

Wounds  
of  
Love



# Wounds *of* Love

*The Story of Saint Padre Pio*

Phillip Campbell

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*To my son Phillip on  
the occasion of his  
confirmation*



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# Preface

YOU ARE ABOUT to read about one of the most fascinating saints of modern times, the great Saint Padre Pio of Pietrelcina.

Writing a book on the life of a saint like Padre Pio is extremely challenging. When I started the research for this book, I was overwhelmed by all the information I found. Saint Pio was involved in so many different things: his vocation as a priest, confessor, and spiritual director that changed the lives of thousands; his work founding the great hospital Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza; the troubles he continually had with Rome; the spiritual struggles and suffering he endured relating to the stigmata; the foundation of international “Padre Pio Prayer Groups”; his miracles, his battles with the devil, his personal life with family and friends, and his monastic observance as a Capuchin friar. There was so much the man accomplished!

It soon became clear that a traditional biography would not be possible—there were just too many things to include

in a book this size! I ended up having to pick and choose what aspects of Saint Pio's life to incorporate. I was able to include a little bit of everything, but I also had to leave out a lot. So, please don't be sad if your favorite Padre Pio story didn't make it in!

As you read, remember this book is not a biography of Saint Padre Pio; it is historical fiction based on his life. *Historical fiction* is a funny phrase—"historical" and "fiction" seem to be contradictory words. What does the phrase mean? Well, first you should know that all the stories told in this book truly happened: Pio really took a little girl's ribbon and cut it up when he was a boy; he was truly seen in the sky by US pilots during World War II; he really exorcised a screaming woman in church, using the Blessed Sacrament. Yet to tell these stories, I had to use my imagination to fill in the gaps describing *how* they happened. A lot of names of random friars are made up, and most of the conversations are imagined, though whenever possible, I used Padre Pio's actual words as found in his letters and the stories written about him. The compilation of essays on Pio published by the Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate under the title *Padre Pio: The Wonder Worker* was most helpful.

Also, some of the details about Pio's life have been rearranged. For example, the dream narrated in chapter 2 when Pio was eight years old actually happened when he was fourteen. The exorcism depicted in chapter 13 when Pio was elderly really happened twenty years earlier. I wrote that Padre Pio came up with the idea for his hospital during his first suspension, but he really came up with it much earlier. This rearrangement was necessary to take all the different aspects

of Padre Pio's marvelous life and help them flow better as a story told in book form.

So, while this book is faithful to the life of Padre Pio, it is not a "history book"; this should not be used as a source or reference for Pio's life. I do, however, hope it inspires you to greater devotion to this amazing saint. In an age that was increasingly becoming enamored with modern thinking and modern technology, Saint Padre Pio served as a "sign of contradiction" (cf. Lk 2:34) reminding the world that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.



CHAPTER 1

## The House of Forgione

“*CHE SOLE!*” exclaimed Grazio. “What a fierce sun! Time for a break.”

He leaned upon his scythe and stood upright, hand on his waist, arching his sore back. He looked aloft at the endless blue sky and squinted at the sun. The afternoon heat in Campania could be relentless. Sweat drained down the peasant’s leathery cheeks.

Grazio produced a dingy handkerchief from his pocket and mopped his brow. He turned and looked at his son. “How are you holding up, Francesco?”

A young boy, no more than eight years of age, came trotting behind Grazio, dragging a jumbled ball of twine. He was panting heavily.

“That good, eh?” said Grazio with a smile. “Bundling grain is not easy, I know!”

“I’m . . . all right, Papa,” Francesco sighed, continuing to breathe heavy.

His father smiled. “You can’t fool your papa. Tell you what—how about we finish this row and then take a break?”

Francesco nodded dutifully. Grazio took up his scythe again and swung it before him in a broad arc, slicing a bundle of wheat. Francesco followed along behind with the twine, tying the bundle off and leaving it to sit for threshing.

*Schlunk! Schlunk!* went the sound of Grazio’s scythe each time it sliced through a cluster of wheat stalks. No sooner had Francesco knelt and tied off a bundle than his father had chopped two more. His bony fingers were aching and didn’t seem to work right, causing him to fall even further behind. Francesco grunted as he tied off yet another bundle, and a sweat droplet fell from the end of his nose.

*Schlunk! Schlunk! Schlunk!*

In a few minutes, Grazio had finished the row and flopped down in the tall grass beneath the shade of a venerable old ficus tree. He took a hunk of bread from his side pouch and gnawed on it, grinning at his son. Francesco continued to toil on the bundles his father left, hunched over, tying each one off as quickly as he could. Finally, he finished the row and hurled his aching body into the grass.

“Papa, we’ve been out here for seven hours already. Can we go back to Pietrelcina now?”

Grazio looked askance at his son. “I’m afraid not. We’ve got three hours of good daylight left. We’ve still got to finish a few more rows before we call it a day. You know better than to ask that.”

The boy's countenance sank. "Yes, Papa. I'm sorry, Papa." He rolled over in the grass.

"Francesco, my boy, what is the matter? It's not like you to shirk from chores. You know very well the threshing starts next week."

Francesco sat back up. "I know, Papa. I'm not shirking. It's just that, well, since today is the eve of Pentecost, I was wondering if maybe we could go home early?"

Grazio wiped his brow again, pulled an apple from his pouch, and shined it on his pants. "Go home early, eh?" He produced a small knife and sliced the apple, tossing half to his son. "What's on your mind, boy?"

"Well," said Francesco, explaining as he crunched into the apple, "I know the feast day isn't until tomorrow, but I thought we might use some extra time to prepare?"

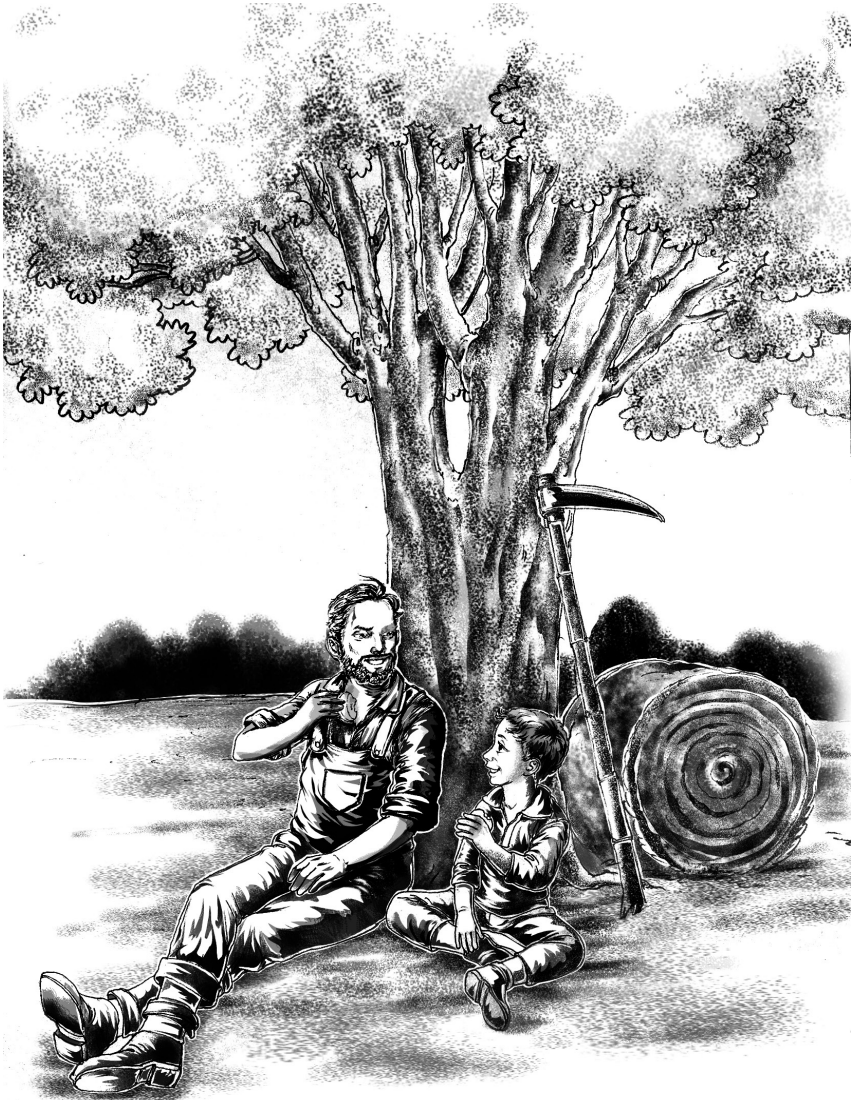
"Prepare what? Your mother can handle the cooking well enough, and she has Felicita, and Michele is nearby if she needs help. I'm sure the Pentecost dinner will be fine without you."

"No, I mean prepare my soul," Francesco said quietly as he swallowed a big bite of apple.

Grazio stared at his son thoughtfully while chewing the apple. He blinked, swallowed his snack, and with a twinkle in his eyes, said, "Well, Pentecost is certainly an important feast. And one can never be too prepared for Holy Mass. That's what Padre Vincenzo always says, yes?"

"Yes, Father, that's what Padre always says."

Juice dribbled down Grazio's stubbly chin as he took another bite of the apple. "I suppose it's all right," he said, wiping his mouth on his sleeve.





“Oh, really, Papa? We can go early?”

“Yes, yes,” answered Grazio, pitching the apple core, standing up, and brushing bits of the earth off his pants. “The bundling work will still be here come Monday. Our field isn’t going anywhere. But Francesco, listen, if we leave off today, I’m going to need extra help next week, understand?”

“Of course, Papa! I promise!”

Grazio tussled the boy’s hair. “You’re a fine lad. Let’s return home. Your mother and the others will be happy to see us.”

The farmer grabbed his scythe and slung it over his shoulder. Francesco took up his twine and followed.



The town of Pietrelcina was a half-hour walk from the little piece of land worked by Grazio and his family. The way home followed an old country road, paved with flagstones and no wider than a horse cart. The road meandered up prominences and down steep ascents, passing through field and forest on its way to Pietrelcina. The air was cool where the trees provided pockets of dappled shade. Grazio whistled while they walked, his scythe slung over his shoulder. The day had been hard, but in moments like this, Francesco felt grateful for his father and their way of life.

“Shall we pray a Rosary, Papa?”

“Ah, want to start preparing right away, do you son?”  
Grazio quipped.

Francesco’s father pulled a rosary from his pants pocket. Francesco nodded and did the same.

*“In nómine Patris, et Filii, et Spíritus Sancti. Amen.”*

Francesco made the sign of the cross. *“Credo in unum Deum,”* he began, leading the Credo. Despite his young age, the Rosary was a daily practice for him. He had been acquainted with these prayers for as long as he could remember.

For the better part of twenty minutes, father and son strolled down the country path together to Pietrelcina, holding no conversation save the exchange of Pater Nosters, Ave Mariás, and Gloria Patris that made up the rhythm of the Rosary. When they got to the third Glorious Mystery, the Descent of the Holy Spirit, Francesco prayed with special focus, remembering the feast day that would soon be upon them. As they prayed, a gentle breeze blew down from the slopes in the distance and passed across them on the path. Francesco imagined the Holy Spirit blowing on the disciples in the upper room on the first Pentecost. He enjoyed imagining himself in the stories of Scripture while he prayed.

As Grazio and Francesco were concluding the Rosary, the road emerged from the trees and opened into a broad field overlooking the town of Pietrelcina. A cluster of humble houses were gathered around a crumbling medieval castle situated on a gentle hillside. Its streets were narrow, winding, and lined in cobblestone. The houses were low and squat; most homes in Campania were, as it made them less susceptible to earthquakes. It was a rustic, shabby little town that many would consider little more than a hovel. But Francesco had never known any other home, and to him the sight of Pietrelcina’s tiny houses and familiar red-tile roofs was as beautiful as Eden.

The pair finished the Rosary as they entered town along the main lane.

“Francesco, since we have some extra time, let’s pay a visit to the Brambillas. Mr. Brambilla broke his hand, and he’s been out of work for a bit. We should see if they need anything. I promise we will only stay a moment.”

“Yes, Papa. I hope Andrianella will be about.”

Though it was still only mid-afternoon, other day laborers from the surrounding fields were starting to trickle into town. Grazio and Francesco were not the only two workers the stifling sun had convinced to come in early.

“Hey, Grazio Forgione! How is this fine day treating you, my friend?” one man called out.

“Another day with breath in my lungs is a good day!” Grazio responded cheerfully. Francesco smiled. Everyone seemed to love his father.

Grazio stopped at a market stall to buy a wheel of cheese before heading to the east side of town where the Brambillas lived in a sturdy brick house near the Chiesa Sant’Anna, the parish where Francesco and his family attended Mass. Mr. Brambilla was a shoemaker and an old friend of Grazio’s from their youth. Francesco, too, was a friend to Andrianella, the only child of Mr. and Mrs. Brambilla. As they approached the house, Francesco was pleased to see his friend sitting on the porch, sewing a dress.

“*Buon pomeriggio*, good afternoon, Andrianella,” said Grazio. “I’m here to call on your mother and father. Are they home?”

“Yes, Mr. Forgione, but Papa is still hurt,” answered Andrianella, never looking up from her needlework.

“Ah, I thought so, but that’s why I have come—and I’ve brought your mother some cheese!” Grazio held up the wheel and smiled.

Andrianella finally looked up. She offered a smile in return. “She’ll like that. Go on in.”

Grazio nodded. “Francesco, stay out here and play with Andrianella. I’ll only be a moment.”

He leaned his scythe against the wall of the house and went in, cheese in hand, leaving the two children outside, an awkward silence hanging over them like a cloud. Andrianella and Francesco had always played together, but she was two years his senior and had begun to act aloof. She continued to focus on her needlework, ignoring Francesco.

“What are you working on?” the boy finally asked.

“What does it look like, Francesco? A dress. My Nonna gave me this pretty red satin band for Pentecost, and I am going to sew it onto my dress.”

“It is very pretty.”

Andrianella snorted. “What do you know about dresses?”

Francesco shrugged and did not work up the courage to speak again as several minutes passed in silence. He was grateful when his father emerged from the home a few moments later. “Ready to go, Son?”

“Yes, Father,” the boy said eagerly. “*Ciao*, Andrianella.”

The girl did not respond, continuing her project as if Francesco did not exist.



After they had put some distance between them and the Brambillas' house, Francesco said, "Father, why has Andrianna been so cross these last few times I have seen her?"

"She's ten going on eleven, no? That can be a tricky time for girls. I think maybe you will understand when you get a bit older."

Francesco considered this. He admitted that could be true.

"And perhaps she is anxious about her father. For a shoemaker to break his hand is a big deal. No hand, no work. No work, no money. No money, no food. Let us remember to pray for them this day."

A few minutes later, father and son reached the small stone house on the edge of town that the Forgione family called home. It was built into the side of a hill with one side facing the town and the other open to the fields outside Pietrelcina.

"Mamma Peppa, we are home!" called Grazio as they walked in.

A thin woman with dark hair and piercing brown eyes emerged from the kitchen. She held a wooden cooking ladle in one hand, while her other supported a chubby baby girl.

"You're early," she said, her tone one of disapproval.

"What did I say? I told you she'd be happy to see us!" Grazio whispered, nudging Francesco with his elbow. Then turning to his wife, "Aye. The sun was fierce today, and Francesco wanted to come home." Grazio kissed his wife and took the little child in his arms, tickling her affectionately. "He wanted to spend some time preparing for tomorrow's Mass."

A smile curled across Mamma Peppa's wiry lips. "Is that so? Well, Francesco, please go feed the donkey, and then you may have all the time you need. Supper won't be ready for some time yet."

"Thank you, Mama," Francesco said, kissing his mother on the cheek before walking toward the creaking trap door in the floor of the main room. This revealed a ladder that provided access to the storeroom on the ground floor where the Forgiones' donkey was stabled. The dirt-floored storeroom opened out into the backyard and the fields beyond that spread out below Pietrelcina. The shabby animal blinked at Francesco from behind his pen as the boy scuttled down the ladder.

"Hello, Zio, my friend."

He scooped up an armful of alfalfa grass with a pitchfork and stuffed it into the donkey's feeding trough. Zio stuck his snout into the trough and began to munch as Francesco sat down in the pile of alfalfa and against the stone wall of the storeroom. The stones were cool on his sweaty back.

Francesco sighed and looked out toward the sun-tinted clouds grazing atop the verdant fields that stretched beyond Pietrelcina. He closed his eyes and breathed deeply, finally feeling a sense of peace.

"Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in me the fire of your love," he prayed. "Prepare me, O Lord, for thy feast tomorrow. Prepare me to receive you."

As he prayed, Francesco imagined his heart being lit on fire and God blowing on it, the way he and his brother sometimes blew on the kindling to get a fire started in the oven.

He imagined the breath of God to be the Holy Spirit. The thought made him feel warm and happy.

Gradually, Francesco's words fell silent as the images, prayers, and feelings all merged into one. In his reverie, he lost track of time. It felt like things were happening, but he did not understand what. Peace filled him like water filling a bucket.

"Francesco," a thin voice called to him.

Francesco opened his eyes. In the storehouse doorway stood another boy, curly-haired with dark, vacant eyes. He blocked out the sun and cast a cold shadow over the room.

"Francesco, aren't you upset the way Andrianella treated you?"

Francesco hesitated, caught off guard by the boy's sudden presence, but answered, "She has good reason to be cross. Her father is hurt. Her family is having a hard time."

"No, no, no, that's not it at all," replied the dark-eyed boy. "The real reason is she thinks you're dumb. Doesn't that make you angry?"

"Go away," said Francesco stiffly. "I'm trying to pray."

The boy moved closer, casting his shadow over Francesco and sending a shiver through his body. "Didn't you hear me? Andrianella thinks you're dumb. She thinks you're a *stupido*. Everybody thinks you're a *stupido*."

"They can think what they want, but I know you are lying."

"Nobody really likes you. They only pretend to like you. Nobody likes a *stupido* like you."

“In the name of Jesus Christ, get away from me!” Francesco yelled, making the sign of the cross. “Virgin Mother, hide me under your mantle,” he added, clasping his rosary.

The dark-eyed boy scowled and stepped back as if intimidated but trying not to show it. “We’ll talk again some other time, Francesco.” He slowly backed out of the storeroom, keeping his gaze on him.

“Come again, and I’ll tell you the same thing again,” Francesco said defiantly. He was no longer afraid but felt empowered by the names of Jesus and the Blessed Mother. “But before you go, I have one question for you.”

“Oh? Please . . . go right ahead.”

“Do you know who the real *stupido* is? *You!*” Francesco held his rosary aloft and pointed the crucifix at the dark-haired boy. The fiendish boy let out a foul, gurgling noise. His body began to dissipate into the air like smoke rising from a fire.

“I am so sick of that boy,” Francesco muttered as he closed his eyes and continued his prayers. Slowly, the peace of the moment returned.



Sometime later, Francesco was roused by the sound of sheep and footsteps approaching the storeroom. It was his elder brother, Michele. Francesco made the sign of the cross and leapt up from the alfalfa pile.

“Aye, *pécore*, *pécore*! C’mon, *pécore!*” Michele called, corraling the family’s sheep into an enclosure behind the Forgone’s house with his walking stick. Five years his elder, Michele was a full head taller than Francesco. At thirteen, he



seemed powerful and confident. Behind him was their little sister, Felicita, two years younger than Francesco.

“C’mon, *pécore!*” she called, mimicking her elder brother. The Forgione flock was not large, only a dozen, but it was enough. At age eight, Francesco was only now beginning to have a vague idea of the social divisions of the world. He knew his family was not poor, but he also realized that poverty was not too many steps below them.

“Francesco! I am surprised you are home already,” said Michele, closing the gate to the enclosure.

“Papa said we could come home early to prepare for Pentecost!”

Mamma Peppa’s shrill voice came ringing from the kitchen. “Francesco, is that your brother and sister? Tell them dinner is ready! *Mangia!*”

The three children entered the storeroom and scrambled up the ladder into the house. Mamma and Papa were already seated at the creaky old table, along with three-year-old Pellegrina, Francesco’s other sister. The baby, Grazia, was slumbering peacefully on a sack of flour in the corner.

Though the Forgione’s did not have a lot, Mamma Peppa knew how to stretch what they had. The food was often simple but was always enough. Tonight, it was *acquacotta*—a brothy soup made with onion, tomato, and chunks of bread-crusts left over from the week. Dinner began, as always, with Grazio leading the family in prayer. When he was finished, Mamma Peppa exclaimed, “*Mangia! Pensa di niente!* Don’t think, just eat!!”

As they ate, Papa Grazio discussed the harvest, the Brambillas, and the weather, while Mamma Peppa talked about

her day, the health of her parents, and her plans for the Pentecost feast tomorrow. The younger children listened while they ate, while Michele and Francesco sometimes joined the conversation. As was the case in many Italian households, dinner at the Forgiones' was always loud and boisterous.

After dinner, the family gathered around the hearth, their dispositions turning more solemn. Grazio, seated in a chair, puffed on a pipe while holding little Pellegrina on his lap. Francesco, Michele, and Felicita sat cross-legged on the floor, while Mamma Peppa nursed baby Grazia.

As darkness fell outside, Mamma Peppa said, "Fetch your rosaries, children." Francesco and his siblings obeyed and returned, beads in hand, to kneel before an image of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. Grazio knelt, too, beside Francesco, smiling at the boy with a twinkle in his eye. Francesco smiled back. Nobody knew they had already prayed the Rosary that day, but it was no matter. Francesco loved the Rosary and was happy to pray it again.

*"In nómine Patris, et Filii, et Spíritus Sancti,"* began Grazio.

"Amen," the family intoned.

Thus went things in the house of Forgione.