tomacelli. A longtime friend of Balthazar's in Naples.

"Let's try it," the owner of the rat jokingly suggested."

"In winter, a rat bit my sis-sis-sis-sis," stammered the other, "and her arm swelled up. The healer poo-poo-poo-pooed the blood, but my s-sis-sister still o-u-died."

"She'll bite, of course she will," Cossa spoke, smiling, looking at his peers. "She only recognizes me. It will never bite me."

Balthazar rose to his feet, climbed the parapet, and spoke as if from a podium:

"Who among you would like to taste the foreign spices and sweets?" All around made a murmur, confirming their readiness and consent. "Let's make a deal then..." and he explained his plan in detail to his entourage.

"It's a sin!" Tomacelli said.

Balthazar's chest knotted.

But he was immediately hooted at by the rest of the boys, and Peter had no choice but to pull his head into his shoulders, and Cossa felt stronger for it.

Everyone who wakes up early has already bought what they intended, those who wakes up late have not yet gotten up, and two-thirds of the town's residents who were not part of the former and latter were just wandering around the market.

The port market attracted those who wanted to taste the freshest and least expensive things. As well as wholesalers of all kinds and wealth, both from Naples and elsewhere. And there were, oddly enough, more than a thousand of them.

As before, so today, on this hot August day in the marketplace, there was much mouthed, noisy chatter. The weathered faces of sailors, the red and sweaty faces of fat merchants, the pretty faces of noblemen's maids in fine dresses, and the mothers and nannies of the lower classes in their proper clothes. Cripples and thieves, law-enforcers and clergymen looked like one big anthill in this brain-melting heat.

The motley crowd, shiny with sweat, moved through narrow passages between tables, benches, carts, cages of cattle and fowl, barrels, bales, and miscellaneous, miscellaneous. It spilled out into the tangents of the rows and then came together in a tight lump.

In spite of the dense stream, everyone was mysteriously trickling past each other, helping themselves with elbows, baskets, words, and grimaces. The smell of fish, spices, soap, unwashed human bodies and animals hung tightly at nostril level of both small and large crowds.

Suddenly, the clamor was lost in the piercing screech of first one throat, a few seconds later a second, and now the heartbreaking screech had everyone silent and oblivious of everything in the world.

On the long table, decorated with carpets in baskets, on copper dishes, and simply piled on the cloth, various sweets flaunted. But it was not this that caused such wild cries, but the white rat, deftly jumping from salted

pistachios to raisins, from dates to sherbet, from candied fruits to halve, from baklava to kadaif.

Not everyone was shrieking, only the ladies and children, and there appeared to be a great many of them at the ill-fated tables at that moment. Merchants and servants, customers and every little boy, squealing and shouting, tried to drive away the white rat that had come from nowhere.

Everyone was waving their hands, and the tomboys were so agile that everything on which the rat was running flew to the floor. Some of the boys, as if from fright, fell under the tables. But it never occurred to anyone what for.

The boys deftly picked up from the stone sidewalk everything that had fallen off the tables and stuffed it up their shirts. The rat disappeared as suddenly as it had appeared.

The wiz stopped, people went back to business as usual, and the boys got unnaturally belly fat and scurried away from the rows of sweets.

A dozen minutes later, almost everyone was assembled in Father Balthazar's distant warehouse.

“Does everyone remember the deal?” Balthasar asked.

“Yes!” The boys answered in affirmative chorus.

“Then pile the spoils into this cauldron. Then divide everything into these trays,” the leader pointed to Guindaccio.

One by one the boys went to the cauldron, opened their shirts and poured out what they had gathered.

Guindaccio gave everyone a hard look and addressed them loudly:

“Where are Peter and Totto?”

The boys looked at each other, and shrugged their shoulders when they couldn't find them summoned.

Guindaccio leaned over to Balthasar and said quietly:

“Master, it looks like we've got some rats.”

When all the sweets were laid out, Guindaccio took a fourth from each tray.

And then he divided what was left into equal portions according to the number of boys.

Balthasar stepped into the middle, gave everyone present a friendly glance, and spoke:

“Is it fair?”

“Fair!” the boys all chattered in unison.”

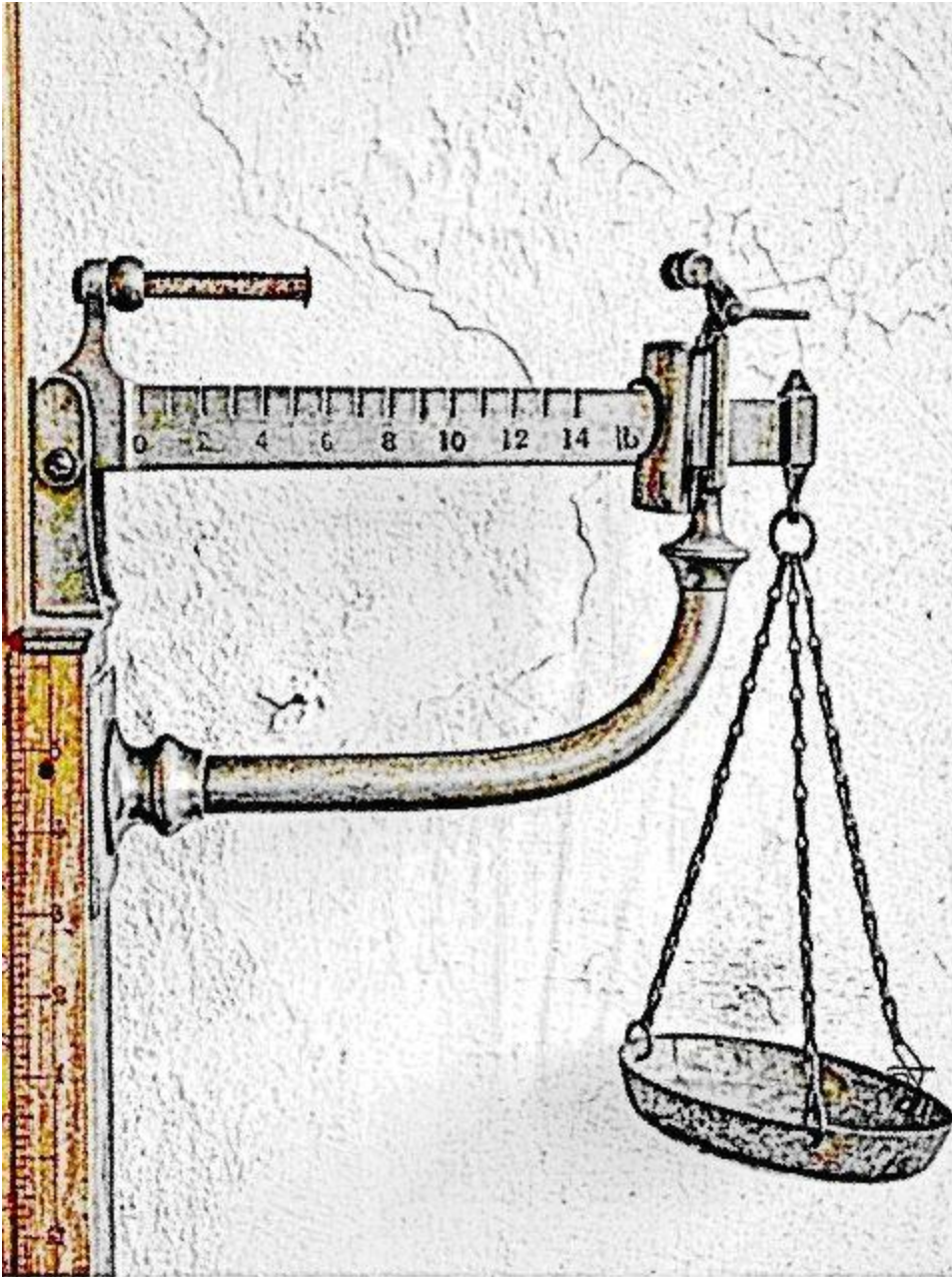
“And what will you do about those who broke the deal?”

There was silence. Only when the white rat on Balthazar's shoulder squeaked loudly did the stutterer speak:

“They must be brought here.”

“Yes. Bring them here. Let them tell!” came flying in from all directions.”

“All right, that's what we'll do. Take your shares and let's go. Bring in the renegades when the sun goes down.”



## **A showdown in the packinghouse**

Supported by sturdy boys, Peter Tomacelli and Totto made noisy excuses. Their grimy faces showed only that they did not want to go to the gathering voluntarily.

“Don't push me!” Peter snarled loudly as the stutterer pushed him through the door. Unlike him, Totto had given

himself over to the situation and was waiting for only one thing to happen, the finale.

The boys surrounded the delinquents. Peter, though he had a bruise under his left eye, stood straight and exhibited defiance. Totto looked resignedly, or rather servility, at his entourage.

"Why didn't you," Guindaccio poked Totto in the chest, "come to this warehouse as we discussed?" The boy sniffed his nose and shed a tear.

"Oh, oh, I feel sorry for you. And when you decided to cheat us, did you feel sorry for yourself too, that you had to share with everyone?"

Totto nodded his head in agreement, and tears spilled over the dusty floor like raindrops.

"What did you do with the sweets you collected?"

"And he crapped his pants in fear!" shouted one of the boys.

"Exactly, look, his pants are wet!" Another one added to the picture. And everyone burst out laughing. And Totto fell to his knees.

"Balthasar, Guindaccio, guys, forgive me. I didn't manage to get more than a handful of sherbet. I thought, what, what..." and the boy started crying again.

"You see, and we got half a pound each after the sharing, so you'd get that much and all sorts of sweets, too."

"That's all right with Totto. We'll decide what to do with him later. Now let Peter explain himself." Guindaccio said in a very unkind way.

"I have nothing to explain. I already told you. I had a pound or two or three. And when I ran, somebody cut me off, and I hit the cart with my left eye," Peter twisted his head, showing a purple bruise.

"And I thought it was the boys who shot you in the eye," said Balthazar with surprise.

“They should have tried it,” said Peter, becoming bolder.

“Where did you put the sweets?” Guindaccio continued his questioning.

“When I kissed the oculus, so many stars swirled in my eyes, like sardines on spawn,” which caused respectful laughter among the boys.

“And then it got dark. When I woke up, my shirt was pulled out of my pants,” Peter looked over himself with a healthy eye. “Someone had gutted me. So, there!” And he flared his hands defiantly.

“Why didn't you come to the assembly-place?” The interrogator wouldn't let up.

“I didn't know how long I was out of it, and I felt ashamed that I had screwed up. So I went home out of shame,” and he looked at the gathering with his only seeing eye.

It caused an attack of frantic laughter.

It was a satisfying conclusion to the story, and now everyone was laughing, even Tutto.



## **He who knows owns the world**

The chill of February, what better time for a boy to learn science, and geometry requires a lot of perseverance to acquire not only knowledge but also skills, and later the skill of the hands. In the study of Cossa senior, a corner was set up for Balthasar to study. The corner was not small. It



fit a large office with various books, a desk, a small drawing board and two chairs.

The door to the office was open, and the German entered leisurely, without giving away his presence. At this time, a teacher from Greece taught classes here with Cossa Jr. After standing there for five minutes, Hans said respectfully:

“Mr. Balthasar!”

Balthasar was carefully drawing Archimedes' spiral from his own calculation. Seeing that the teenager did not even take his head off the sheet, the German paused. Then, stroked the hilt of his saber with his right hand, as if looking for the right thought in it, and having caught it, a guttural trumpeted:

“You, the mental exercises give more time than the established for it, we will have nothing left for the study of the art of war. As for me, to organize a verified attack, or indestructible defense, to cut a saber, or to shoot from the bow is not less important for the future commander,” he continued more for the Greek. “Than to fix a feather goose with a knife, and then to draw scribbles and translate a very expensive paper.”

“But, but! Sophos exclaimed,” sticking up for the lad, “without these, as you now put it, squiggles no ship would have been built!”

“But knowledge of military history and good physical fitness are needed too. For a start, it was because of Gaspar's battle organization, strong muscles, and fighting skills that we ended up here, and besides,” Hans hesitated, not adding that these activities satisfied something else in his body that craved action and fighting.

“Now you will dine, my lord. Then you will rest for a while, after which we will have a lesson in military history pertaining to our century.”

When the young count had eaten and returned to his lessons, Hans called Balthasar.

“Help me unfold these maps,” the German, untying the ropes of a leather tube.

The two, a teacher and a student, began to roll out canvas scrolls the size of a desk on the floor. They were maps of naval and land battles.

“Wow, that's a lot of maps!” The student marveled. “Have you been in all the battles?”

“There are maps of seventy-seven battles, most of which never took place, though they were carefully planned. Here, for example, this map,” Hans picked it up and laid it on the table.

Stand on this chair, and we'll go over the intricacies of the military map together. Several hours passed, and the discussion did not cease. Tin soldiers stood on the map, and their student and teacher moved them around, symbolizing tactics.

“Back at the beginning of our century,” Hans began thrusting the knight's cavalry at Balthasar around the left flank of his infantrymen, “these horsemen terrified everyone, but now, new techniques of fighting with steel-armored warriors have been found and tried out. Here's one of them,” he took the equestrian in his hands, tossed him a couple of times in his palms, then put him on the card, “Now I'll explain everything.”

The German began to spread out and arrange the cavalry.

“Think Balthasar Cossa, a descendant of the great Roman commanders, the future greatness of Rome, because when the riders start galloping to attack, they themselves will increase the front. Each of them, so as not to collide will add distance, or retreat from each other, thereby your lightly armed infantrymen have the opportunity, almost just before the raid, to form triads mall links of fighters. The task of the link is to knock the knight off his horse. Seeing only three warriors in front of him,”

the German took a soldier and waddled him away from the attackers for persuasion.

Balthasar watched the German's hands spellbound.

“Here, one of them turns his back to flee, the knight, like any predator, like any fish or bird, rushes after a weak opponent, unaware that it is a trap. The two chop the horse's legs, the horse collapses, often pinning the rider down. That's the trick. Further, if the rider is lucky enough not to be strangled by his own horse, he won't be a warrior at all! A knight without a horse is just a slow-moving mountain of iron. And now, even one of your nimble fighters with a spear, sword, saber, or even a knife will easily and permanently pacify a clumsy foe.”

Hans took a wick and a firebrand in his hands, flicked it to strike sparks, and lit the wick.

“Another thing you should remember is not to be afraid of innovation. Observe, notice, think, and you will always find a solution that will stun your opponent. Black powder gunpowder began to be brought from faraway Asia. No steel armor or chain mail can resist it. Not ten years from now, gunpowder will change the tactics of battle. You will be one of the witnesses of this change.”