

An illustration of Galileo Galilei in a study. He is wearing a red robe and a red cap, looking through a telescope mounted on a desk. The desk is cluttered with books and papers. A window in the background shows a view of a city with domes and buildings. The style is a detailed, textured illustration.

A NOVEL BASED ON THE LIFE OF
GALILEO GALILEI

DARK LABYRINTH

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PROJECT

Prologue

It was a crystal-clear day in Florence in the spring of 1739. Long past the heady days of the High Renaissance, Florence still basked in the glories of the fruits of Florentine geniuses such as da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael, Titian, and Botticelli. Passing constant reminders of the output of these creative giants, Giovanni Battista Nelli, a writer, walked through the busy city streets. He was short and stocky with a to-the-manor-born appearance, although he had none of the manner so common to his class. His late father had been a well-to-do architect and had seen fit to outfit him not only with his same name, but also with a proper education. By his mid-twenties, Giovanni fils had become, while not as famous as Giovanni père, at least a budding, accomplished young man of letters, due just as much to his innate talent as to the fortune from his father's estate.

Giovanni was on the way to a monthly lunch with Dr. Lami, a family friend who was also of a literary bent. In preparation, Giovanni stopped for some mortadella at a butcher shop he had recently heard excelled at this particular sausage. As Giovanni watched, Cioci, the shop's owner, thin-sliced two generous sections of his prized mortadella and wrapped them in paper. He hoped Giovanni would become a regular customer.

Dr. Lami met Giovanni at the Inn of the Bridge, a superstructure built above the stone arches of the Ponte Vecchio that spanned the river Arno. The two of them lounged on the inn's small terrazzo and ordered antipasto and a good Chianti to go with the mortadella. The fortyish Lami was a handsome, affable man who saw his patients in the mornings and wrote poetry in the afternoons. He was a proud member of Società Letteraria del Duca, a local literary society with the coveted seal of the Grand Ducal imprimatur. Having recently sponsored Giovanni for a membership, Lami looked up inquiringly as he wrapped a slice of melon with a slice of mortadella and gorged on them. His words slurred as he chewed. "This is excellent mortadella. How are your idylls of the Tuscan countryside proceeding?" he asked.

Giovanni looked away glumly. "Slowly. I'm having a problem with inspiration. Inspiration, eh? There's something missing in my work. A certain passion."

Lami smiled complacently. "You're young, Giovanni. Don't expect to ascend from the waves of the Adriatic, perched on a clamshell like a fully formed Torquato Tasso in his prime."

Giovanni bristled at the mention of the revered poet whose works he had actually never admired. But Lami had made his point. Giovanni admitted to himself that he was reaching for instant brilliance.

Lami continued, "With patience and hard work, your good writing will come." Giovanni shrugged. "Just keep at it. If your father had lived longer, I know you would have made him proud. He wrote too, you know, in addition to his archi—"

"I know! I don't want to be my father!" Giovanni cried.

Lami quickly composed himself. "Certainly not, my boy."

He paused to think. “But I have good news for you. You can only be yourself.”

Giovanni shrugged. “That’s good news?”

“But you’re very good at being yourself,” Lami said with a smile as Giovanni laughed. “In fact, no one can compete with you on that!” Giovanni’s laughter was contagious. Lami was gratified at the sudden confidence in the young man’s eyes.

Satisfied that he had at least temporarily given a ray of hope to his protégé, Lami leaned back in his chair, closed his eyes, turned his face to the Tuscan sun, and cleaned his teeth with a small succession of crude toothpicks. Lami felt expansive as the warmth of the sun suffused his flesh, heating him down to his bones. He burped.

Giovanni smiled. “There’s nothing like a good Tuscan mortadella.”

“It’s the pounded garlic,” Lami replied. “Yes, we don’t need Bolognese myrtle berries in *our* bologna! I also like the Portuguese version, with olives. Your new butcher should merge the Florentine with the Portuguese into a new mortadella. He’ll make history.” They laughed.

Lami dozed serenely, suspended in time. Giovanni was caught up in the glistening rays of the sun reflected on the softly flowing Arno, which glided invitingly underneath them and past the painted iron railing of the terrazzo—which, as the story went, had been installed to dissuade jilted, anguished lovers from rash actions.

Broken from his reverie by a muffled clatter of dishes in the kitchen, Giovanni prepared to leave and collected the mortadella wrappings on the table. As he crumpled one of them, he glanced casually at the greasy paper. *What’s this?* he thought. *Handwriting?*

Giovanni read the words on the wrapper and scanned the

page to the bottom. Though the writing was faded, it was clearly a letter. It was signed “G. Galilei.”

Oh, Lord, he thought. *Galileo! A letter written by Galileo!* Giovanni concealed his utter excitement at the find. A letter from Galileo had been used to wrap his mortadella!

Carefully, he uncrumpled the wrapping and flattened it. Giovanni couldn't believe his luck. He looked over at Lami, who still dozed. Suddenly, a pair of young lovers laughed heartily at a nearby table. Lami jerked awake from his slumber. He looked at Giovanni, who nonchalantly folded the wrappings and stuffed them in his pocket.

“Why do you save them? Throw them out,” Lami said.

Giovanni replied, “I'm going to get some more mortadella on the way home.”

“I want some more too. I'll go with you.”

Giovanni panicked. “No, I'm stopping at the apothecary first, and then the bank. I might be there for some time. I don't want to delay you.”

“*Basta*. Another time, then.”

Giovanni nodded in relief. He was keeping this find to himself.

Later, after they went their separate ways, Giovanni rushed to Cioci's. Approaching the shop, he slowed and assumed a more casual gait. As he entered, Cioci looked up from a pig's head he was trimming. “Ah, you want more, eh?” he said, chuckling. “They even come from the other side of town for it.”

“No more today, *grazie*, but it was superb,” Giovanni replied blandly. “I'm curious about something. I'm always shipping books to friends in Rome and Milan and I use a lot of wrapping paper. Do you have more of that paper you wrapped the mortadella with?”

Cioci smiled, his good heart showing. “*Certo, Signor*. I have a stack in the back. How much do you need?”

“I’ll buy whatever you might have,” Giovanni said with a nervous smile.

Cioci’s eyes glistened. He thought of the profit he could make in the situation, and that he had other sources for wrapping paper anyway.

“By the way, how did you happen to come by it?” Giovanni asked offhandedly.

Cioci’s mind raced. Concerned Giovanni was trying to go around him to his source, he shrugged and replied coyly, “Eh. It’s my good fortune that, since last month, every few days a boy brings it to me and I give him a few scudi. Where he gets it, I don’t know or care. But it makes for good wrapping, eh?”

“*Sì, sì*. It’s perfect for sending books.”

“*Bene, Signor*,” Cioci grinned. “Come back in a week and I’ll have more for you.”

Giovanni smiled back and said, “*Molto bene, e grazie*.”

But after buying what paper Cioci had left, Giovanni didn’t wait to come back the following week. From then on, he sat every day, all day, in a café across the piazza from Cioci’s. He waited for the boy with the wrapping paper. Day after day, the boy didn’t come. Still, Giovanni sat with his wine, coffee, and panini. He worked on his pastoral idylls and glanced up frequently at the entrance to the butcher shop. He was incensed at the idea of a great man’s letters becoming butcher paper. These writings were the products of the greatest European mind since da Vinci, and they were being used to wrap sausage. He wouldn’t have it. Through a chance purchase, he had found his inspiration. He would preserve the legacy of Galileo Galilei.

Chapter One

In June 1609, Galileo Galilei worked silently and alone in his workshop on the first floor of his house in Padua. Moonlight and a few candles illuminated the scene. Galileo bent over his workbench to grind a glass lens with the near-agonizing intensity of a perfectionist. Words came back to him from a letter he'd received from his scientist/statesman friend, Paolo Sarpi, the week prior:

My dearest friend, Galileo,

I know you will forgive me for not writing so much anymore, but the papist stilettos have left their permanent mark on my health. The pope and his minions continue to plot against me, but I will not desert the Republic by seeking refuge in England. Pray for me, my friend, that our Lord and Savior will protect me from their sharpened blades. Since your visit, which brought me so much joy, I want to tell you that the Flemish stranger has departed Venice, having found no joy with the Senate. My recommendations against his Dutch spectacle glass have been fruitful. They have refused him, and the field for these devices is left open to your efforts. I know you are embarked on

producing such a device, which I'm sure will afford more power to enlarge a subject. I defer to your genius in optics and mechanics to bring your efforts to fruition.

Galileo stopped to check lens thickness measurements and to examine his grinding tool. Just the other day, he had made the error of over-grinding a lens and was still berating himself for having to start over with fresh glass. As he approached the correct thickness for the glass, he was taking extraordinary care not to go too far with it. He looked for anything that would damage the high-quality Venetian glass. Lens grinding was not an activity for the casual enthusiast, but Galileo had the patience for it. He was proud, ambitious, tall, heavily bearded, and alternately gruff, witty, and caring with his friends. At forty-six, in spite of his sturdy frame, he had been suffering for years from gout brought on by too much wine.

Moreover, Galileo's health had been seriously compromised by unknowingly inhaling toxic underground gases after he and several colleagues ventured into an unexplored Tuscan cavern five years earlier, such that he had been suffering severe rheumatic attacks and heart palpitations since. Also, suffering the earlier summer with a persistent fever, he had lain bedridden the following winter with various pains, sleeplessness, discharges of blood, and resultant depression. In times such as those, his thoughts wandered to his father, Vincenzo, who had died eighteen years earlier and who, Galileo judged, had done what he could for the boy, teaching him music and getting him educated as best he could with his meager finances. Nevertheless, Galileo thought to himself, *I'm forty-six and I've gotten no further than my father, so what's the use of all this struggle?*

And yet, he struggled on.

Galileo strained at his grinding and thought of a reply to Sarpi's letter:

My esteemed and gracious Paolo,

Words cannot express my thanks to you for giving me a chance at the spectacle glass. I would gladly welcome additional income from the sale of this glass to the Venetian Republic. When complete, my device should make objects appear roughly six times larger than with the naked eye. I will send further news when I've completed it.

His body plagued him, even now on this unusually cold summer night, and his wrists ached from the incessant grinding motions at the fixture. At times like this, Galileo consoled himself with his full mathematics professorship at the University of Padua. He enjoyed Padua's prestige and academic freedom. Because Padua was part of the independent Venetian Republic, he was even allowed to lecture against the faults he found in the philosophy of Aristotle, the Jesuits' sacred cow. Galileo felt secure that Padua was beyond the reach of the Jesuit oversight he had experienced as a student at Pisa University. At Padua, he was only mandated to give three lectures a week, which left him free to take in student boarders, who added roughly another thousand florins a year to his meager university salary.

I'm forty-six and I've arrived at a dead end, he thought. *I've been either a student or a teacher for most of my life, and what have I got to show for it? A measly few thousand florins a year, a mistress, three illegitimate children, and a mother from the pit of hell who gives me no peace. I'm a failure. What do I have to live for now? I've advanced the sciences not one whit. And what have I done to live*

up to my father's legacy? Nothing. He worked hard to give me a life better than his—a good education, mathematics, music theory, a father's love. But, God help me, it's all wasted. I need a major push forward. Something to give me wings and let me soar to new heights of fortune and fame.

Yes, it mattered what others thought of him, but that was secondary to how he viewed himself. And the view wasn't great.

Galileo stopped again to let his ambition send his mind vaulting over his current circumstances to a life of independent happiness granted by an as yet unknown patron.

As would always happen at his low points, his dreams intruded on his self-pity. He imagined a patron who would leave him free to research, experiment, and write without obligations to teach or lecture. With new discoveries and consequently new books, Galileo knew he could attain the notoriety required to find such a patron, either in the nobility or the Church. As a Tuscan, he had set his sights on one of the Medicis—Cosimo II, grand duke of the Florentine Republic, whom he had tutored from childhood on and who had become as much of a friend as his royal position could allow.

The initiative in that direction was for another day, however. Tonight, his student boarders had finally quit their incessant questions on geometry, mechanics, and astronomy and had left him in peace in his workshop. He had just locked himself in and returned to work when a knock on the door startled him. Twinges of pain shot through his shoulders as he pulled his hands away from the grinding fixture. "What?!" he said, irritated. A moment passed. "That has to be Guiducci." The young man had to know how everything worked, especially the heavens, about which Galileo regretted that he could only offer speculation.

From outside the door, Mario Guiducci's voice rang out clearly. "*Professore Galilei*, I have a question."

"That's a surprise," Galileo responded. Their dialogue usually began thus, then ended in a mandatory discourse in which Galileo felt obligated to respond.

"Can I come in?"

"No!"

"Can I ask the question through the door?"

"Do I have a choice?" Galileo said. Guiducci laughed. "My purpose in existing is not to make you laugh, Guiducci. What's your question?"

Guiducci cleared his throat. He was hoarse from yelling through the thick oaken door of Galileo's workshop, which was right off a frequently chilly hallway. "The authorities tell us that perfect crystalline spheres surround the Earth."

"*Authorities?*" Galileo snorted derisively.

Guiducci continued, "Are the spheres filled with water . . . or air?"

"I don't know. Go see for yourself."

Guiducci knitted his brows. He wasn't sure if Galileo was joking. "I can't," he said, after pausing to think.

"Why not?"

"Because I can't just fly out there and look, you know, through the spheres."

Galileo had had enough. "That's not my problem. I'm busy. Go away," he said. As he returned to his grinding fixture on the workbench, he accidentally knocked the telescope housing to the floor, shattering it into many pieces. Galileo swore at the top of his lungs, "Another two weeks wasted!"

Guiducci was silent, thinking himself to blame for Galileo's

outburst. “Forgive me, *Professore*. I’m going away now.” Shoulders slouched, Guiducci plodded back down the hallway.

Galileo felt a pang of guilt. When he was in pain, he wasn’t himself. He cared about his students, but seemingly less so when his body was acting up. He yelled through the door. “Mario?”

Guiducci stopped. His eyes brightened. Smiling, he hurried back to the locked door. “*Sì, Professore?*”

The door opened suddenly. Galileo looked intensely at his student. “Never be afraid to ask questions,” he said.

Guiducci smiled. “*Grazie, Professore.*”

As Guiducci vanished happily down a narrow stairway, Galileo’s guilt dissipated. But he knew it would return, as would Guiducci.

Galileo’s arrogant, abrasive manner had at times lost him several friendships. But they weren’t his true friends who knew his physical ailments occasioned his gruffness. Because they admired his brilliance, they accepted his flippant wit, though it was often pointed at them. Moreover, even when times were tough for him, which was often (having to maintain three illegitimate children, a mistress, and a nephew), his friends loved him all the more because he was always willing to help someone in need.

Galileo was tired from turning his grinding tool. He didn’t look forward to refabricating his telescope housing. He suddenly yearned for the embrace of his mistress, Marina. Her massaging hands always eased the pain of his physical conditions. He thought bitterly about the gases in the Tuscan cave that had poisoned his bones and muscles. He wished he could turn back time. The conditions he suffered were intensified by his lens grinding, which stretched hour after hour. But he kept turning the wheel. He thought about Hans Lippershey in the Netherlands,

who, the year before, had only managed to fabricate his “Dutch perspective glasses” as amusing, three-power, child’s novelties—while immediately applying for a patent on them!

While Galileo had passed his physical prime, he was only then entering his prime years as a scientist. Telescope optics was not even a formal field. As such, the making of Dutch perspective glasses was virgin territory, thought Galileo. Lippershey had not even conceived of improving his lens optics, nor had he turned his spectacle glass to the night sky, which was exactly what Galileo intended. He was determined to know the truth of the world. First, he would fabricate a new housing and assemble his lenses into a more powerful device than the Dutchman’s.

The latter will suffice if all the Dutchman needs is a magnified view of his neighbor’s barn, thought Galileo. I want to magnify the world.

Chapter Two

Two weeks later, Galileo was nearly finished. He had worked fast, grinding and polishing his two lenses. He doubled his speed over the next week fabricating a four-foot tube to hold the one-inch-diameter lenses in a refractory arrangement. The result was a six-power telescope twice as powerful as Lippershey's.

To add icing to his cake, Galileo had finished his "spectacle glass" on the first clear night in weeks. Nervously, he attached it to the mounting interface of a rifle tripod he had borrowed from a Venetian naval officer. Bringing up a chair, Galileo pointed the device up at the night sky and looked through the eyepiece. All he could see were stars. Hundreds of them. He trembled with the realization that he had just made history. Awed and humbled, he crossed himself and thanked God for allowing him to be the first man to see what had never been seen before by any man in the history of the world. He was sure of that. And yet, there they were, a miraculous myriad of stars. Glistening, almost beckoning to whoever wanted to look. He felt he was looking at the greatest treasure in existence, greater than all the gold in the Vatican and all the silks and jewels of Samarkand.

Galileo scanned the night sky. *An endless sea of stars!* he thought.

Suddenly, he froze. He was looking at a densely packed star cluster unlike anything around it. And then he realized—it was the Milky Way, seen by the ancients but never magnified as it was now, exposed in detail and clearly much more than the mere glowing ball of light it had been for mankind's naked eyes for hundreds, even thousands, of years.

"I've done it!" he yelled. He had unmasked the Milky Way! His mind raced and swirled in cascading extrapolations he could not have completely voiced or encompassed even if asked to.

And then he realized something. *This is the major push forward I needed! The success that will overshadow all my failures! From this, everything I want will follow!* he thought. His smile spanned from one jowl to the other. He looked up at *his* stars. In that moment, he owned them.

Through his glass, the stars stretched forever. Galileo felt he was looking at the face of God. Slowly, he tamed his mind into rationality. *My God! How far does this labyrinth stretch? And how can we say we are alone and in the center of all this when it appears we lie only on the fringe of it?* he thought.

He immediately realized he could never ask these questions publicly, not if he valued his position at the university, or his freedom—or even his life. Being in Padua (part of the Venetian Republic), Galileo was protected from the Roman Inquisition. But once he announced his discovery, the news would travel fast—and the moment he ventured outside Venetian territory, he could be snatched up by agents of the Supreme Sacred Congregation for the Roman and Universal Inquisition, leaving him at the mercy of the Cardinals General.

Galileo didn't let such dark thoughts spoil this victory. He felt as if the entire universe had in one brief, wondrous moment

opened itself completely to him. *Has anyone ever seen this?* he thought. But he had never read or heard of any such thing. What he looked at was mind-numbing, humbling, and ultimately a cause for elation. He had broken through the walls of an ancient mystery, and he knew it.

The words of Lucretius, written over sixteen hundred years earlier, came to Galileo. He intoned the words from memory:

Take the first pure and undimmed luster of the sky and all it enshrines. The stars that roam across its surface, the moon, and the surpassing splendor of the sunlight. If all the sights were now displayed to mortal view for the first time by swift unforeseen revelation, what miracle could be recounted greater than this? What would men after such a revelation conceive as impossible? Nothing, surely.

Then it was as if that open door had closed upon him forever. What he had to say was just such a revelation. A revolutionary one. Who would listen to him? He chuckled bitterly, “Only the Holy Office. And they will listen only to condemn, as they did with Bruno.”

He thought of Giordano Bruno, whom the Holy Office had burned at the stake for heresy only nine years earlier. Galileo suddenly felt very lonely, like the sounds of a lute he had heard on a deserted unlit street in Padua. The hopelessness that no one would take him seriously settled on his shoulders like a sack of wet flour. He felt completely alone on Earth as he looked back up at the stars, which were slowly fading with the coming dawn.

“They’ll be back again tonight,” he said aloud, putting away his equipment. A firm resolve grew in him, bolstered by

his self-confident ambition that he had stupidly allowed fear to destabilize. He would make the world see and understand what he saw. Nothing could stop him.

Chapter Three

That night, Galileo dreamed he was floating in space. Bishops and cardinals serenely floated past him on their way to Heaven. They turned to look at him as they passed, then shook their heads sympathetically, informing him he would not be allowed inside.

“Please,” he pleaded. “I want to know. I want to find out.”

A cardinal came abreast of him, his cassock undulating around his frail body. His eyes glared at Galileo as he said, “It is not for you to know, my friend.”

After blessing him with a cross gesture, the cardinal drifted on by. Galileo heard a child’s cry and awoke in a worn-out haze, recalling that he had ridden a ferry to Venice and dragged himself wearily to the house of his mistress, Marina, where he had collapsed on her bed and gone to sleep. But now their first-born, three-year-old Vincenzo, was hungry. Where was Marina? He called to her.

“*Sì, sì, Amore!*” Marina answered from another room. She had gotten out of bed, picked up Vincenzo, and had taken him to the kitchen. Galileo’s daughters, nine-year-old Virginia and eight-year-old Livia, realized he was awake and screamed and giggled as they invaded the bedroom. They jumped

on the bed to play with him. A tickle fight ensued, accompanied by even louder screams—after which, Galileo sent them packing. He thought about his children, whom he loved dearly. Being illegitimate, what kind of futures would they have? He mused with the idea of giving his daughters to a convent when they were older.

Galileo would have liked to spend more time with all of them, but he had his work to do. He thought about Marina, whose face, kisses, and caresses were embedded deeply in his heart. And he thought about his priest, who considered Galileo a faithful Catholic regardless of his maintaining a mistress. There were many men in Italy who had such liaisons. Thankfully, in day-to-day life, the Church seemed to look the other way about it. Regardless, thought Galileo, living in separate houses was for the best. He didn't want to rub anything in his priest's nose, especially because, per his mother's edict, he could never make his mistress his wife. Indeed, he might never marry anyone. His working hours were too irregular and weren't conducive to raising a family. Nor would he put family over his research.

Galileo considered his situation. He was largely indifferent to teaching, although he made as much money from the private students who lived in his house as he did at the university. As it was, the administration only required of him three lectures a week. He was already publishing his scientific findings on his own and needed no goading on that score.

As he lay in bed, Galileo's mind returned to what he had witnessed the night before. *I'm going to find out as much as I can, then I'll decide who to tell*, he thought. Johannes Kepler came to mind, Europe's most famous astronomer who had just published his groundbreaking *Astronomia nova*. *I'll finish reading Kepler's*

book and tell him what I've seen! Of course, he'll want one of my spectacle glasses to see for himself. I'll make one for him!

In his enthusiasm, Galileo had forgotten Kepler had weak eyes from a childhood bout of smallpox. But Kepler would likely engage an assistant to view the stars through Galileo's glass.

His thoughts flooded in once more. Galileo was prescient enough to realize that his greatest discoveries lay ahead. To preempt any competitors, he would scan the skies rapidly and publish just as fast. With overweening hubris, Galileo exulted that once he published his discovery, Kepler's preeminence in European astronomy would be replaced by his own. Galileo's excitement grew with every passing moment. He felt this was just the beginning of a new life and a new career.

"I will be known not just as a mathematician, but as a philosopher," he mused.

He knew this was a much more prestigious appellation. "Philosopher" was a title ascribed to the scholar/scientists of the natural world; a "mathematician" was a mere manipulator of numbers.

Some weeks later, Galileo made a spectacle glass for Kepler and sent him a note with it:

My esteemed Lord,

I trust this letter finds you well. I have constructed an improvement to Lippershey's Dutch spectacle glass invention, a copy of which found its way to Venice. A mere child's toy, it inspired me to reconstitute it as a serious scientific instrument. I have

greatly augmented its power to magnify the world, something Lippershey never conceived of.

Within a few weeks, Galileo received an enthusiastic reply from Kepler:

My good friend Galileo,

I appreciate the Galilean spectacle glass you've sent (note my new designation), but allowing for my poor eyesight that plagues me especially in regards to your gift, I have most regretfully been forced to set one of my students to viewing through it the wonders of the world you have discovered. Bernhard has reported back to me, astounded beyond all description at the overwhelming extent of the sea of stars that surround us. Indeed, he gushes that with this creation you have made a most certain and important contribution to science. Herr Galileo, all of us here at Prague look forward to your future discoveries.

I remain your willing and humble servant in the cause of science,

Johannes

Chapter Four

By that time, with constant lens improvements, Galileo had created an eight-power spectacle glass. Word of his invention had already spread both in Padua and Venice. Who was this celebrity scientist of Veneto? Even the doge, Leonardo Donato, the ruler of Venice, wanted to meet him. Thus, in the early morning light of a day in August, Galileo took a ferry from the Port of Marghera across the Laguna Veneta toward the docks on the northwestern end of the Isle of Venice. Galileo had taken Kepler's letter with him in case of need, as a sort of scientific confirmation of the import of his telescope. He reread it several times to himself as the ferry glided across the water. The summer air was just brisk enough to be bracing. Hunched against the breeze in his long coat, Galileo held tightly to the long maple wood case that housed his creation. He was amused by the tab-leau at the stern. Gulls followed the vessel, competing for tidbits thrown by the passengers. And until reprimanded by his mother, a son happily threw sardines into the air and grinned as the gulls snatched them in their beaks.

Galileo's excitement built as the ferry made its way toward the Venetian dockyards. The bell tower of the Basilica San Marco loomed in the distance. Finally, he disembarked and walked

excitedly to the Piazza San Marco, where he breakfasted lightly at a café. Hoping for success with the doge, Galileo stared across the plaza at the basilica. Its beige façade gleamed in the morning light and its five spires inspired onlookers to imagine their ascent to Heaven. Capped by the golden lion of Venice and the imposing statue of Saint Mark, the central dome symbolized for Galileo the great power of the doge, who, due to local gossip about Galileo's novelty, had recently made it known that he wished to take in a view of his domain through the eyepiece of Galileo's spectacle glass. Donato had given over the details of the manner of viewing to his staff. It was decided that Galileo would meet him and his entourage in the eastern apse of the Basilica San Marco, whereupon they would proceed up to the terrazzo of the bell tower for a view of his domain from an appropriately imposing height.

When Galileo was done eating, he crossed the piazza past bustling workmen, ambling nobility, and calmly sauntering priests. He entered the edifice, crossed himself in the central aisle, and humbly took a seat, just as the daily mass began. Once the basilica's head priest had concluded his Latin discourse, two choirs would be employed that day in the performance of a mass by Giovanni Gabrieli, the doge's favorite composer. Galileo was almost late and was nervous about it. In the front row of the nave reserved for dignitaries, a tonsured priest pointed out Galileo to the irascible-looking, seventyish Leonardo Donato. He wore the ceremonial pointed golden cap and white ermine coat. Donato turned around to see Galileo, and their eyes met. The doge nodded interestedly to him. Galileo nodded back, bowing his head respectfully.

Donato was a semi-handsome man with a forceful demeanor, not unlike Galileo. The doge wondered at this genius

from the mainland. Galileo looked interesting, but a bit young to be a full professor. What was Galileo like and what was this meeting all about? An adviser had intimated to Donato that Galileo's invention would ensure the security of the Republic, an impressive prospect. But the doge wondered about the advice he'd been given. Was the idea of magnifying things far beyond the Dutchman's accomplishments merely an idle fancy concocted by Galileo to gain favor and wealth from the Republic? Not likely, as the adviser who had given him word of it was not given to chimeras.

At any rate, even Sarpi has highly recommended him, so we shall see for ourselves what Galilei can do for us, Donato thought.

The priest had finished. The double choirs began their sonorous a cappella tones. Galileo felt his heart could burst from the intense purity and serenity of their voices. Suddenly, he worried what people would think if he told them he felt he had touched God when he looked through the glass. Was it heresy?

And then the voices lifted him up again as they rose and fell and rose again to ever greater heights, until his body felt very light, as if he could rise with their voices, past the winged angels' pendentives and out the dome windows, beyond the confines of San Marco and into the sky. Galileo was immensely elevated. He had never been more tied to his Holy Mother Church or more tearfully grateful and respectful of it than he was at this moment.

He prayed to God again, earnestly, that the day would be a success for him. It would surely lead to more money, which he could use, and it would bring him more renown than he enjoyed as a professor of mathematics. The future beckoned to Galileo and he strode toward it with open arms.