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The Crusader

Michael Alexander Eisner



THE CRUSADER

A NOVEL



MICHAEL EISNER



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GLOSSARY

TO MY MOTHER
AND FATHER



Michael Eisner is a graduate of Yale University and Yale Law School. After college he worked in a refugee camp on the Thai-Cambodia border, and was in Chile during the transition from Pinochet's rule to democracy. An expert in international law, he worked on the Middle East peace process as a lawyer for the U.S. State Department. It was during a trip to Syria that he visited the massive medieval fortress Krak des Chevaliers, whose fall to Islam in 1271 signalled the end of the two-hundred-year existence of the crusader states. Inspired, he began writing his first work of fiction: this novel. Michael Eisner lives in New York City.

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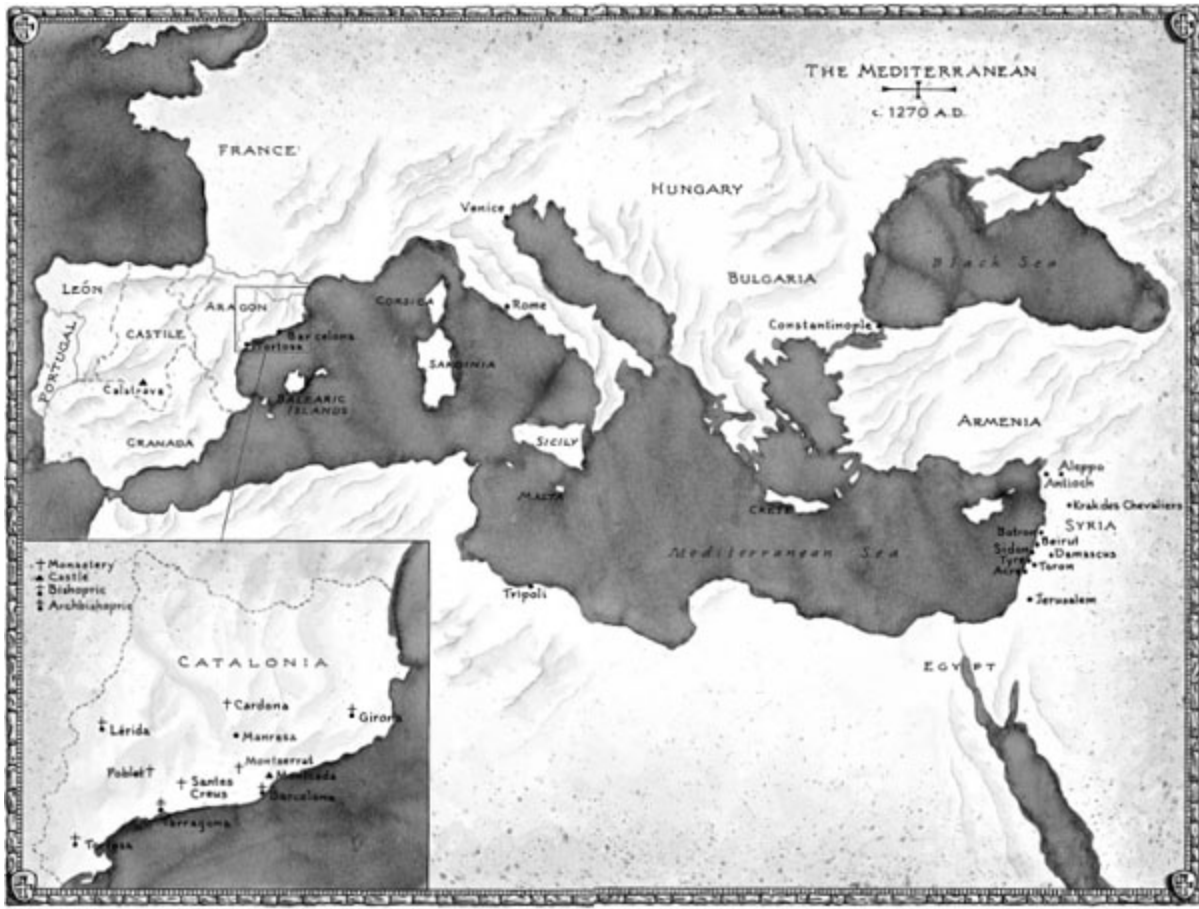
Luke Janklow, my agent, successfully conveyed his inflated opinion of the novel to others, including me. Margot Tenenbaum reminds me periodically that I'm not as important as I think I am, but makes me feel pretty important just the same. Bill Thomas, my editor at Doubleday, offered generous support and insightful editing, significantly improving the novel.

Finally, my mother suggested I write a novel in the first place. My dad pushed books on me since I can remember.

And both my parents weighed nuances of phrasing so minute that only a mother or father would tolerate.

*The following pages contain the confessions of a knight in
Christ's army, Francisco de Montcada, with commentary by
God's humble servant Brother Lucas of Santes Creus,
confessor
of Francisco and transcriber of his words.*

ANNO DOMINI 1275



CHAPTER I

A MAN OF SORROWS



THE TENTH DAY OF JULY, THE YEAR OF OUR LORD 1275

THE RAIN HAD let up. I leaned forward and glanced out the front of the wagon. The pink stones of the monastery glowed against the night. A gray mist rose from the frozen earth. It was past midnight.

I had been waiting several hours for our reunion. In truth, I had been waiting several years—six years—only I had imagined it under different circumstances.

The porter came out to meet the carriage. He had been recently admitted to the clerical state, tonsured with a smooth razor so that his baldpate gleamed against the moonlight.

“Welcome to Poblet,” he said.

“What is your name, Brother?” I asked.

“Silva,” he responded, “Brother Silva from Cerdanya.”

I introduced myself and told him to take me to the cell of Francisco de Montcada. He looked down without responding.

It had been a long journey, and I was irritable and impatient. “Do you understand, Brother Silva?”

“Yes, Brother Lucas,” he said, “but Father Adelmo has decreed that no visitors shall enter the crusader’s cell.”

“I have in my hand a letter with the seal of Archbishop Sancho of Tarragona,” I said. “It gives me custody of Francisco and charge of his exorcism.”

“Perhaps I can fetch Father Adelmo,” Brother Silva said, “you can discuss the matter with him.”

“No, Brother Silva,” I said, “I will see Francisco now.”

Reluctantly, Brother Silva escorted me into the church. I could smell the familiar incense of matins, the first prayer of morning. I took a deep breath—the pungent aroma awakened my senses. For me, it is the smell of God, the smell of home, the only home I have ever known. The monks had already assembled, waiting for the Abbot to begin their chanting. Several yawned, the younger boys rubbing their eyes to shake the sleep from them. As I made my way down the center aisle, every monk in the chapel turned to stare at me. One of the older monks tried to draw the attention of the others by beginning part of the liturgy, but the congregants ignored him.

When I reached the stone Cross at the foot of the dais, I knelt to say a silent prayer—*Holy Mary, bless me and keep me from evil. Please give me strength to perform my mission.* I crossed myself, stood, and proceeded with Brother Silva to a corner door, where we exited the church into the cloister. We walked around the square, passing several writing stations between columns. The monks had moved their manuscripts to the stone bench under the walkway to protect the parchment from rain. I took notice of the calligraphy, the bold strokes, the confident curves.

At the corner of the courtyard, we passed into the tower. Brother Silva lit a torch and ascended the spiral staircase. I followed, trying to keep pace, but the boy soon disappeared

and the bright light faded, leaving behind straggling flickers, and then darkness.

I felt my way gently up the winding steps. My sandals slid on the cool stone, and I tried to steady myself on the narrow banister. One step, then another, and another, until I had established a rhythm, and the pounding in my chest subsided. I reached the top of the staircase, where Brother Silva was waiting. I had intended to chastise the boy for his haste, but my attention was diverted to the latched door just a few feet away.

“Are you ready, Brother Lucas?” he asked.

The flame illuminated one side of his face—beardless, anxious, uncertain. I hesitated for an instant before nodding my head.

The room was bare, except for a wooden Cross hanging on the far wall. Starlight fell through a small window and cast a strange, unearthly glimmer in the cell. A piece of stale bread covered with cockroaches interrupted the play of light on the stone floor. In the shadows, a human figure stirred. He was sitting slumped on a pile of straw. As I entered the cell, a foul stench of excrement and sweat assaulted me. I withdrew a cloth from my cassock and held it over my nose and mouth. Then I approached the person to get a better look. He was chained by the wrist to an iron ring embedded in the wall and wore a tattered robe that barely covered his emaciated frame. His brown hair had grown long and unruly, his beard chaotic. His blue eyes looked out vacantly. His outer appearance had altered much, but I still recognized him.

“He has not talked since his arrival here,” Brother Silva said. “Sometimes in his sleep he will mutter words, but they are always unintelligible. Many of the monks believe he speaks a secret dialect of the devil. They fear the evil spell.”

I too was afraid, afraid of the demons that had taken hold of Francisco, afraid of the awesome power of the devil that he could so humble such a man as Francisco. I had an impulse to flee. I clutched the Cross hanging from my neck, and tried to stifle the dread rising from my stomach.

Remember who you are. Remember your mission. Remember your station.

Two steps into the darkness, and I reached out to this apparition. I placed my hand on his temple and moved it slowly across his cheek and down to his chin. When I pulled my hand away, my fingers were covered with phlegm and grime.

A gust of cold wind blew through the small window and stung my face. I took a step back, and I felt Brother Silva's hand on my shoulder.

"He is one of the lost cases," Brother Silva said. "Father Adelmo has tried for many weeks to exorcise the demons. He has bled him, burned him, punctured him, even baptized him again. To no avail."

I reached for the chain that bound Francisco. My eyes scanned the links down to his wrist, which was caked with dry blood.

Brother Silva seemed uncomfortable with my silence and probably felt some uneasiness with the conditions in which Francisco was held.

"Father Adelmo ordered that he be chained to the wall. It is for his own protection, Brother Lucas."

I said nothing. My mind was whirling with images from our life together at Santes Creus—the rusted iron gate of the monastery, the purple flowers surrounding the cistern, the oak table where we took our meals in perfect silence.

I dropped the chain and brushed aside Francisco's hair in order to see his face more clearly. He seemed much older than his twenty-seven years. His blue eyes,

translucent, reflected nothing. Creases fanned out from the corner of his eyes, dark ridges carving a desolate path that faded into his temples. His lips, gray and thin, parted slightly, as if he were whispering some grievous secret from his sojourns. His cheeks had grown gaunt, the skin above his beard pale and bloodless. His sideburns extended out wildly, encroaching down his face, where they met his hard jaw, protruding from his beard like a worn stone, unflinching amidst the tempest.

“Francisco, it’s me, Lucas.” I repeated his name several times. He did not respond.

“Brother Lucas, the smell is unavoidable,” Brother Silva said. “Father Adelmo forbids the monks to enter without his permission. We have done our best to . . .”

I raised my hand, and Brother Silva stopped speaking. I was not here to judge the boy or the other monks. His chatter was breaking my concentration as I scrutinized Francisco’s face, searching for some sign of life, something recognizable from our past.

I found nothing.

Brother Silva sneezed. I offered him my cloth. When I looked back at Francisco, he was gazing at me. Our eyes met for several seconds before he glanced away.

“Did you know him well, Brother Lucas?”

“He was my friend,” I said.

I took several deep breaths. The stale and putrid air in the cell provided no relief. Indeed, my legs weakened. I was choking. I turned and stepped out into the corridor. Brother Silva followed, closing the door behind us.

“Are you well, Brother Lucas?” he asked.

I leaned over, placing my hands on my thighs for support.

“The world has turned upside down, Brother Silva.”

CHAPTER II

SANTES CREUS



I MET FRANCISCO eleven years ago. He arrived at the monastery in Santes Creus at the end of summer, the Year of Our Lord 1265. He was sixteen, one year older than I. Abbot Pedro had told us of his coming, the son of a great baron, a Montcada by blood and name.

The nobility sometimes send their firstborn sons to the monasteries for a prescribed period—usually three years—to gain an education before assuming the family mantle. Cistercian monasteries generally prohibit the presence of such temporary visitors, called oblates. The path of perfection—the path of Our Savior—requires an all-consuming commitment, an infinite devotion. Abbots can make exceptions, though. And Francisco was an exceptional case.

With bloodied fingers and unwavering faith, the first Cistercian brothers in Iberia carved God's sanctuary at Santes Creus out of the wilderness over one hundred years ago. But faith is seldom sufficient. The construction and maintenance of temples dedicated to promoting and reflecting the spiritual glory of Christ's Kingdom requires a more temporal funding. And the Montcada family provided the financing from the beginning. Through this sacrifice, many members of the family have assured their place in

paradise and have earned an eternal resting place in the monastery.

Lest anyone forget our patrons, the monks pass the Montcada crypt seven times a day. Hewn into the stone wall just to the right of the door leading to the church, the crypt holds the remains of Garsenda de Provence and Guillem de Montcada, great-grandparents of Francisco. During his lifetime, Guillem was the most powerful of the Crown's vassals. He led the force that captured the island of Majorca from the infidels in the Year of Our Lord 1229.

The details of Guillem's martyrdom are well known to all in the Kingdom of Aragón. The family commissioned a song to commemorate Guillem's achievements. I learned the ballad during my first year as a novice. I can still recite the verses. One of the Saracens drove a stake into Guillem's side. His entrails hanging from his stomach, Guillem continued to direct the Christian forces from his mount. He fell dead just outside the gates of the City of La Palma.

Guillem must have seen the ghost of the White Knight Saint George and felt the impending victory before letting his soul ascend to heaven. The White Knight rode horseback over the enemy defenses, striking terror in the hearts of the infidels and causing a diversion that enabled our soldiers to breach the city's walls. Once inside, Christ's soldiers unleashed a divine retribution on the city's inhabitants. They say that most of the Muslims, men, women, and children, were killed within two hours of the breach. It was a scene of such savage butchery that, but for its divine inspiration, some might well mistake its noble purpose for the devil's work.

Needless to say, Abbot Pedro and every other member of the monastery eagerly anticipated the arrival of the Montcada heir. The Abbot sent for painters from the Barcelona guild to refinish the facade of the church and several areas in the main cloister, including the Montcada

crypt with the family's coat of arms, a red shield with seven bezants, gold coins from Byzantium.

I was praying silently, walking around the cloister, when I came upon one of the craftsmen retouching the gold leaf on the crypt.

"Why are there seven gold pieces on the Montcada shield?" I asked the guildsman. I had always admired the design, but wondered about the significance of the seven coins.

"The Montcadas are rich," he answered, without looking up from his work.

"Yes, I know," I said, "but why not three bezants to signify the Holy Trinity?"

"They're very rich," he said.

Indeed, Francisco was an exceptional case.

When the young heir finally arrived, I was in the Abbot's quarters entering figures in the monastery's financial ledgers. Perhaps I should explain. Every two years, Abbot Pedro chose one monk with unusual promise to act as his personal assistant. It was a great honor to hold such a position of responsibility, which I assumed in my thirteenth year. In this position, I spent the early afternoon—between the offices of sext and nones—in the Abbot's quarters. I drafted his correspondence. I kept minutes of important meetings. I reminded the Abbot of feast days according to the liturgical calendar. I counted and sorted the coins in the treasury—like cool spring water sifting through my fingers. My reappointment for another two-year term when I was fifteen reflected Abbot Pedro's recognition of my devotion and discretion. Abbot Pedro frequently confided in me his intimate thoughts concerning other members of the monastery.

As instructed, the porter escorted Francisco to the Abbot's quarters.

“Come in, son,” Abbot Pedro said to Francisco, who seemed reluctant to advance beyond the doorway. “Welcome to Santes Creus.”

It was a scene we had replayed many times. Greeting the new arrivals. Some tall, some short, some fat, some thin. But always the same expression—a smug complacency, a keen awareness of the prerogatives of their birthright as sons of the high nobility. And perhaps a slight sneer to reflect the bitter injustice of their situation if they were second- or third-born sons compelled to take the cloth. Noble families gave these sons to the Church to avoid a division of the patrimony. In the Church, these sons would inherit no land and yet lead lives worthy of nobility that would redound to the spiritual benefit of their parents.

I rose as Francisco approached. I could see immediately that he was different. Francisco was smiling absently. Actually, it was half a smile. The left side of his mouth raised, the left eye crinkled tenderly. The other half of Francisco’s face somber, the right eye focused inward as if on some private sorrow. This disjunction gave Francisco’s countenance a brooding, ironic impression, as if he were amused by his own suffering.

Abbot Pedro seemed momentarily confounded by Francisco’s demeanor. The Abbot examined Francisco for a full minute before speaking.

“I am grateful,” the Abbot finally said, “that the Lord has seen fit to place you under my care.” The heavy weight of Francisco’s vision seemed directed toward the window. The Abbot moved to the left in an effort to intercept Francisco’s stare.

“As you well know, Francisco,” the Abbot continued, “the monastery owes its existence to the largesse of your family. The Montcadas have always recognized the sacred work performed by the Cistercian Order.

“Our Benedictine brothers and sisters,” Abbot Pedro began his standard speech to new arrivals, “have developed a predilection for gold and silver. And yet Christ was a man of stone and wood, Francisco. The Cistercians seek to restore the purity of Saint Benedict’s original vision. Our Benedictine brothers wear black habits. We wear unbleached white—a symbol of the pristine nature of Christ’s word and our mission. Our buildings are austere and simple. No superfluous decoration mars the walls and creates distraction from our lives of prayer and contemplation. We shun the new fashion of installing colored windows in our churches. If God’s light is perfect, why distort the sublime rays?”

Abbot Pedro looked hopefully to the new arrival, but Francisco had no intention of responding. It was not clear Francisco was listening to the Abbot’s speech. Francisco’s gaze seemed to reach just beyond Abbot Pedro. The Abbot glanced behind himself, evidently searching for the source of Francisco’s interest.

“Our Benedictine brothers,” the Abbot raised his voice, trying to draw Francisco’s attention, “own serfs to work the fields. The brothers of Santes Creus till the land ourselves. We use our hands as Christ the carpenter did in Galilee. We have not come to replace the Rule of Saint Benedict, which remains our guide, our path to the Almighty. We seek merely to reform some of the excesses of the old Order. With stone and wood, we expand Christ’s dominion into the darkest plains of Iberia.

“Francisco,” Abbot Pedro was shouting, “in recognition of the unusual and temporary nature of your stay here, I have prepared a private cell for your habitation. You will also be exempt from fieldwork on alternate days. And I have reserved a place for you on my right in the refectory where the food is served first. On feast days, you will be able to pick from the most succulent pieces of fish.”

“Sir,” Francisco said his first words, “did Christ receive exemptions?”

“Excuse me, Francisco?” Abbot Pedro said.

“Did Christ receive special treatment on the Cross?” Francisco asked.

“No,” the Abbot said. “Our Lord suffered most grievously.”

“Then I do not think,” Francisco said, “that a Montcada merits special treatment. I appreciate your consideration, Abbot Pedro, but I would prefer to take my natural place amongst the others in the dormitory and to perform the tasks expected of any member of the monastery.”

Abbot Pedro was smiling thinly. At least, he knew Francisco had been listening.

“Would you be so kind,” Francisco asked, glancing in my direction, “as to escort me to the dormitory?”

Despite the initial commotion concerning Francisco’s arrival, he soon settled into life at Santes Creus. Francisco seemed quite suited for the rhythms of monastic life. He prayed with a marked devotion during each of the eight offices of daily prayer—the Opus Dei. While some of the monks would mumble the words, particularly during matins at two in the morning, Francisco always chanted the psalms with a peculiar intensity. Abbot Pedro once commented that Francisco’s prayer had a desperate quality, as if the boy were making a solemn plea to the Lord or seeking some critical information.

When the sun rose, Francisco took his place in the fields beside the other monks—four hours a day wielding spade and hoe. Sowing seeds that, like good deeds, would reap reward one hundredfold. While others might tarry in the shade, Francisco was loath to break even for water, and he worked with an uncommon vigor. Sometimes, on hot days, he pulled his white robe off. The sweat would glisten off his

bare back, the smooth muscles twisting against the yellow wheat.

The others watched Francisco with curiosity. Who was this most noble of nobles who worked like a peasant and seemed to enjoy his labor? Several boys whispered disagreeable comments. I overheard Felipe González question the noble origins of Francisco.

“Perhaps,” Felipe said, “his father was a field hand who wandered into the Baroness’ chambers while her husband was away.”

In time, though, Francisco’s energy seemed to infect the other brothers. Eventually, we all followed his example. After Francisco’s first summer, the monastery registered a record crop of barley and wheat.

Unlike most of our new arrivals, Francisco was literate when he came to Santes Creus. He was able to take advantage of the monastery’s fine collection of books. During the two hours in the library after Mass, Francisco would bury his head in the manuscript of some obscure Christian saint. His thumb was stained permanently with black ink from turning the pages. Such was his concentration that Francisco seemed not to hear the bells for sext, so that the librarian would have to tap him on the shoulder after most of the boys had already departed for the noon service.

During the day, the brothers observe the Order’s prohibition on frivolous conversation. As it is written, *in a flood of words you will not avoid sin*. For a quarter of an hour each day that prohibition is lifted. The monks and lay brothers gather in the parlor to discuss whatever they wish. Invariably, the same small groups congregate. A hierarchy seems to pervade these gatherings. The monks are mindful of the social standing of each member’s family, so that the highest nobility associate only with each other.

Felipe González surrounded himself with an entourage of four other monks, sons of the richest and most powerful families in Barcelona. They called themselves the young lions. Felipe's father was the treasurer of the kingdom. Alfredo Martí led a rival but equally prestigious faction, whose members hailed from the northern territories. The other brothers formed similar, if less exalted, groups.

Given the distinguished status of his family, Francisco's arrival threatened to disrupt the balance of factions. We were all anxious to see whether he would join Felipe's or Alfredo's group. In light of the proximity of Montcada to Barcelona, most of the brothers opined that Francisco would favor Felipe's group.

Felipe approached Francisco two weeks after his arrival.

"Francisco de Montcada," Felipe said, "we invite you to join the young lions."

Francisco looked up. He smiled at Felipe, that same ironic expression from his interview with Abbot Pedro. The parlor became silent as every brother strained to hear Francisco's response.

"Thank you, Felipe," Francisco answered, "you honor me with this invitation. But I prefer the breeze on this side of the parlor."

Felipe's face drained of color, slack-jawed, as if he had just learned that his family descended from serfs. It was something of a humiliation for Felipe, who seemed to have instantaneously acquired a limp as he shuffled back to the other end of the parlor.

Francisco became the subject of much conversation in the parlor, not all of it flattering. There were some that felt Francisco's rebuff to Felipe reflected a deep arrogance.

"Perhaps," I heard one of the young lions say, "young Montcada thinks he is above us. We shall see how he fares on his own."

In fact, Francisco fared quite well. In time, most of the boys developed a grudging respect, even an admiration, for Francisco and his independence. It was more than his family name, although some undoubtedly were unable to see beyond that. In his quiet smile, in the tilt of his head, in the slight inflection of his voice, Francisco bore a striking dignity, a regal quality that set him apart from his colleagues—indeed, even from our superiors. Everyone seemed to understand tacitly that Francisco was different, that his destiny would take him far above the intrigues of the parlor and the petty controversies amongst our Catalán nobility. Francisco made no effort to curry favor with the Abbot or to engage in the machinations that forged powerful alliances between families long after boys had left the monastery to become prelates or barons. He seemed indifferent to the solicitude of the Abbot and immune to the flattering of the sycophants amongst the monks who sought the favor of a Montcada. He resisted the comfortable future in which all seemed to conspire to place him. He was, in short, marked for greater things. That, or simply greater suffering.

My friendship with Francisco began in the parlor. Not every brother fit within one of the cliques that formed. Because of jealousy concerning my position as the Abbot's assistant or because of the unusual circumstances of my birth, the other brothers excluded me from their circles of conversation.

Perhaps another note of explanation would be helpful. Before becoming a novice, I was a servant in the monastery. You see, several local habitants live among us. The more industrious have acquired the status of lay brothers. It is a mark of Cistercian humility that the monks consider as brothers these unlearned, unsophisticated peasants. While the lay brothers are not permitted to partake in the eight offices, the work of God, Abbot Pedro

does allow them to celebrate Mass with the monks. Those ill-suited for the more spiritual endeavors, including women, become servants, who perform the bulk of menial tasks at the monastery.

My mother had been a servant in the monastery. She was thirteen and unmarried at the time of my arrival. Evidently she concealed the pregnancy underneath her wool smock. Upon giving birth, she abandoned the infant in the stable before fleeing. No one in the monastery ever heard from her again.

It was generally assumed that my father was Lucas Sierra de Manresa, a young monk who had abruptly and unexpectedly deserted the monastery several weeks before the birth. Based on this assumption, I was christened Lucas de Santes Creus. But I have always suspected that Brother Sierra provided a convenient scapegoat and that my true father was a man of much less humble origins, perhaps a visiting dignitary or even a bishop. How else to explain my precocious development and the patronage of Abbot Pedro?

Indeed, I believe that Abbot Pedro knows the true identity of my father. He once told me I had the same black eyes as my father.

“Lucas Sierra had black eyes?” I asked.

“Lucas who?” he said.

Given the unfortunate situation surrounding my birth, I was forced to live with the other servants until the age of nine. It is, I believe, interesting to note that I never felt at home amongst the servants, and I do not believe they themselves viewed me as one of their own. Even the older servants seemed to treat me with a distance befitting the treatment that should, in those circumstances, be accorded one born to a higher station. For instance, while the servants slept huddled together in a ragged mass on the

stone floor of the kitchen, they always reserved for me a separate space, underneath the chopping table.

There were some cold nights in the kitchen. I can still remember waking in the pitch dark in the dead of winter with no blanket. Waiting for the sun to bring some warmth. Trying to breathe some life into my frozen fingers. Anticipating the scraps of bread, leftovers from the monks' table, which would soothe only partially the ache in my belly.

Until one day, a miracle occurred. On my ninth birthday, Abbot Pedro called me forth as a novice, the first and only of the local inhabitants to become a full member of the monastery. Abbot Pedro introduced me to the other monks during our meeting in the chapter house. I was kneeling next to the same boys to whom I had served supper the previous day. The brown wool of my new habit felt like silk against my skin. The robe had been used briefly, worn by a monk who had passed from illness the previous month. But he had been with us for such a short time that the garment was practically new. As the former owner was substantially older than I, the habit was on the larger side. I rolled up the sleeves carefully so as to avoid the unsightly wrinkles that I had often seen in the habits of the other monks.

After the daily reading of a chapter from the Rule of Saint Benedict, the Abbot introduced me to my colleagues.

"We welcome Lucas," he said, "as a father would welcome a wayward son back into the fold."

The Abbot described my admission as an act of expiation for the sins of the past and a symbol of the spirit of forgiveness that pervaded the monastery. I was grateful for the opportunity to take what I knew to be my rightful place in the constellation of God's universe, and I was determined to prove the wisdom of the Abbot's decision.

But I have strayed from my purpose. This manuscript will provide a map of Francisco's soul, a description of his spiritual struggles, not an account of the achievements of one of God's humble servants, that is, me. My friendship with Francisco began in the parlor. I believe Francisco recognized an innate nobility about my character and appreciated my skills as a shrewd conversationalist. Indeed, it was he who initiated our discussions. I remember his first remark—"I think, Brother Lucas, your habit is a bit large for you." Then he smiled.

Soon, the long and painful minutes in the parlor became something quite different—a period to which I looked forward—a chance to talk to my friend, in truth, my only friend. Except for Abbot Pedro, my benefactor. During Francisco's first year at the monastery, our relationship evolved toward a deep mutual respect and spiritual bond. The only impediment was the propensity of other members to intrude upon our private conversations. Sometimes Francisco unwittingly invited the participation of other brothers not affiliated with a specific faction. Francisco could be rather naive at times. He would direct an offhand, stray comment in the direction of one of these stragglers, who seized upon the remark as an invitation to enter our circle. Our little parlor group must have seemed a motley crew.

By coincidence, Francisco's sleeping mat was next to mine in the dormitory. In our proximity, Francisco and I became accustomed to each other's presence. When Francisco left the first year to spend Easter with his family, I was surprised to feel his absence. Waking for matins, I would glimpse the cold, flat outline of his wool blanket and feel just for a moment a sense of aloneness in the vast monastery.