

Sample Chapters: FULL CIRCLE, Lucia's Story

Chapter 1

THE FAMILY

Our story brings us to northern New Jersey, and an old, once-little town nestled in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. Creakwater was home to a growing community of hardworking, middle-class families. The growing in the community of Creakwater came a few years ago, after two big pharmaceutical companies got some farming land cheap and built new facilities in the area.

Outside it was a cold, blustery night in late November, 1967. Woodruff Street, like most of Creakwater, was lined with moderate Cape Cod-style homes, which were built after the big war.

Inside one of the homes there was another late-night game of poker about to finish up. The empty beer cans were overflowing the garbage can and the ashtray was not doing much better.

Sitting in his usual spot, at the old wooden poker table in Bill Taylor's back porch, was Vincenzo Rossi—or Vince, as his friends called him. Vince was down on his luck again, but hoping to win the big pot of cash before him. He had two aces and was determined to stay in the game. Sitting next to Vince was Jim Lucas, who figured he was about square for the night and had a feeling shifty Bill had some good cards, so he folded out.

"Damn, it's cold back here," Bill yelled out to his wife Jane. "Sweetie, turn the damn heat up, please."

The game went on and Bill liked his cards, so he sweetened the pot as much as he could. He had a familiar feeling: he knew Vince was half-drunk and wanting. He looked at his cards then over at Vince, and slipped another twenty in the pot. "You in?" he asked.

Vince looked over at Jim and hesitated for a moment. "Yeah, I'm in," he replied, as he anted up the pot.

Bill dealt out the last of the cards, and could see he had won by the look on Vince's face when he showed his cards. "Two aces. Damn it!"

“I got four jacks,” Bill replied with a smile, and swept the pot.

Jim stood up. “I don’t know about you guys, but that’s about it for me.”

Vince was angry. He needed the win. “Yeah, I’m out!” He looked over at Bill. “You lucky sucker! I’ll get you back next time.”

Bill smiled and tried to cool Vince off. “You’re right, my friend: luck it is. Your turn is coming.”

Vince and Jim headed out, while Bill sat and happily counted his money. It was another good three-hundred-dollar night.

Vince stepped outside into the cold, blustery night air and started his walk. Half-drunk, he stumbled down the street to his house. He had lost more than he could afford to again and was pissed off. Vince was forty-nine years old, small at five feet tall for a union carpenter, but had good hands and the skills his father taught him over the years. He could make a fair wage when work was available, but number one on his list of problems was his gambling.

Vince was married to Lucia. She was an attractive, petite and kind Italian woman, forty-five years of age, who came to America with her sister Maria after the war. Maria, the older of the sisters, married a soldier she met in Italy and now lived in upstate New York. Lucia and Vince had two children; Anna was fourteen years old and Mario was ten.

Vince stepped inside the warmth of his home and found Lucia up, having a smoke in the kitchen. “How was your night?” she asked.

“My night?” Vince raised his voice. “It sucked!”

He grabbed the cigarette pack. “Only a few left! What about me? Where is my pack?”

And so the screaming and cursing started in again. Lucia tried to calm him but it was no use; he had to take it out on someone. And so his shameful abuse continued.

In her bedroom, Anna had her hands over her ears, as she tried to block out the screaming and cursing of her selfish, bitter father. Finally, things quieted down and Anna drifted off, thinking about how much she loved her dear mother.

The following morning was a school day, and everyone was up having breakfast in the Rossi home. Anna had finished dressing for school and raced her brother to the kitchen. Anna was happy; her mom had made their favorite: pancakes and scrambled eggs. Lucia smiled as she watched her children eat and talk about school.

She was surprised when Mario finished before his sister. “Where is Dad?” he asked. “I want to show him my picture. I drew it in school.”

“He’s upstairs on the phone, and you know the rules when he is in his room,” Mom replied. “You can leave it and I will show him later.”

“No,” the little guy replied. “Maybe I will show him after school.” His mother could see that he was disappointed again. Sadly, Lucia knew Vince had a hard time paying attention to anyone but himself.

Off the kids went to catch the school bus, as Lucia held her coffee and watched them from the window. *I pray he finds work today*, she thought to herself. She sipped her coffee wondering what had happened to the kind, happy man she married years ago.

Knowing another argument was coming, Lucia had waited for the kids to leave before talking to Vince. She needed money for food, and Thanksgiving was coming at the end of the week.

Vince came downstairs and grabbed the keys for his truck.

“How did your call go?” Lucia asked.

“Okay. I have to go down to the union hall and wait,” Vince replied, as he grabbed his jacket by the front door.

“Oh, good. I’m going to need some food money,” Lucia asked. “I hear Shop-Rite has some nice turkey on sale.”

“What happened to the money I gave you last week?” Vince asked with a frown. “It’s always about money with you! I only have so much!”

It went on, the cursing and yelling, before finally Vince left Lucia with a twenty-dollar bill, for Thanksgiving dinner and food for the week.

Lucia lit up her last cigarette and took some comfort in the fact that he was gone for the day. She looked toward the kitchen. *Let me see what I’ve got here*, she said to herself, thinking of her mother and

the way she managed things in Italy with little money; she would scrounge around, see what she had and buy only the basics. But Lucia was determined that her kids would have a nice Thanksgiving dinner.

That man, I'm so tired of him! How can he be so selfish? she thought. *I need to find a job—get out of this place.*

Vince drove his old but reliable Ford truck off the highway, and onto the main road leading to the union hall. He was hoping for work, and he'd got word a big job was starting at the airport. It would be a long drive every day but the money was good. He pulled into the union hall parking lot and was happy to see his brother-in-law Sam getting out of his car.

Sam, a tall, heavy-set man was an Army Ranger during the war, and about as tough as they come. He worked his way up, becoming a successful contractor with a thriving construction business.

Time to kiss some ass, Vince said to himself, as he headed toward his sister Annette's husband.

Sam grinned as he saw who was coming. *Shit, it's Vince.*

"Hey, Sammy, you look good. How's the family?" Vince said. "I heard there's some work at the airport."

"Yeah. Vince, I got a meeting and I'm late. Talk later." With that said, Sam turned and quickly headed inside, with the sound of Vince rambling on behind him.

Vince went inside and signed in, then sat reading the newspaper with the other workers. Everyone was talking about the airport job. He turned to his friend Ralph Hugaro. "What we got at the track today?"

"I got the inside tip, my friend: number nineteen horse, win or place," Ralph replied with a smile. "You in?"

Vince opened his wallet. "Yeah, here's twenty and two bucks for you. We need a win."

Inside the meeting room Sam was going over the prints, layout and timeframe for the airport job. He turned to his foreman Dirk Roos. "How many men we need to start on this one?"

Dirk hesitated for a moment. "I figure about two dozen men to get things moving and two heavy equipment operators."

The union business agent Jerry Lango added, “We got a lot of hungry men out there; good workers, for sure.”

Sam lit up a smoke, thinking and looking over his paperwork. “Okay, Jerry, I will leave it to you and Dirk. But do me a personal favor: we give Vince another chance on this one.”

“Ah, damn it, Sam!” Jerry replied. “He does good work but you know some of the guys don’t like him: his drinking, his big mouth. He’s trouble.”

Sam stayed quiet and Jerry could tell he was serious. “Okay, okay, boss, a favor is a favor. But I hope bigmouth keeps it shut.”

“Good, then it is done,” Sam replied. “Let’s get the ball rolling on this one right away.”

He turned to Dirk. “We’re taking a drive over to meet with the township for the airport area. I need to go over the permits and make sure of the dates for the inspection schedule.” Sam smiled, “Today is the day we get moving. There’s a lot of money to be made.”

The chatter started as Jerry walked out of the meeting and down the stairs, into the union hall, where he stood before his workers. Vince could tell he had good news. *Looks like we got the airport job*, he thought.

“Airport job is a go.”

Everyone was cheering as Jerry looked at the happy faces. “Finish up what you’re working on or go home and get ready,” Jerry yelled out above the chatter. “Most of you will be getting a call.”

Jerry then pointed at Vince; “In my office.”

Vince made his way upstairs and sat in front of Jerry’s desk, trying to stay calm but wondering, *What the hell is going on?*

Jerry sipped his coffee. “Okay, Vince, Sam wants to give you a try. But no bullshit, no drinking and no lunchtime trips to the track. You do the work and keep your mouth shut and you’ll be okay.”

“Of course, of course! I’m gonna do some good work for the boss, you’ll see.”

Vince left and Jerry said to himself, *We will see.*

Back in Creakwater it was snowing hard, the wind picking up swirls of snow dust. Lucia read a letter from Maria, as she waited in her car at the bus stop. The car was an old Buick. Maria gave it to her years ago and it still ran fairly well. The two sisters wrote each other often. She was happy to hear her sister was doing well.

Lucia had also got some good news today: her friend Jane told her that she heard the school was looking for part-time help in the cafeteria, so she went there. And, to her surprise she got the job; she would be starting right after the holiday. She decided to keep that news from Vince for now; she didn't need to hear his big mouth again.

The big, yellow bus came slowly along the snow-covered road and slowed to a stop. Lucia watched, smiling as the kids came out and started playing, making snowballs. It was good to see them happy and having fun.

With everyone on board, Lucia drove slowly on the slippery roads and pulled up in front of the house. She noticed Vince's truck was in the driveway. *I sure hope he has work*, she thought to herself, as they headed for the door.

"Can I go out for a while, please, Mom?" Mario asked, looking across the street at his friends.

"Okay, okay. Come inside and change your clothes first—and only around the house," his mom answered.

Lucia went in the kitchen and found Vince at the table, drinking whiskey and reading his newspaper.

"I got some work coming: big job down in Bergen County."

"Oh, that's good," Lucia replied, feeling some relief. "I have news, too: Sam and Annette are coming at around six, for coffee and dessert after Thanksgiving dinner."

"Really? My nosy sister Annette and big man Sam for dessert?" Vince replied, thinking, *And now she's gonna ask for more money.*

"Don't worry, apples are cheap," Lucia replied. "I'll make two apple pies. I should have enough eggs and flour to make do."

"See you later, Mom," Anna yelled out from the front door. The kids were excited, all bundled up and heading out to play in the snow.

Vince went upstairs and unlocked the door to his room—his selfish hoarding room, one might say. There was an expensive slate pool table which no one besides him was allowed to touch, and sitting on his desk were stacks of racetrack tickets, lottery tickets and books on his custom coin collection.

Vince sat in his leather chair, set his whiskey glass down and opened the desk drawer. He pulled out a big stack of silver dollars and went to work cleaning and restoring them. He sipped his whiskey, thinking, *These babies are gonna bring me at least five hundred bucks.*

Chapter 2

HOLIDAY

The sun was a yellow-orange blur sitting low in the light, overcast sky, as Sam and Annette got in their car and pulled out of the driveway of their stately home in Belleville, New Jersey. They were heading for the parkway north and their visit with the Rossi family. The roads still had pockets of ice and snow on them, so Sam drove his big Cadillac nice and slow.

Sam looked over at Annette. “Damn it, I forgot my wine.”

“I got it; it’s in the back seat,” Annette replied. “And I got the Italian pastries Lucia likes so much.”

Sam was relieved. His wine was not the sweet, fruity, store-bought kind—no way; it was the homemade if-you-drink-too-much-you’re-taking-a-nap kind. He needed it to put up with Vince’s bullshit.

Annette smiled as they pulled onto the parkway. “It will be good to see the kids. I miss them.”

Sam smiled. “Yeah, I miss them, too. They’re good kids.”

Annette smiled at Sam. “Thanks for helping my brother with the work. He needed it.”

“I do it for you and the kids,” Sam replied. “Vince needs to stop the drinking on the job, keep his foul mouth shut, and he’s got no problem from me.”

“I know you don’t like him,” Annette replied. “I pray he does the right thing. I see it, too: my brother has not been himself since our father died.”

The two continued their drive as little flecks of snow started to come down. Sam turned on his wipers. “Looks like another squall is coming in.”

Before long, Sam pulled off the parkway, onto Washington Street, and began the climb up along the pines and hemlocks to the town of Creakwater. The snow was picking up as he eased the big car up the winding road.

Inside her house on Woodruff Street, Lucia was watching the snow coming down from the living room window and smiling at the kids tromping in the snow. It looked like they were making a snow fort by the driveway. It was the little things—happy memories and her kids—that helped her get by.

She went to the kitchen, to check on the coffee and put the apple pie out to cool down a little. So far it was a good Thanksgiving. Vince took his turkey plate up to his room and she hadn’t seen him since.

Upstairs in his selfish room, Vince was sitting in his leather reclining chair with his glass of whiskey, sitting on the edge of the pool table. He had just finished setting up his custom set of Lionel trains on the pool table and turned them on. He watched like a kid in a candy store as the old steamer locomotive and rail cars made their way around the track.

Sam turned the Caddy onto Woodruff and slowly pulled up in front of Lucia’s house. He laughed as he saw the kids playing, throwing snowballs. “Isn’t that a sight! They look like a bunch of snowmen.”

Annette laughed. “I remember those days.”

Mario stopped throwing snowballs and looked over. “Uncle Sam, Uncle Sam!” he yelled, as he ran to him. Big Sam picked him up and gave him a hug.

Anna watched her brother with her uncle and went over to Aunt Annette. They hugged. “It’s so good to see you, but you two better get inside,” Annette said; “you’re gonna freeze out here.”

“Okay. My mom made some nice apple pie for us,” Anna replied, as she helped Annette up the snowy driveway to the front door.

Lucia opened the door and let them in with a warm welcome. Sam took off his snow-covered overcoat and gave Lucia a hug. He noticed that she looked a little tired. The ladies went into the kitchen and Sam took a seat at the kitchen table. The smell of cooked turkey was still in the air. Sam had his eyes on a bowl of Lucia’s cranberry stuffing, which was still on the table.

“I saved some just for you,” Lucia said with a smile. “I know how much you like it,”

Sam took a plate. “Thanks, dear. You know I do.”

Annette looked around. “Where’s Vince?” she asked, as Lucia poured the coffee and served her caramel-cinnamon-topped apple pie.

“Oh, he’s upstairs in his room,” Lucia replied. “I’ll give him a yell in a minute.”

Sam was enjoying his food, when he noticed that Lucia’s lower arms and her left cheek bore some bruises. “What happened to you?”

Lucia wanted to tell the truth but lied again. “Oh, my arms... Silly me: I fell when I was vacuuming the stairs. So, how’s the stuffing?” she asked, trying to change the subject.

Sam hesitated for a moment, thinking of what happened at his house last year. He had a feeling it was Vince, but let it go for now. “Please be careful. And the pie and stuffing—it’s your best this time!”

What happened last year at Sam’s place was something he wouldn’t forget or forgive. Annette was busy, so Sam had asked Lucia to get another bottle of wine. He waited a bit, then realized he needed more barbeque sauce, so he went into the kitchen and heard yelling down in the basement. As he came to the basement stairway, he heard a commotion going on and Vince cursing. He headed in and caught Vince gripping Lucia’s arm, in the act of slapping his wife. Lucia’s face was flushed. Embarrassed, she ran up the stairs and locked herself in the bathroom. Sam pinned Vince against the basement wall, chewed him out and made him a sincere promise. When he calmed down, he grabbed the wine and said nothing to Lucia about it.

Today Lucia was nervous, but happy to have the company for the holiday. She thought to herself, *Lord knows the kids love their Aunt Annette and Uncle Sam.*

Anna and Mario came rumbling through the front door and Lucia went over. "Look at you two! Get those clothes off." She put their snow-covered coats and boots in the porch.

Sam smiled at Annette. "Look at Mario: his lips are blue! He's frozen!" He also noticed how much Anna had grown, becoming a young lady. She had her mother's features, for sure.

They laughed with the kids and looked happy. Then Lucia went off and escorted them to their bedrooms to get changed. Annette found the wine glasses and opened the bottle of red wine. Sam poured and took his glass over to the sofa, just in time to hear Vince coming down the stairs.

Vince had showered, changed his clothes and used mouthwash to hide the whiskey smell on him. He smiled at Sam. "Happy Thanksgiving," he said.

Sam nodded and sipped his wine. "Lucia's pie was great," he replied.

Annette hugged her brother. "Don't you look nice, all dressed up. Happy Thanksgiving," Annette said to Vince. "Come sit at the table with us."

Anna and Mario came into the living room and sat next to their favorite uncle. Sam smiled. "I thought you guys were snowmen when you walked in. You look much better now."

Anna laughed as she looked at Mario. "It was his fault. He kept throwing snow on me so I got him back."

Sam and the kids talked for a while, as Lucia served some coffee and apple pie to Annette and Vince. Sam was happy; it was good to hear they were doing well in school and Anna was on the honor roll. He asked how everything was going around the house and noticed Anna hesitate. She looked away when she replied, "Oh, okay."

Sam pointed toward the kitchen; "You guys had better get some pie before your aunt eats it all!" He laughed as he watched them race to the kitchen.

He noticed that Vince had a nice gold watch on, and he was wearing what looked like a new knit shirt, slacks and new shoes. The kids, on the other hand, had holes in their sneakers and Mario was growing out of his pants. He took a long swill on his wine glass and tried to calm down. He lit up a smoke and set it in the ashtray. He then slipped two hundred-dollar bills out of his wallet, folded them up and put them in his pack of butts.

“Come on, Sammy, have some coffee!” Annette yelled out from the kitchen. Sam finished his wine, put out his butt and went for the kitchen table, where he sat next to Mario. “Make sure you finish your milk; it’s good for your muscles.” Of course, then Mario had to pull open his shirt and show off to his uncle. Sam laughed, as he watched the boy’s mother fix his shirt.

Vince looked at Sam. “The airport job is starting out good. So, how you been feeling?” he asked.

Sam hesitated, looked at Vince’s fancy watch and thought, *I’m feeling like I want to pick you up and throw you through the living room window!*

“I’m good. We’re all good,” Sam replied instead, as he sipped his black coffee.

Vince left the table and went back upstairs to the “selfish room”, to get himself a drink of whiskey. The family talked, played some cards, laughed and joked for a while at the table.

Soon, Anna excused herself and started for the living room, to watch her favorite T.V. show.

“Don’t forget, young lady, church tomorrow,” Lucia said and pointed to Mario, “and you too, mister.”

“It’s getting late,” Annette said, as she finished helping Lucia in the kitchen. She went to the living room to get her coat.

Sam then walked over to Lucia and handed her the cigarette pack. He whispered, “Please give the kids a nice Christmas.”

When Lucia saw the bills, her face flushed and she was speechless. Sam gave her a hug and whispered, “No worries. Please, I have plenty.”

Sam grabbed his coat and put on his gloves. Goodbyes were said, then Sam and Annette huddled together and made their way into the ice-cold car. Off they went on the snow-covered roads, heading back to Bellville.

The next morning Lucia was in church, listening to Father’s words about the peace and the love Jesus has for everyone. She looked over at Anna and Mario and prayed. She prayed for the peace and love of Jesus, which she felt inside, to come out and make her strong for her children.

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