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The River

I twined through the valley escaping endlessly the mountains and snow and searching for the warm breeze and birds' song. My whirlpools became calmer, less angry and less hazardous. I had to leave my aquamarine dress in the mountains, one of my most beautiful garments, and put on my dark green skirt. Even though not that pretty, it was neat and clean.

Once I reached the valley and the village of Cassino, I walked slowly. My pace slowed down and I looked around at the small wooden houses with tall roofs that protected them from snow and storms in winter time. Those small houses and tall roofs withheld stoically weather quirks and mischiefs. And they were the pillar of Cassino's beauty.

Children played in the field next to the church while the church bell tolled. Maybe someone had died, or it was time for Mass. Or maybe a baby was born.

I looked carefully and watched people gather in the church yard. The priest was in the middle encircled by the curious faces of the villagers. They swarmed and waited for something. I wanted to know what they were waiting for. Therefore, I sent one of my curlews to go closer to the church and the group of people gathered in its yard and spy on them and their talks. My curlew cheerfully approached the gathering point and wandered around, but then, something strange happened.

The priest's gestures were fretful and panicky. He talked to the people with some strange fear in his eyes. And people looked at him puzzled, flabbergasted and full of anxiety. And that anxiety rose high, high to the

clouds. Those clouds scattered over the village. They became numerous and ominous. And they threatened to burst and destroy everything that was below them. The strange noise filled the air. It was the noise that was building up with every new second. It slyly filled every inch of the air and the worried faces of the villagers turned up toward the sky. “Planes, planes, bombs...” The whisper turned into the panic that left no one calm. The people started running off in all directions without a clue where to hide and what could be their shelter. There was no shelter from the sinister dark birds that were approaching at high speed. They seemed to take over the control of the sky and left it numb and insensible. Once these perilous birds were right above Cassino, they threw away the heavy balls they carried in their beaks and those balls caused a disaster. Within minutes, the serene village in the valley became the burning maddening mess. The whole village and the whole valley were in a shambles. Fire, smoke, dead people, destroyed houses. That was the scenery I had never seen before or thought I would see. The deadly havoc, widespread destruction, ruins and chaos painfully filled my eyesight. And I cried. I cried loudly and for a long time. But no one heard me. All people in Cassino were dead.

My heart was broken and I was trembling with sorrow. Even the sky got back to its sense and started shredding giant tears. But once the reality kicked me and I realized what a devastation had occurred, I decided to go back to the mountains. The next year I had no strength and will to go back to Cassino village again. There was nothing and no one left there anyway. And my heartbroken feeling let me abandon the village and the valley for a year. The drought took over and dried every corner of otherwise splendid valley. It was not pretty and green anymore. It was sad, ugly, ruined and shriveled.

However, my guilty conscience bothered me and I knew it was not fair to turn my back on Cassino and its valley. They needed me. They needed my green waters and I knew that if I didn't go back there the process of its healing would take longer. Therefore, I discarded my beautiful aquamarine dress, left the mountains and, in a plain dark green skirt, descended to the valley and Cassino.

There were some people, probably cousins and friends of those who had died in the unfortunate villainous birds' attack. They were trying to remove the ruins and clean the chaos that was left behind that terrible event. I watched them and gave them solace in my waters. They worked hard during the whole day and once

they got very tired, they made a break and swam in my waters. It made me cheerful and I promised myself never to let down Cassino and the valley again.

Many years went by. Cassino still had scars of that terrible attack. However, those scars seemed to be healing slowly. The village was alive again, and those cousins and friends who had abandoned it a long time ago, before the birds' attack, came back. They built the monuments and statues to honor those who had died. Those memorials would always be a reminder of the malevolence that had once happened here. And everyone would reflect on them with a sadness in their hearts. But hopefully, neither I or anyone else would ever witness those kind of unsettling events that killed many and caused an overwhelming shock and grief to many others.

I still keep going back to Cassino and the valley, and I will never abandon them again. They like me and enjoy my waters, and seeing their joy fills my heart with delight.