

Dance of the Spider



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I

He sagged against the back wall of the empty elevator. Three vodka martinis had his eyes sleepy behind the sunglasses. The sudden ding of the bell reminded Gennaro DiBello, senior investigator, that he had hours to go, a few more rounds before quitting time. He took off the shades as the elevator doors opened. He squinted from the brightness. The white shirts in the room and the overhead fluorescent rods didn't help. Thank God the way to his office didn't require much thought.

He could hear them now: their whispers, the occasional snicker. He walked, unlike the last time, without resorting to the hand on the wall for balance. The clatter of keyboards, indistinct conversations, and the humdrum sound of a photocopier thumping away hurt his head. He neared his door, his sanctuary. He saw the other empty desk inside. Gennaro undid his jacket. His shirt stuck to him. No sane man would wish August in Naples on his enemies. The tie hung dead from his neck.

Three objects sat on his desk. Was this some kind of prank?

Then he remembered. He could feel their eyes on him. This was the office tradition for special cases. They were watching him outside his window. Whenever a big assignment loomed, the anointed detective would receive signs before the real notification, the summons to the Boss's office. There was no phone call, no internal memo, or that modern method that he disliked the most: electronic mail. This office ritual custom meshed well with their work. The mafia was a university whose alumni used hidden symbols and gestures. The Boss was a few steps away from him, about as convenient as the death chamber was for the condemned.

He looked down at his blotter. Beyond the glass, they were noting his reactions. He took in a deep breath. He'd play his part and process each clue with the care and devotion of a homicide specialist.

One paperback: Carlo Levi's memoir. *Christ Stopped at Eboli*.

One pair of driving gloves: Orsini Fratelli. Black. Lambskin.

One curio of a tarantula preserved in resin.

Gennaro didn't glance up to give them the satisfaction. He put his jacket back on. Time to preempt that official assignment with his manager. He'd set precedent. Gennaro opened his door and heard the entire office fall silent. Only one sound prevailed: the air conditioner, as it hummed hard to maintain that divide between imperishable heat outside and cool respite inside.

"Ciro?" Gennaro said after the rap against the doorframe. He let himself in, turning to close the door behind him.

"Leave it open."

Ciro Cerlino, his head down, engrossed with a report or some other paperwork, did not look up. Even seated, he oozed a magistrate's intolerance for excuses. Giro, fair with the staff and aggressive against the mafia, was business by day, and a good friend after-hours and on weekends. Gennaro counted him as a pal. When their eyes met this time, Giro was Pontius Pilate and Gennaro couldn't help but feel like Barabbas. Giro rose from his chair. Gennaro spoke first.

"I saw my desk. I've never been good at dietrologia."

"You and your colleagues do this with each other. I had nothing to do with it."

"Is this some kind of joke then?"

"No joke this time."

Blame it on the milkman's delivery, but Giro had Gallic eyes, the kind the actor Alain Delon, in his heyday, used to great effect. Giro was no womanizer, though. He had been married

longer than Gennaro had been, which denoted loyalty and reliability. Those two blue jewels in his head, however, had the sea's caprice for change; they were serious.

"Where are you sending me?" Gennaro asked.

"If it was up to me, Gennaro, nowhere, but this wasn't my call. You're not fit to be in the field."

"Unfit? Who...? Never mind." Gennaro lowered his hands and surrendered the protest. *Ciro* was still Boss and he, Gennaro DiBello, had to respect the boundary set in the carpet. He was in the man's office; this was the workplace. Gennaro swallowed hard and made another go at it. "Fit or not, you would have to sign off on the paperwork."

Ciro's eyes wavered. Someone had passed by the office, but Gennaro didn't catch a glimpse of the distraction. "Have you met the new secretary?" *Ciro* asked.

Gennaro pivoted too fast. His head spun and he was sweating in a frigid office. He saw through the glass a tall gangly young man pushing a wire cart, delivering the afternoon mail. He appeared upbeat, polite, and well liked by the staff. Gennaro watched the kid hand out envelopes and small parcels. Every upturned face acknowledged the postman with smiles.

"Jesus, he's a kid. Are we that hard up that you're raking the school yards?"

"That kid is here by special request."

"Who made that request?"

"Paolo Borsellino."

Borsellino. That name, this revelation arched his eyebrow. Gennaro faced his manager. The name of the anti-mafia magistrate sobered him. Somewhat. Gennaro raised his arm and pointed out to the bullpen. "If he's so highly regarded, then why is he the mail boy?"

Ciro extended a piece of paper to Gennaro. "Read it."

"I'd rather read the order that's putting me in the field."

Ciro set the recommendation down. Even upside down, Gennaro could tell by the signature that it was from Borsellino. "I'm sorry, *Ciro*. This letter there," Gennaro pointed to it, "had to be one of the last things that Paolo signed before he was..." Gennaro didn't have to say it.

Ciro held up another piece of paper. "No, this is the last thing Paolo wrote."

A bomb, placed a short distance from his mother's front door inside a parked car, had killed Paolo Borsellino and his protective detail. July 1992. Earlier, in May, Giovanni Falcone, another legendary anti-mafia magistrate, had been killed in a similar fashion, that time on the A29 highway; the detonation that killed him, his wife, and three police officers registered as an earthquake on monitors in Palermo. Both men had been more than colleagues to *Ciro* and Gennaro; they had been personal friends.

"What does it say?" Gennaro asked.

"Paolo named you as lead in an investigation. He said it would be 'therapeutic' for you."

"'Therapeutic'? Obviously, Paolo hadn't had time to think it through."

Gennaro regretted his choice of words. He would have contested the assignment, would have put up a fight if it had been from some bureaucratic wonk, but this was Paolo Borsellino, and what that man did, he did with the knowledge of Falcone. Those two magistrates had been beyond reproach. Gennaro would be contravening the last wishes of a saint. Furthermore, it was disrespectful and in bad taste. *Ciro's* blue eyes confirmed his thinking. Gennaro cleared his throat. The brine from the olives tasted sour in his mouth. Petulant child or not, he'd have his say.

“Why not send the Young Turk in my office? That’s another office tradition. Nobody likes the guy. Send him instead. Farrugia is the new guy.”

Ciro’s eyes shifted. Gennaro looked over his shoulder. Farrugia had just passed the office. Gennaro rubbed his eyes.

Gennaro’s hand reached out for the chair in front of Ciro’s desk. As he sat down, he heard the click of the door behind him. Ciro was still fleet of foot, the god Mercury incarnate, except he wasn’t a thief or liar. Ciro sidled up to Gennaro’s chair.

“I can’t send Farrugia.”

“Why not? Is it Paolo?”

“It’s more than that. First, Farrugia just came back from vacation, and we need him off the streets until his last bust becomes ancient memory with the Camorra.”

“Is there a second reason?”

“There is: Paolo requested you. Don’t forget that.”

“How could I?”

“Embarrass yourself all you want with Farrugia, but you will do this investigation, out of respect to Paolo and Giovanni.”

Ciro lowered his head and spoke into Gennaro’s ear. “You’re my friend, Gennaro, and I’m speaking to you as someone who loves you and loved Lucia. I know that her death has been hard on you and I can’t imagine what it is like for you, but you’ve refused help, you’ve declined speaking with a grief counselor.”

Gennaro went to say something, but the strong hand on his shoulder told him to shut up and listen. He did.

“I get it, Gennaro. I really do. Old-timers like us think it’s a sign of weakness to talk to a shrink. We don’t want a psych report in our jackets, but times have changed. People would understand after Paolo and Giovanni’s deaths. How long do you think I can make excuses for you?”

Gennaro looked up, stunned. “You’re making excuses for me?”

“You can’t go on with these liquid lunches. I’ve even heard that you’ve resumed smoking.”

Smoking? Did the man have security cameras somewhere? Gennaro thought. He bowed his head, pinched the bridge of his nose. He had to save face. “Thank you, Ciro, but get behind your desk. Let’s make this official, for tradition’s sake.”

Ciro returned to his chair. Gennaro stood up, ran his hand down the front of his shirt, over his tie and buttoned his jacket. “I want to hear it. Where is the investigation?”

Ciro gave him the once over. He sat up straight in his chair. He didn’t consult any paperwork, or reach for a special dossier. Ciro had the mind of a medieval monk, complete with stocked rooms in his memory palace.

“You’re going to the Basilicata region per Borsellino’s request.”

“Can you be more specific?”

“Matera and Potenza because the Camorra is active there.”

Images of dry Murge hills and sheep farmers swept through his mind. The region was also known as Lucania, and the mountains there, the Appenino Lucano, left the Ionian coast choking in desert heat and the hinterland, cold as Dante’s hell. The ride there explained the driving gloves. The Fascists had exiled Carlo Levi there, the writer from Turin who would write in his memoir how village life hadn’t changed since Christ had walked the earth. There’s the book.

Ciro handed Gennaro the piece of paper. It was standard Borsellino: perfect margins, cryptic message that included his initials at the bottom. He had been named; the Camorra was mentioned. *Ciro Cerlino* deduced the choice of cities based on criminal activity. A magistrate's letter was official, but initials were for private communications.

"May I ask what you think I'll find in either Potenza or Matera?" All I've got here is a word, if you can call it that."

Gennaro handed the letter back to *Ciro*.

Ciro took the paper. "Rome sent someone from their office there undercover."

"Potenza or Matera?"

"I don't know. Since when does Rome tells us anything?"

That made Gennaro smile. *Ciro* came from around his desk. *Ciro* patted Gennaro's side. He felt the gun and his hand crawled up and tapped the packet of cigarettes. The discovery prompted a tight grin.

"Just to let you know that this office will be No Smoking soon."

"Since when?"

"Soon. Oh, I almost forgot. You like American cinema, don't you?"

"Yeah, sure. Why do you ask?"

"The young secretary you saw is working on his English, but that isn't the only reason why I asked you. I was thinking of advice that *Humphrey Bogart* would give to other actors. I think you should heed it." Gennaro waited for his friend's sage guidance, hoping that *Ciro* wouldn't affect what would certainly be a bad imitation of *Spade* or *Marlowe*. *Ciro* leaned in. "Bogart said, 'Say the lines and don't stumble over the furniture.'"

Not quite *dietrologia*, nor even the least bit arcane. Whatever *Bogart* said onscreen or in real life had always been on the nose. Gennaro's ears weren't off-pitch; he could read the music. *Ciro* was telling him to do his job and stay sober. With the Camorra, who had murdered his wife, in the dry tank with him, no problem.

Moments later, and what seemed like a thousand meters of corridor under the watchful gaze of eyes, Gennaro found his office door. He walked in to find *Isidore Farrugia* behind his desk, back from lunch, and the male office secretary at his own desk, considering the three objects as if they were relics.

Farrugia's glare scorched him. As an undercover narcotics officer, *Farrugia* had an unassailable reputation and a high conviction rate. He worked twice as hard against double the discrimination new detectives had in the ranks. *Isidore Farrugia* was both dark-skinned and from the darkest heart of 'Ndrangheta territory in Calabria. The white shirt, ironed to have sharp ridges down the sleeves, shone in the bright sunlight that slanted through the window. *Farrugia* was the only one in the entire office who wore jeans and no tie. Nobody, including *Ciro*, would dare quote the dress code to him.

Not *Barabbas* but *Christ* now, Gennaro stood in front of *Farrugia*, arms out. "*Mea culpa*."

Farrugia didn't smile. "I'd prefer if you'd call me *The Moor*, like the rest of them do." He didn't have to indicate the crowd outside their window. *Farrugia* returned to reading whatever he had on his desk.

"Commissario?" Gennaro heard. He had forgotten the secretary, the mail clerk. The young man, who had mysteriously impressed the late *Paolo Borsellino*, stood there with an ingénue's smile. Just then, *Ciro*'s voice arrived in his head as a telepathic reminder. Use English.

"I'm Gennaro DiBello."

“I know.” He pointed at the blotter. “These three items here intrigue me. The leather gloves make sense since the roads into Basilicata are treacherous, worse than the Amalfi Coast Highway and...”

“You knew about my assignment to Potenza?”

“And don’t forget, Matera.” He picked up the paperback. “Whoever selected the Carlo Levi book was somewhat askew.”

“‘Askew’?”

“Yes, is that not the correct in English? *Come se...*”

Gennaro waved it off. “Why is the book the wrong choice?”

“Not quite wrong, since it’s still Basilicata, but the Fascists had sent Levi to Aliano, which is...boring.”

“That’s the idea behind exile; you’re not supposed to have fun. Hell is not a destination; it’s an emotional state.” Gennaro put his arm around the young man’s shoulder and pulled him closer. He wanted insight about the last item. “This – what do you make of this?”

“I’m not sure, Sir, but I’m certain that it’s another mistake.”

“Wrong how?”

“I’m not quite sure, Sir.”

“Allow me.”

The voice belonged to Farrugia, in respectable English, too.

“The spider is from a different region. Salento, as in Melpignano,”

Farrugia stopped and busied himself with reading paperwork.

“But of course, that makes sense. *Pizzica*,” the young man said. “You know, the Apulian dance: The Night of the Tarantula. I’m not sure how that fits. Inspector Farrugia might have an idea.”

Farrugia glanced up. “Me? What do I know? I’m just the new guy.”

The kid paled and Gennaro gave Farrugia a hard stare. Farrugia relented and stood up.

“That was rude of me, and I apologize. The tarantula was from me. I purchased it as a keepsake from my vacation for Commissario DiBello.” Farrugia paused to look at Gennaro. “It was intended as a gift and it has nothing to do with the office tradition.”

The kid said nothing. Gennaro moved him to the door, but didn’t release him from his grasp. He held the doorknob with his other hand. “You knew about my trip to Basilicata. How is that? Everybody else was guessing.”

“I’m the secretary and the secretary knows everything.” The boy of no more than twenty-one years of age indicated, with a jut of his smooth chin, the desk where the artifacts rested. The young man looked as if he hadn’t started shaving yet. “Your coworkers had their theories and tried to import them.”

“‘Import them’? Oh, impart them. Yes, of course they did.” The door had yawned open and Gennaro found himself holding it open. “I didn’t catch your name.”

“Silvio.”

“And your last name?” Gennaro asked, but his diviner of symbols was gone.

II

One hand on the wheel, the other in transit for another drag from his cigarette, Gennaro sat there, shades on, in a nondescript rental, squashed between a Fiat Panda and a Renault, his radio off and the AC blasting.

He had parked the car at several strategic spots throughout the day. He had quartered the morning into blocks of time, with the intention that even the low-level Camorristi punks would spot him and relay the message that someone wanted to do business, or wanted a sit-down with a lieutenant. With the right accessories, hair slicked back, dress shirt, tailored, wristwatch, garish and gold, and, for the *fatto compiuto*, the clunker of a pinky ring with diamonds, DiBello projected the flamboyant cobra of a gangster. The car was ironic self-deprecation.

Gennaro had started in town. The tourists amused him at first, but those comedic moments were then transformed into sadness and consternation. A flustered American who expected everything his way, as if he were back home, was one thing, but to see the man's wife clutch the smallish hands of their children and pull them closer to her because strange men had approached them with something to sell, or watch them aghast to find a prostitute servicing her john in a parked car, now that was another matter altogether. This was not the Naples he knew, not the city in which he had courted his late wife, Lucia.

La dolce vita turned bitter in Secondigliano and soured in Scampia. Worlds had eclipsed and fallen from view. He had been behind a desk far too long. In his nostalgic mind, the *sagra*, the bazaar, was a joyous place of discoveries, but in Secondigliano, drugs now replaced the food festivals. Lucia used to take him from stall to stall to find exotic spices. She would introduce his palate to Ethiopian *berbere* on his vegetables, Egyptian *duqqa* in his olive oil for his dipped bread; from her he learned to use Moroccan *ras el hanout* with lamb, and Syrian *za'atar* in his marinara. The *sagra* was where he remembered the joy of Lucia's hand in his as she pulled him from one stall to another. He would give anything to hold her hand again.

Scampia, with its crush of gloomy apartments and faded colors, offered a vista of abject poverty and exploitation. He didn't plan to stay long. He wanted a wannabee or two to see him, possibly note his license plate, if either of them had enough memory in their brainpan for that simple task. Time in the car inspired philosophy and social commentary. Every generation finds fault with each other. The old think the young are disrespectful, ignorant of past sacrifices and spoiled. The young deem the elderly decrepit and irrelevant.

Gennaro at fifty years of age, a half-century in this life, viewed himself at the midpoint of mortality. His youth had not been squandered; it had, in fact, moved at a magisterial pace. Gentle Fortune had bestowed on him a loving wife. Fate the harridan had ridden in on a dark horse, causing Lucia to predecease him. Thinking of her, thinking how she had died, reduced the word 'demise' to a euphemism. Those years ahead of him, the walk through winter and autumn, would come fast. He had known losses. His bones told him so. And as for his friends -- Giovanni was more like an older brother, born in 1939, dead. Paolo, like a middle sibling, born in 1940, was dead. He himself, the youngest of the trio, had been born in 1942. He was left alive and alone: his date after the dash, to be etched in marble.

He had a moment of hesitation. Would he stay here to see whether the Albanians and North Africans would do the *passeggiata*, the stroll in the hours between work and dinner? He decided no.

As he lit yet another cigarette, he saw a young tough across the street at the corner with his friends. The kid had been watching him. He sized up the kid. No lieutenant here, Gennaro thought, but an ambitious runner. Nothing had changed. He recognized the swagger. He struck

the pose, like the pop song said: *Fare una bella figura*. This peacock watched and liked being watched. He was in jeans and clichéd white shirt, the gold chain around his neck. Gennaro confirmed that this hustler wasn't armed. He could tell from the kid's clothes. Junior Scarface started the rooster's walk towards him. Gennaro eased the window down.

"What are you looking to score, old man?"

"You should mind your manners, kid, or you'll end like Pasolini."

"Pasolini who?"

Now Gennaro felt old. This kid, this idiot, hadn't heard of Pier Pasolini, the famous director. Forget about this stooge knowing the name Aldo Moro. His culture was doomed to knowing right-wingers such as that up and coming demagogue, Silvio Berlusconi. The sales pitch came next.

"What is it that you want? Some drugs? Whatever you need, I've got your fix. Does Signore need poppers?"

The way he said 'Signore' rubbed Gennaro wrong. The sarcastic *stronzo*, with his smug show of teeth, had made a mistake. Gennaro grabbed a handful of shirt and some gold chain with it and yanked the kid's head in through the open window. Gennaro stuck the muzzle of his Beretta M9 into the Camorriste's mouth.

"Stop squirming, piglet."

Gennaro caught a whiff of hair tonic in the brat's hair, Brillantina Linetti. The little animal did stop squirming. He had raised his arms to signal his cooperation.

"That's the smartest thing you've done all day," Gennaro said into the teen's ear. He noticed the earring. For some bizarre reason, he tried to remember whether it was pierced right or left ear that meant straight or gay. Borsellino and Falcone, for all their mental agility, would never have conceived of a homosexual camorriste. Muffled sounds escaped around the barrel of the semiautomatic.

"What do you want?"

"What I want is to play telephone," Gennaro reconsidered his analogy. This moron might not know that child's game. He revised. "What I want is for you to relay a message up the chain of command. Understand?" The head nodded. "Good. I'm taking a trip down south, where I want to meet a certain someone important. I want a meeting with *Il Tufo*. Nod once more, if you understand."

What was it with criminals and their obsession with nicknames? Who named himself after a kind of volcanic rock, unless he came from the town Tufo in Campania? Gennaro had a bead on the pack of juvenile wolves across the street. They hadn't caught the scent of the distressed.

"I'm going to take the gun out of your mouth now and you're going to walk back across the street, like nothing happened. If you make even one sign for them to pull their guns, I will run you over, just like Pasolini was." Gennaro couldn't resist giving the feral cub a little education.

Gennaro shoved the boy away. He put the car into drive and drove away.

Back to Naples proper, the Fiat Panda was gone; the owner of another Renault had executed a ridiculous k-turn up and over the curb before it disappeared into traffic. Gennaro lit another cigarette. He should eat, though a martini or two tempted him. That self-pity had to stop. *Ciro* was right. Even from the grave, Paolo was looking after him. The ghosts of Borsellino and Falcone had seen Grief, the Devil's lesser demon, alight on his shoulder and she whispered all

those beautiful seductive things that would keep his life frozen until God himself called him home. Gennaro could frame the picture now. One step past Saint Peter and Lucia would have slapped him hard across the face for not getting on with his life. He ended the unfinished cigarette.

He found himself staring at a woman walking her dog. This wasn't like that Chekhov story. A *ferragosto* wind had kicked up and this woman, her back to him, found herself in a dilemma: hold the dog's leash with one hand, and hope for the best with the other hand while the breeze lifted her skirt. She had no time to think. Gennaro watched her instinctive decision. She shot both hands down her sides to quiet the dress, without considering the leash or the dog. Neither she nor the dog could walk well. The schnauzer's head, with its Fu Manchu mustache, turned in understanding. The wiser of the two, the dog had sensed the change. He had slowed down to accommodate her pace.

A tear welled up. Gennaro understood God's message.

He had allowed Grief to keep him from risking exposure, from walking down the street of life. A Jewish friend explained to him his faith's tradition of sitting shiva, the covering of mirrors so that the aggrieved could cry without regard to appearances, without judgment. Cry the necessary tears, gnash the teeth, or whatever form it took. A week, his friend said, and life moves forward. You remember. You never forget, but you must live. God would accept nothing less. Lucia had been dead for a year. He had not moved forward. He had become the dog, death the leash, and his vanity, the impediment to living life.

A rap on the window of the passenger side startled him. A man lowered his sunglasses and his eyes stared at Gennaro. A hand rose, a finger pointed to the lock.

Farrugia.

Farrugia slid into the passenger seat. He diverted the vents of the AC to his chest. Gennaro stopped to take the measure of the famous narc. *Ciro* had said that he wanted the inspector off the street because his last stint undercover had gutted a major drug operation. Farrugia sat there, basking in the cold air; head tilted back, a soft groan escaped his lips. Gennaro faced forward, embarrassed, unable to stop thinking of the prostitute and her client earlier in the day.

The inspector, like all great undercover cops, was a master of disguises. He had swapped out jeans for a pair of khakis. The shirt was quality linen. Wise decision there, given the heat. The most dramatic transformation, however, was the hair. In a mere day, *Isidore Farrugia* had gone from the dark brooding locks of a wild man to the severe, but not quite *memento mori* skull.

"Are you done?" Gennaro asked.

"I never understood how people could live in Naples."

"Milan is the brain, Rome, the heart, and Naples, the soul."

"In hell," Farrugia said.

"I'm sure Calabria is no better in the summer."

"We have mountains, but I wasn't talking about the weather."

Gennaro fished for the pack of cigarettes on the seat. Farrugia placed his hand over Gennaro's and pressed it ever so slightly against the pack of cigarettes. Gennaro pulled his hand away.

"You used to call me *Isidò*, but that changed after Lucia was murdered."

"Don't be ridiculous." Gennaro looked down at the crushed cigarettes. "May I?"

"If you insist."

Farrugia pressed the lighter in the console. He hadn't removed the sunglasses, but Gennaro could make out the eyes.

"Hell. Suicide. That is what this is all about, isn't it?" Farrugia asked.

"You know, Isidò," Gennaro let the sarcasm drip before he continued, "if I had wanted riddles, I'd have taken that young secretary in our office out to lunch. He's learning another language, so he has an excuse. Talking about the weather in another language is always a safe conversation in a new language. We're older and we should know better."

Farrugia opened his window and angled the rearview mirror before he closed the window and shifted in his seat and put his back against the door. That brief action did not escape unnoticed. Back against the street, Farrugia wanted eyes in the back of his head. As a man with a price on it, the Camorra would pay anyone who put a bullet into his head.

"Keep telling yourself that. You're as old as you think you are, Gennaro."

The lighter popped. Farrugia grabbed it. Gennaro slipped a cigarette between his lips, lowered his head to press the end against the orange coil. He puffed twice and backed off with the lit cigarette. He'd let it stick to his lower lip like Robert Mitchum did. People said that he bore a resemblance to the actor. Must be that wild strand of hair that would fall forward on his forehead. Lucia said that it gave him a Byronic charm.

"Why are you here, Farrugia?"

"Because you're an idiot, a suicidal fool."

"Do tell me what you really think."

"I saw you."

"Saw me when?"

"In Scampia. I saw that asinine stunt you pulled with that runt."

"You followed me?"

"Did you honestly think that you're that clever, Gennaro? If I tailed you and you didn't know it, what do you think the Camorra will do to you in Basilicata?"

Gennaro exhaled a long veil of curtain. Smoking in a car was stupid, but at least the AC helped. He had his pride, but he wasn't about to let Farrugia bruise it.

"What the hell do you know?" he said. "You don't even know what I said to that kid, or why I did what I did. Did it ever cross your mind that I might've had a reason?"

"Yeah, you're suicidal."

Gennaro blew smoke in Farrugia's direction. Mere smoke, filled with carcinogens, wasn't about to rattle the great inspector – the scourge of the Camorra -- sitting next to him. "You keep saying I'm suicidal, Farrugia." The change to last name should signal that he had lost patience. "It gets tedious when you repeat yourself."

Farrugia flicked a hand in disgust. "Go ahead, mock me. I don't care. You say that you had a reason for that little street scene of yours. Okay. Tell yourself that lie. I still say that you're suicidal."

Farrugia reached over and pulled the cigarette out of his Gennaro's mouth and the two of them tussled in the seat before Farrugia opened his door and threw the cigarette away. They had almost fallen out of the car together, like two comedians in a B-film. Both men righted themselves and regained their composure. They sat like schoolchildren. They watched the traffic light change.

"I'm not suicidal."

"Why did you do it then?"

"Do what?"

“Why did you stick a gun in the kid’s face?”

“I wanted to convey a message.”

“The truth, Gennaro.”

“I didn’t know what to do. I lost my temper, okay. The kid said something. I don’t even remember what, but I snapped.”

A long minute elapsed. The car was a bubble of time, thought, and temperature. Farrugia adjusted a dial. “I see. You’re in an air-conditioned car and you lost your temper. That must be it. You drove around all morning, to all the Camorra hot spots. I bet you tell yourself that it is so you could be seen.”

“Something like that,” Gennaro said in his defense.

“Let me tell me you how I see it, Gennaro.” Farrugia had him on the ropes. “They don’t know whether you’re a cop with big balls, or a heavy from a rival clan with big balls. You let them see you. You left them questions, but only one answer.”

Gennaro turned his head. “What answer is that?”

“That you have balls.” Farrugia leaned in. “So you call this guy out and what do you think that guy is going to do? Oh, his curiosity is piqued. You did that part right, and once this guy shows up with his entourage and once he decides whether you’re a cop or a rival, he’ll kill you.” Farrugia snapped his fingers. The sound hurt Gennaro’s ear. “Suicidal.”

Farrugia sat back in his seat and made himself comfortable. He noticed the Levi book, the gloves on the seat, and ran his hand over the leather for the last item.

“It’s in the glove compartment,” Gennaro said. “I appreciate that you got it for me as a gift. I also want you to know that I don’t blame you.” Their eyes met. Farrugia waited and Gennaro finished. “I don’t blame you for Lucia’s death. I know that I asked you to look after her while I was on that assignment. What I’m saying is that I don’t hold you responsible.”

The car door unlatched, it swung open, and Farrugia put one foot out into the oppressive heat. He stopped, twisted while in his seat to say something.

“What?” Gennaro asked.

“Keep telling yourself that and you might end up believing it.”

The door closed and latched. Gennaro bolted the lock. He glanced over. The side-view mirror needed an adjustment for the road, but not for the parting shot that he had of Farrugia walking down the street until he disappeared from view.

III

He resented motorcycles. In the afternoon sun, the cars stood dumb, still as sheep, in traffic. The asphalt cooked, the lines in the road teased them pointing forward as they did, but they were not moving. Not one car. Nobody. Gennaro noted the eerie acceptance on exhibit. A truck had spilled its cargo of vegetables. Nobody beeped a horn; nobody rolled down the window and voiced their impatience. Not one person. No one shouted out an obscenity even. But the motorcycles, a rumble from behind, a loud belch and then the long burn into the horizon into Matera. Even here, Gennaro could see it on the hill; the Lord had a sense of humor. Unlike the Redeemer in Rio, or elsewhere in the world, this Christ, this Savior of Matera, the hands outstretched to bless those who crossed his path, had his palms up to the heavens. Gennaro contemplated several profane captions.

Gennaro had his own secret. He had not told Farrugia that he had packed a camera. What did it matter? If he managed to snap a picture of *Il Tufo*, *bravissimo*, great, if he didn't, so be it. What he really wished to do was revisit an abandoned hobby. Passages from the Levi novel had inspired him to bring the camera.

Basilicata formed the instep of the Italian foot; and yet, for all the vaunted beauty of its mountains and forests, the instep had splinters from the Tyrrhenian and Ionian seas to give the region a reputation for another kind of natural beauty, that of the splendid seaside resorts. His camera and amateur skills would capture that, and the stark beauty of the *sassi*, the cave dwellings. Levi narrated the poverty, the isolation and the despair of a people who lived in these caves, many without running water. For a moment, for an egotistical second, Gennaro imagined himself as the Italian Juan Rulfo, the man who would capture the burning plain, time forgotten, and the hard faces of lonely people.

He parked the car. He did the usual transactions with the clerk at the modest hotel. Gennaro had the alias ready, the paperwork for his lies, but the clerk didn't ask for proofs. Another person who didn't care, Gennaro concluded. Why should he? Rome had abandoned the people of Basilicata. The north was always dismissing the south. It took UNESCO, the humanitarian agency, to rescue the region from ruin and eradicate malaria. Gennaro knew his southern history, the worn-out doormat for foreigners and oppressors alike. First, the Greeks came first, then the Romans. The descendants of the Lucanians would experience Hannibal, the Byzantines, the Normans, Barbarossa, Angevin kings, and the Bourbons before unification.

Borsellino had given *Ciro* the name. This *Il Tufo* was an enigma, a living riddle. Gennaro had had his suspicions that this chase after a phantom could be a ruse, a way to get him out of the office, so he could detox without *Ciro* having to impugn his record. 'Medical leave' would've worked, if he had been shot in the line of duty. Farrugia had one of those in his jacket, along with a commendation, but what does The Moor do? He returns to his desk in record time. Gennaro admitted it; he envied the Calabrian.

Gennaro was old school, a relic. What he knew of the Camorra from fieldwork was outdated, or hearsay. Like grandpa's 'in my day,' Gennaro could speak only of the Camorra's older ventures such as smuggling cigarettes, shoddy construction work, or bribing officials for city contracts. The modern Camorra was into waste disposal, counterfeiting Gucci and Versace, and working with the Chinese sweatshops.

His continuing education consisted of eavesdropping and details that he gleaned from other detectives. He overheard how drug sales were done in the rundown tenements. Money in hand would go through one glory hole in the wall, and a few steps later, that same hand would receive 'the package' through another hole in the wall. Bust the addict and the detectives still had

nothing. Nobody could identify anyone. Gennaro felt that same way here in Basilicata: groping blind for a payout from holes in the wall

That punk in Scampia said he'd relay the message. He didn't deny his master three times as Saint Peter had. This *Il Tufo*, this Mr. Rock or native son named after a town in Campania had to exist.

The next morning he photographed the *sassi* in the old town. Gennaro saw the old juxtaposed against the new in Matera. Buildings in disrepair, caves crumbling like cheese, its neighbors gentrified into exotic homes, swank hotels, and upscale restaurants. Gennaro had to put away the smokes so could have the legs and lungs of a mountain goat to climb up hills and shimmy down narrow paths and summit cliff tops with the camera around his neck. Thinking of Rulfo and his photographs of the impoverished, Gennaro decided on the poorer *sasso* district of Caveoso, where he could take pictures of the *chiese rupestri*, the churches built into the caves between the eighth and thirteenth centuries.

He had just selected his aperture and framed his shot when he heard a voice behind him. A man in a sun hat, white shirt and white linen pants sat in a makeshift chair before an easel, brush in hand and his art out of Gennaro's view. He pointed to a sign that said Taranto-Laterza.

"That road will take you to Belvedere."

"What would I see there?" Gennaro asked.

"The Murgia Plateau for one thing, but Belvedere is biblical; that's the only way I can describe it. You'd think Christ Himself had walked there. Wait for sunset and you'd think the Holy Spirit were breathing over the plain."

"Sunset is a few more hours away still. I've already walked quite a bit. I'm not a young man, you know."

"You look fine to me," the man said. The man was dressed in white. His clothes could act as camouflage against the rocks. He was wearing tortoise-shell Vuarnets with green shades so Gennaro couldn't make out the eyes. The man stepped away from his easel. He approached, hand extended.

"Name is Attilio."

Gennaro blanked as he shook hands with the man. He had forgotten his alias. He heard himself say the oddest thing: "Sant' Attilio is a popular saint in Piedmont."

The man smirked and stepped closer. "Mother Church doesn't recognize my namesake." He wagged a finger in the air. "You know your saints, my friend. No Piedmontese here, but a son of Campania, like you. I can hear it in your words. Are you a religious man?"

"No, why do you ask?" Gennaro realized that he had flinched, taken aback by the unexpected question about faith.

This Attilio shrugged and smiled. "I intended no offense. I assumed you were, since you know your saints, is all."

Gennaro relaxed. He'd play this game of loose conversation. "No offense taken. I was spooked when you said 'Christ had walked the earth.'" Gennaro reached into his jacket. He had made a point to wear one with many pockets for the rolls of film. "I've been reading Carlo Levi."

The man turned sideways to view the cover of the book. He recited the title. *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*. "May I? See, my hands are clean. No paint."

Attilio's hands were clean, smooth. Gennaro had no clue as to the kind of work this man did for a living. He handed him the slim volume. Attilio considered the cover, its red lines and

the small picture of the young author. "I hadn't seen this book in years." Attilio fanned the pages and stopped to look on the inside cover. "Ah, your initials are here. PB."

Gennaro blurted out. "Pier Benincasa." He had Pasolini on the brain ever since intimidating that kid in Scampia. All the white houses around him inspired 'casa' in the surname. Attilio returned the book.

Gennaro's hands trembled. Could it be? He thumbed to the inside cover. *Madonna mia!* He screamed inside his head. He had never thought to look there. He recognized the writing, however brief -- this edition, this book had belonged to Paolo Borsellino. Mysteries came in threes, like the Trinity. First, he still didn't know the last name of the secretary. Second, Farrugia had followed him without Gennaro's even knowing it. And now this! It had to be *Ciro*. He had to have left been the one who had left the book.

"Are you okay, friend?" Attilio asked.

Gennaro felt the hand of consolation on his arm, the hand of God on his heart.

"Yes. Yes. I'm fine."

"You look pale."

"I'm fine. It's just that this book has sentimental value." Gennaro faked a smile and showed the publication date. 1945. "A gift from my late father."

Attilio nodded in understanding. "Stay with me, if you would like to photograph Belvedere at sunset. My place is a short walk from here. You're welcome to join me for a meal. I knew that you were a *paisano*." He wagged that finger again. "A surname like Benincasa couldn't get any more *campani*. Let me get my things, and I'll show you the way."

Attilio turned around to gather up his portable workshop of stool, easel, brushes and paints. Gennaro offered to carry the artwork. When Attilio led the way, without speaking, Gennaro reviewed the painting. Attilio had a talent for Matera's white on white, dust on dust, and for insinuating the sinister in a blue sky. Gennaro followed, his chest and head beating with the name of Paolo Borsellino.

Gennaro didn't know what to expect. Attilio searched his pocket for his house keys. The steps had been steep. Creeper vines covered one pinkish wall of porous stone and a thick, robust hedge of greenery hung over the doorframe. As Attilio fumbled with his keys, Gennaro waited for a hobbit to swing the door open. The key worked. Once they were inside, his host turned on a light. The lamp cast a comforting shade of yellow. The mix of lunar landscapes and surfaces provided a variety of possibilities for natural furniture.

"Don't worry," Attilio said before the strangeness could overcome Gennaro. "I have all the modern amenities. He pointed in the cardinal directions and said. "Kitchen here, bathroom in the back near the bedroom. Please, make yourself comfortable."

Gennaro smiled like a polite guest. His mind scurried as he tried to recall the difference between stalactites and stalagmites because the cave had both. Hearing 'modern amenities' was somehow reassuring since Gennaro had the momentary fright of venturing out into an outhouse, or worse, some dank room with bats or scorpions watching him while he did his business. Attilio had set aside his day's tools and took the canvas that Gennaro was holding. There were smiles and a voiceless 'thanks.' He had to admit it: the cave had come a long way since the Desert Fathers started monasticism. Attilio's home was ascetic yet cozy, simple but sophisticated. Gennaro declined the offer to take his coat saying that the temperature was crisp.

"Something to drink before I start cooking?" Attilio asked.

"Water, please."

Gennaro took the camera off from around his neck. The kitchen was something out of a spaceship movie, with its curved counter space. There was a standard kitchen sink. The addition of a nozzle spray stood guard next to the faucet. And there was a dishwasher, too. Gennaro heard the suction, the sound of a refrigerator door. Attilio had handed him a glass.

“Hope you don’t mind still water.”

“Not at all.”

“I’ll make something simple.”

“Please don’t trouble yourself too much.”

“Not like I have guests often.”

Attilio’s white linen, so bright outside, had settled into a softer hue. Gennaro suspected spaghetti with zucchini from the items gathered for the *mise en place*. Gennaro witnessed the man’s excellent knife skills. Each piece of zucchini was consistent. Attilio didn’t need a mandolin. He ate one raw and then tossed salt on the rest of the zucchini for a quick marinade to render them more flexible. Those few minutes were perfect for an aperitif conversation.

“So Pier, what brings you to Matera?”

“It’s August and I wanted to go some place different.” Gennaro glanced at his prop. “I saw my camera and I thought, why not?”

Gennaro didn’t forget; he was still the actor. He ran an admiring hand across a geological surface. “May I?” He had asked if he could sit. Attilio nodded. “Only so many times you can go to Sorrento, right?”

Gennaro had been to Sorrento more times than he could count with Lucia. Attilio was tearing sheets of paper towel for his zucchini. He heard Attilio’s voice.

“If it isn’t too impertinent, may I ask what you do for a living?”

“Nothing special. I’m a writer.”

“That explains your carrying around the Levi novel. I can understand the selection -- the historical significance and all, since he had written about the area and such. Have you written anything that I might’ve read?”

Gennaro did the Italian version of aw-shucks modesty: He put his hands into his pockets, kicked an imaginary pebble, and smiled. “I doubt it. I write under a number of pseudonyms; it’s a way to make money and trick the editors at the same time. How about you?”

Attilio had started the other tasks. He had pat-dried the zucchini. Gennaro spied the ingredients for a panzanella salad. *Secondi*. That was a perfect choice for a second course, given the summer heat. Gennaro tasted the water. Pleasant. The word ‘therapeutic’ floated up in Gennaro’s head. He realized that Attilio was talking.

“A little bit of real estate, and I collect rents, here and there in Naples and other places.”

Gennaro nodded in admiration. “Smart.”

“How so?” Attilio asked with a smile. “Most people hear that and think ‘slumlord.’”

“Smart that you have income coming in; that you are your own man. But, I’m curious. Why here then?”

Aromas. The kitchen had become fragrant. Attilio was indeed a maestro at the stove. Lucia had once joked that men are better cooks, but women were jealous, determined to stake one area other than the bedroom or raising children as their territory. Here, Attilio was conducting two meals simultaneously. Gennaro had an orchestra seat. What bravura knife skills he demonstrated with the heirloom tomatoes. Torn basil leaves released their scent. Gennaro noticed the scar on the man’s left hand.

“Interesting scar there.”

Attilio stopped and read the back of his hand. “This thing? It’s nothing but a silly accident with the knife. I slipped cutting canvas. Wine?”

Gennaro licked his lips. He had been a teetotaler since he had left Naples. Wine – not quite his usual, but it might be the better choice. He drank vodka because it was undetectable. He preferred gin for the botanicals and for its not giving him a hangover. He found himself saying, “Wine would be nice.”

Attilio handed him two wineglasses. Gennaro took the stems between the fingers of one hand, and grasped the neck of the bottle with the other. He was still in the kitchen when Attilio remedied the bachelor’s setting at his table with a quick visit to the armoire. Gennaro was steps behind Attilio when the armoire’s door fell open slightly. Gennaro saw the unmistakable profile of a Kalashnikov inside.

“Have a seat and I’ll bring our food over.”

Gennaro exposed the palms of his hand. “Your bathroom, please? I’d like to wash my hands. Old habits die hard.”

“You could use the kitchen sink, if you like.”

“It’s embarrassing, but I have a bladder the size of a thimble.”

Attilio had found that amusing, and Gennaro made his escape down the end of the hall. He passed a bedroom. Nice wooden bedframe, the duvet pulled to the side, as they do in hotels. There was no miniature chocolate on the pillow. Bed sheets: definitely Egyptian cotton. Gennaro saw the Bible on the nightstand. He saw neither a hair shirt nor a cilice for daily mortification hanging over the chair.

He and Attilio were no more than five years apart. They had lived through Moro’s kidnapping and murder, through the collapse of several political parties this year alone. They had endured the Fabulous Eighties, the Japanese invasion and American sitcoms. They had stared in amazement at the rise of Milan --- of all places. Computers replaced the idiot box of television.

He opened the medicine cabinet while the water ran in the bathroom sink. He could hear his dead wife inside his head. ‘Gennaro, this is wrong.’ She was correct. This was so nosy – so *ficanaso*. No blister packs but large orange twist-top bottles, twice the size of a shotgun casing. Bulk medication. He rotated the cylinder. No name there suggested off-the-books pharmacist. He shut off the water. Last bottle. He recognized the suffix. Benzodiazepines. For anxiety or depression? This one had the remnant of a label. He made out the name.

The last name.

Tufo.

Gennaro flushed the toilet. Every actor avoided continuity errors. He had asked for the bathroom instead of the kitchen sink. He was proud of his chic performance.

He marched down the hall, rubbing his hands together, and turned the corner into the main room. The food smelled delicious. The wine in the glass suggested cool and refreshing taste, with a citrus nose and a soft mouth feel. He could see the expertly twirled mound of spaghetti on his dish. He saw the toasted croutons, the large plate of salad to the side. He saw Attilio waiting for him. He saw the pistol next to his dish.

Gennaro stood still. “What’s with the gun?”

“Sit down, Pier. Let us enjoy our dinner together.” His empty hand indicated the waiting chair. “Sit, please. Have some wine.”

Gennaro sat down, tentative at first, taking his napkin, but afraid to put it on his lap. Attilio had the weapon to his right. Gennaro’s heart skipped a beat when that hand moved. Attilio chose his fork.

Gennaro sipped wine. He resisted the urge to guzzle it for strength. White wine never made him perspire. Sweat brimmed at his hairline. Attilio began eating. Gennaro's fingers felt weak as he groped for the fork. He spun a small amount of spaghetti.

Gennaro chewed. Impressed, "Lovely."

"I'm glad. I figure we can talk. If we're simpatico, we'll finish off this bottle of wine, and if you're generous, I can make us a cup of coffee. I'd like it if you help me load the dishwasher. I dislike dishes left out."

Gennaro chewed. He waited until he swallowed. "Of course I'll help you with the dishes. My wife is the same way."

"You're married? Of course you are, I had seen the wedding finger," Attilio said.

Gennaro had realized just then that he had never taken off his wedding band; it had been integral to his being, a part of his existence. He took another mouthful. He stopped. His mind reread the clerk's transcript in his head.

"Is something wrong?" Attilio asked.

"You said 'generous,' that if I were generous I would let you would make coffee for us."

Attilio didn't stop eating. He was enjoying his spaghetti with zucchini with obvious gusto. It was when he needed wine to rinse his mouth before the next parcel of goodness that his gray eyes looked up. He saw Gennaro waiting for an answer.

"What?"

"Generous, coffee..." Gennaro said.

"Before... You are here to kill me, aren't you?"

IV

Gennaro reached for the bottle of wine to replenish Attilio's glass. The man's eyes widened, uncertain whether this simple act was largesse or cruelty. He saw it. He saw the slight tremor in Gennaro's hand as he filled the glass.

"You're nervous?"

"You're the man with the gun."

Attilio glanced down at the table. Glock 17. He ignored the fresh glass of wine.

"If you need parity, then put your piece on the table."

"What if I told you I don't have one? What if I told you I'm not here to kill you?"

"I wouldn't believe you," Attilio put his elbows on the table and folded his hands. He stared at Gennaro. "You never took your jacket off. With that many pockets, you could have one or more concealed."

Gennaro rose. Attilio sprung up, weapon in his hand.

"Relax." Gennaro opened his jacket, and slowly rotated himself. "See for yourself. I'm not armed."

Gennaro thought of all the times that he had suspects repeat the same maneuver in front of him. "Don't believe me? Search my pockets. All you'll find on me are rolls of film, a small notebook, a pen and a light meter, and a novel. No gun. No weapon of any kind."

Attilio bit his lip. He had listened. That was a good sign. He waved the muzzle to the chair. "Sit down."

"Thank you. Offer is still good: you can search me."

"Why should I believe you? You haven't told me the truth."

Gennaro sat down. He pointed to his glass. "May I?"

He had learned that in a hostage situation it was best to cooperate, to let the bad guy think that he's in control. In a cave, in a literal hole in the wall, Attilio was the man. The sip of wine gave Gennaro solace. His hand had stopped shaking. He had hoped that the offer to Attilio to search him and even his quivering hand had calmed the man's suspicions.

"Since when have I lied to you?"

Attilio set aside the gun and picked up his fork. "Let's eat."

Gennaro reached for his own fork, but then he heard Attilio's fork clang against the dish.

"Since this morning is when. When we met," Attilio said. He pointed across the room. Gennaro looked. There was nothing but hard rock, unchanged since the Italian version of Fred and Betty Flintstone had lived here.

"What the hell are you talking about, Attilio?"

"I called the hotel. I know an acquaintance there. He gave me the name of the last person who checked in. Know how many people checked in in the last two days? In the last week?"

Attilio raised a finger. "One person; and guess what?" Gennaro endured the dramatic pause. "I'll bet that the name of that one person is not Pier Benincasa. What do you have to say about that?"

Gennaro had just tasted the zucchini. "Your zucchini is *perfetto*. Perhaps you called the wrong hotel." Gennaro stared back at Attilio, aware that the two of them were testing each other. The spider. The fly. Their web.

Attilio shook his head. "No, my friend. I already knew the make and model of your car. You know how I knew? A little bird in Naples told me."

"Is that what you call that little punk?" Gennaro said. He dropped his fork on his dish.

"You asked to meet *Il Tufo*." Attilio rested his hand on the Glock.

“So I did. I have a camera. I told you I was a writer. Had it ever crossed your mind that I might’ve wanted to write an article about you?”

“Not buying it,” Attilio said. He picked up the gun.

Interesting choice, the Glock, Gennaro had thought. He knew firearms. The Camorra loved their Kalashnikovs. Italians were born to dislike Austrians. Glock was an Austrian manufacturer. The semi-automatic pistol looked like a plastic toy, with its polymer body. The gun chambered seventeen rounds.

“What’s not to buy, Attilio?”

Gennaro hoped that in using the man’s name he had established intimacy, a connection. That tactic might save his life.

“The car,” Attilio said. He leaned forward, gun still in his right hand. “I had the car checked out; it was a rental. Guess what I discovered?”

“I’m tired of guessing. Clearly, you’re a man of many talents.”

“A Gennaro DiBello rented that car. So, if I seem a little off my head, it’s because I have one man in front of me, at my table eating my food, with three different names.”

Gennaro expected a profanity and the vein in Attilio’s forehead to be pulsing.

“My name is Gennaro DiBello. That’s the God’s honest truth.”

“Leave God out of this, Gennaro. What do you want from me?”

“I don’t know.”

“That’s your answer? ‘I don’t know.’”

“I’m having more wine.” Gennaro looked to the side of the table. “We haven’t touched our salad.”

Attilio set down the Glock. He raised his plate when Gennaro offered him *panzanella*. “More croutons?”

“Please. They’re the best part of the dish.”

Gennaro started in on his salad. “You may not believe me, but I wanted just to talk to you. You’re Camorra, past or present, I don’t know, but I’m thinking that’s past tense because otherwise you wouldn’t be here living the monastic lifestyle.” Gennaro motioned with his fork. “I doubt that all this is your idea of expiation for a life of sin.”

Gennaro stopped and shimmied his shoulders to let his jacket drop. He twisted in the chair to drape it over the back. They ate their salads. With food and fellowship, Gennaro poured the last of the wine into his host’s glass.

“You shouldn’t give me all the wine. Have some.” Attilio went to empty some wine from his glass, but Gennaro placed his hand over the top. Attilio sat back in his chair.

“What is it that you want, Gennaro? It is Gennaro, isn’t it?”

“It is, and you are Attilio Tufo.”

“The one and only, unfortunately.”

Gennaro swept his hand as a king would to indicate his vast kingdom.

“Is this your exile, or is it penance?”

“Exile, if you must know.”

“And your colleagues in Naples? What do they think?”

“I make them money. They know I prefer a low profile. I always have, which is why nobody knew I was Camorra. I’m curious, Gennaro. How did you know my name? Few people do.”

Attilio was correct. Neither Gennaro nor anyone in the Naples office had ever heard of *Il Tufo*. Borsellino had, but the man’s understanding of organized crime didn’t surprise Gennaro.

The new fangled computers and something called a database made it easier to track *camorristi* and other gangsters. No *Il Tufo*. A box on a desk in Naples with colored wires for hair and an arrow for a finger could talk to an electronic teammate in Palermo or Rome. No *Il Tufo*.

"I didn't know your name, but a friend of mine did," Gennaro said. He told Attilio that he wanted to show him the novel again. He reached down into the pocket of his jacket and pulled it out. "Open to the front cover."

Attilio did just that. "I'd seen this earlier. What do you want me to see now?"

"The initials. PB. It's his writing." Gennaro put on a hard face.

Their eyes met. Attilio squinted. Attilio closed the cover. Gennaro tapped the red line on the book's cover art. "Have any idea whose book this was?"

Attilio nodded. "I do, but I want to hear you say it."

"Paolo Borsellino. Something tells me that the two of you talked."

"Did you know him? You have his book," Attilio said, eyes on the book.

"He was a dear friend, like a brother. I can say the same for Giovanni Falcone."

"You're not a magistrate because I know all their names. Anti-mafia squad then?" Attilio squinted again. He was thinking. He was evaluating his prey.

The spider and the fly.

"I'll make it simple for you, Attilio. I'm a cop."

Attilio shook his head and then he spoke while he laughed. "You wouldn't want to arrest me, Gennaro."

"And why is that so funny? I know that if Paolo was talking to you, then you *are* a criminal. You are Camorra."

Gennaro shrugged, the kind of tic he used with a suspect he knew he had nailed to the wall. Psychology games with criminals were no different than a principal with kids. Gennaro went in for the kill.

"I'll find whatever notes Paolo had on you, whatever deal the two of you had made, and I'll take it from there. You do your part. You do your bit as a *pentito* and I'll make sure that the court honors the terms Paolo offered in exchange for your testimony."

Attilio bobbed his head in amusement, a big grin on his face. He looked at the gun but left it there, much to Gennaro's relief.

"You don't get it, do you?" Attilio said. "Sure, I confessed my crimes, but Paolo didn't give a damn about them. He wasn't interested in my misadventures in the Camorra." Attilio leaned forward. Gennaro saw them again: cold gray eyes. "You arrest me and we are both dead men. Understand?" No smile. No expression. "Dead, you and I."

"What did you tell Paolo?"

"I told him who killed Falcone."

Gennaro hated when scum thought they had leverage. He wanted to drop some oil in the gangster's water. Just one drop.

"Rumor has it that Totò ordered it; if he did, then he'll end up in a prison cell in Asinara counting the albino donkeys that he can see through the bars of his window. He'll start to think that Sardinia is paradise. Do you have something that ties him to Falcone?"

Attilio lowered his head, still serious.

"Don't be a fool, Gennaro. Totò isn't the complete story. Bringing me in is exactly what someone else wants you to do. Paolo didn't live long enough to understand that fine point."

Gennaro didn't like the tenor. He was losing control in this *tête-à-tête*.

“What are you talking about? Has living under a rock done something to your brain?” Gennaro asked. He raised his voice to signal impatience. Attilio didn’t blink. Gennaro balled his hands into fists and put them on the table. “What are you telling me?”

Attilio leaned forward. They were eye to eye. Attilio had the stare-down perfected.

“Think about it, Gennaro. You were friends with Falcone, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Falcone had Buscetta as his key in unlocking the door to the Sicilian mafia. Buscetta tells him about the *Cupula*, the Commission or board members that runs Cosa Nostra. Now, suppose that there are honorary members on that governing body who aren’t Sicilian. Follow me? Now, let’s say these silent members have voting privileges, and Buscetta never told Falcone that part.”

Attilio paused and opened his hands. Gennaro looked down at the palms of the man’s hands. Creased and scarred. He doubted that it was from years of painting.

“What are you saying?” Gennaro asked.

“Falcone was transferred to Rome in ’91. He’s dead months later.”

Gennaro eased back into his chair. He had a countermove.

“Falcone said that going to Rome was the best thing because it gave a new angle on fighting the mafia. He also wanted to undo a judge’s ruling that had freed mafiosi.” Gennaro rapped the table like a gavel. “Giovanni had accomplished that; he’d gotten the convictions upheld and mafiosi re-arrested.”

Attilio drank some wine. “Are you done?”

Gennaro nodded, confused. Anxious.

“Let me give you the other side to that story. Let’s say that certain board members – the silent ones – wanted to make sure that the other committee members were convinced that Giovanni was a threat, so they pull their strings and the next thing you know Giovanni Falcone is in Rome; and not only is he in Rome, but he thinks it’s the best thing for his cause. Someone whispers into Falcone’s ear and reassures him. They can overturn the judge’s ruling. These silent board members let Giovanni Falcone be Giovanni Falcone and then one day...Boom.” Attilio’s hands simulated the explosion.

“You’re saying that these silent members are government officials? Politicians?”

“Don’t forget the judges?” Attilio rested one hand on top of the other. “More than one man pushed the button that detonated the explosives that killed Falcone. Paolo suspected that one of their own might have been involved.”

“And he came to you?” Gennaro had used his mocking tone. “Paolo came to you? He doesn’t talk to a Sicilian. He decides that you, some mystery man in the Camorra, holds the key to the undeniable truth.”

“Everyone knew Buscetta; they knew Totò.” The eyebrows arched. “You didn’t know me. I must’ve been good at what I did.”

Gennaro went to get up, but sank back in his chair. This was too much.

“Why should I believe a word of what you have told me?”

“Because Paolo knew that he was a dead man after Falcone died. Because he had names, thanks to me. He was your friend, correct?”

“Yeah.”

“Paolo knew the name of his executioner.”

“A silent board member?”

“With a vote,” Attilio said.

“Some unknown Sicilian?”

“No.”

“Then a politician?”

“No.”

“Then who?” Gennaro asked. He could feel the veins in his neck stretch.

Attilio spoke in a calm, almost serene voice. He stared at Gennaro, who waited for the answer.

“I met the devil and he’s an American.”

V

Shattered, Gennaro sat there; his legs had gone numb, the blood had drained from his face, and his heart had begun to beat faster. He was afraid. Still yellow, still soft, the lighting in the cave seemed to have changed to something wan and pallid. The air even smelled different now.

Like slate. Like a coffin.

Gennaro ignored Attilio's departure from the table. He had heard those names dozens of times. These names were synonymous with integrity, with fairness and justice. He may not have met these men, but he had heard Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino recite their names with awe and with respect as if they were sacrosanct. Giovanni would joke that the anti-mafia squad and their allies were like that American movie, *The Untouchables*. What a painful memory. Every time Paolo heard the comparison, he would tease Giovanni: 'Which one of us is Kevin Costner?'

He almost felt ill. He sat there, older than his years and heavier in the chair. His career – their careers – had become undone, been betrayed. Too weak to feel anger, Gennaro wanted to throw up, but he knew that he'd fail at it. His best effort would be a miserable retch, a dog's dry heave of spit and agony.

"Here, have this," Attilio said. A small glass had appeared on the tablecloth. "It's whiskey."

"I really shouldn't."

"It's already poured. It'll warm your blood."

"My blood is hot enough."

Attilio had sat down. He had cleared the table. Gennaro could hear the dishwasher churning. He had been so vacant, so in shock that he had no memory of Attilio collecting the dishes and utensils, the wineglasses and napkins. Two trips, at least, and Gennaro had been there amnesiac and deaf to all the sounds, to the squeak of the button for the desired cycle. Gennaro curled his fingers around the glass of whiskey.

"It's whiskey," Attilio repeated.

Hearing that, Gennaro thought appellation. "An American?"

"The Devil," Attilio said, his drink in transit to his lips. "Before you get ahead of me and play the detective, I can't give you a description of the man. I can't even tell you the man's name."

Gennaro stared at the amber liquid. Tempting, strong. He had read that the Native Americans had called it firewater. He wanted it. He didn't care an iota about its potency or devastation it might cause. He drank because he couldn't forget Lucia. He wanted to drink the rivers dry to forget this revelation. Let the cruel gods put him in front of Campania's rivers, before the Garigliano or Volturno, and he'd drain them. He had forgotten the Ofanto and thought it would do just fine, and if none of them slaked his thirst, though, he'd visit Lake Averno and walk down into Hell. He'd visit the Sibyl's cave and see how her place compared to Attilio's abode.

"I know this must be upsetting to you," Attilio said.

"You have no idea. You work your whole life and..."

"Tell me about it. I should've been born Sicilian. The mafia has a code; the Camorra doesn't."

"Some code! You think they're 'honorable men'?"

"And Falcone and Borsellino are 'excellent cadavers'?" Attilio had seen Gennaro's jaw clench. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that."

“Do you have proof?”

“I do.”

The cold gray eyes that never seemed to change accompanied those words. Attilio raised his glass. Gennaro hadn't expected it. “A toast?”

“What to?”

The two men had their glasses raised, touching. Gennaro saw a mischievous spark in the eyes opposite him. “I don't know you well, friend,” Gennaro said, “but I'd think the Devil has just flashed through your eyes. What are you thinking?”

“Know your Virgil?”

“Can't say that it's fresh in my memory. Why?”

“Let our toast be Juno's words. *Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo*. ‘If I cannot bend the will of Heaven, I shall move Hell.’ That is what your friends Falcone and Borsellino were doing.”

They clinked glasses and downed their whiskeys in one swallow. The heated scowls had bonded them.

“I didn't know you knew Latin,” Gennaro said.

“I don't. I learned the phrase from a priest.”

Gennaro reevaluated Attilio. His training, ancient when compared to what the younger guys got at the Academy these days, but the methods he had learned were ingrained. Gennaro could say they were Balzacian, in that every criminal was a type, with certain physical traits. A burglar, for example, was a thief and seldom a murderer.

This *Il Tufo* had an intelligent face, a leanness to him that denoted a healthy diet and few excesses. A thousand years ago he could've been one of St. Benedict's own, living the life of Prayer and Work, *Ora et labora*.

“I know what you're thinking,” Attilio said. “You're asking yourself this one question. How did this guy sitting here get into the life?”

“It'd crossed my mind.”

“I wasn't born into it, if that is what you're thinking. I started young and stupid like that punk you talked to. I was a pickpocket. Know what I used the money for? Art supplies.” Attilio got up and returned with the bottle of whiskey. The tight twist and the soft plunk of the cork made Gennaro swallow hard. He wanted some.

“Then one day this low-level *camorrista* asks me to be his wheelman. Know what that is?”

“A getaway driver.” Gennaro pushed his glass forward.

“That's right. It was serious money to me. I could buy myself a lot of paints, brushes, and canvases. I could go from the cheap crap only students could afford — the Series A and B, 1 and 2 — to better supplies. The higher the letter and number is, the more expensive the paint. I didn't have to buy tubes that said ‘hue’ on them. Imitation stuff. I really thought I was something the day I bought cadmium red. The rest is history, as they say. What is your story — and I'm not talking about your life in uniform?”

By the fourth round, they were each other's priest. Attilio discussed friends who had died in clan feuds. He spoke of how he had avoided arrest before he formulated his ‘system’, of how he believed in sharing profits to avoid violent dissension. *Il Tufo* the boss had few rules: settle quarrels amongst yourselves; he alone was the arbiter of last resort, with his decision as law; and that his name would never be mentioned. Ever.

Gennaro mentioned Lucia. He edited the details about her murder. He preferred to regale Attilio with their romance, of how they had met in an English class. She had fled an abusive husband and had started her own business. Her family had shunned her after she divorced her husband. The parish priest had scolded her. Prostitutes had been her only friends.

“Like Mary Magdalene,” Attilio said.

“Like Mary Magdalene.”

“I want to tell you something.”

His head abuzz, Gennaro didn't remember saying yes. He wavered in his chair. Attilio seemed unaffected, jovial.

“I had heard about your wife's death. The Camorra may have been involved, but not in the way that you think. They didn't kill her. We are vicious with our own, yes, but we don't do what your wife's killers did. We may send a message, but we don't torture civilians.”

“What are you saying?”

“The men who killed your Lucia were mercenaries. Hired out. None of my people had anything to do with her death. You have my word on that.”

“Your word. What does that even mean?”

Gennaro had slurred his words. Attilio took away Gennaro's glass.

“I needed you to know that. Understand?”

Gennaro went to get up, but he collapsed back into his chair.

Attilio laughed. “You should rest. Sleep for an hour or two, and I'll wake you up in time for you to take some pictures of Belvedere at sunset.”

Attilio helped Gennaro up. He walked him over to a flat surface. Gennaro saw the smooth ledge. “That's no bed. Where's the bed of nails?”

Gennaro sat and Attilio eased him back. Sleep was spreading her wings. He grabbed a hold of had Attilio's arm. “I'm taking you to Naples. I have to take you to...” and then he was in the dark fields of slumber.

He dreamt of dust and a darkening sky, of brown stones everywhere, soft under the last light of the day and brooding when darkness overcame the land. One moment, he was there photographing scenery; the next minute, he was the scene.

Disoriented and jostled, he walked through a crowd. Taunts, pleas — a cacophonous herd of voices assaulted him. He turned left; he turned right. He saw a blinding light and heard a voice calling him. He had fallen down. Was he Saul before he had become Saint Paul? In this chimera, night had become day again, the same stones shone now like copper.

His hand couldn't reach down to touch the wound. His ribs had been pierced. He jerked and writhed to escape the spear to his side again. He was above the throng, elevated and looking down from some unknown height. Jabbed, he saw the blade leave his face. He heard trumpets triumphant. He searched for the face at the end of the lance and found his own staring back at him. He was Longinus, the centurion.

“Gennaro! Wake up!”

He opened his eyes wide. Exhausted, he tried to awaken from the familiar scene of the drunkard's sleep. Something light had fallen on his chest. A toothbrush in its store plastic.

“You should get up,” Attilio said.

Gennaro surveyed the room. He could smell strong coffee. His eyes hurt. His head ached. The morning music didn't help. Vivaldi. Gennaro clenched his eyes shut. *Il Tufo* preferred the

peppy music of *Il Prete Rosso* to stimulate the nerves. Hand across his mouth to stifle a yawn, he cleared his throat thick with sleep.

“I guess taking pictures is out of the question.”

“What are you talking about?” Attilio pointed. “You shot a whole roll.”

Attilio handed him a demitasse and sat on a nearby precipice. The compact bullet of caffeine was just the antidote his tired body needed. Sheepish, he held the small saucer. His hand shook. The saucer shivered. He steered the miniature cup to his lips and tilted his head back.

“You don’t remember last night?”

“Pieces,” Gennaro answered.

“Does that happen often?”

“Does *what* happen often?” Gennaro sensed an interrogation.

“Blackouts.” Attilio didn’t stay for an answer. Sleek, swift, he had sprung up from his seat near Gennaro’s bed. He mumbled something about hitting the road.

“Where are we going?” Gennaro asked.

“First to your hotel and then to Potenza.”

“I need to take you to Naples.”

He accepted a *cornetto* now. A simple pastry had undermined his stern demand. Gennaro took a savage bite out of it. “What’s so funny?”

“You,” Attilio said. “Hung over, hair standing up like some mangy dog, jam on your lips, and you want to take me to Naples?” Attilio thrust a wrist out. “Do you have handcuffs? A gun?”

Attilio indicated the hallway with a raised arm. “Take a shower. There are disposable razors in the drawer. Make yourself presentable, so I can be seen in public with you.” Gennaro staggered to standing.

“I want to stand here and exhaust my street vocabulary, but that would take all day.”

“Save it for the drive.”

Half of him indignant, the other half embarrassed, Gennaro attempted to save his dignity. “I want more coffee.” He pointed to the stovetop moka.

“Do I look like your mother or *nonna*? Make it yourself. I have an errand to run.”

“An errand?” The words alarmed Gennaro. Attilio approached and placed both hands against Gennaro’s arms and shook him.

“Relax, I’m not flying the coop. I’ll be back by the time you finish drowning yourself in the shower. If you like, grab a shirt from my closet. I used to be larger.”

Gennaro resented the implication. He waited until Attilio had left. He ran his hand over his belly and said to himself: “I’m not fat.”

Attilio had been true to his word. When Gennaro came out of the bedroom buttoning the colorful loan from Attilio’s closet, the man was in the kitchen drinking a glass of water.

“Have yourself another *caffè*?” he asked.

“I did and cleaned up after myself.” Gennaro lied. He hadn’t, though he had carefully rummaged through the man’s bedroom and kitchen drawers like the nosy mother of a teenager. He ‘borrowed’ the semi-auto and tucked it below a kidney.

“Good, don’t forget your camera.”

A short walk later they arrived at the hotel. Gennaro settled the bill. He paid for the one night he hadn’t sleep there. He hadn’t even unpacked, which is why he took the pistol. His M9 was sandwiched between a shirt and an emergency sweater in his carry bag.

Outside, his Cinquecento awaited, unmoved and untouched from where he had parked it. Fiat's latest model had a square face, a lot of glass and worse of all: made in Poland. Attilio asked for the keys. "I'm driving," he said.

"It's my car."

Attilio ignored Gennaro. He got down on the ground. Attilio may have not have had a mechanic's creeper board to slide under the car, but he was adept at moving around. Gennaro checked the parking lot. Nobody was watching them.

"Let me guess. A wheelman's job was to check the gas, the oil, and undercarriage?"

Attilio crawled halfway out from underneath the Fiat. "Yeah, and you forgot bombs."

"Any experience planting them?"

A muffled voice under a half-ton of metal and glass answered. "None, but I know what I'm looking for." He crawled out seconds later. "Door frame and under the hood are next, and then we're good to go." Gennaro followed, thinking this was routine for Falcone and Borsellino, which was why the Sicilians hid the explosives under the highway in Giovanni's case, and inside a car, meters away from Paolo's mother's porch. Satisfied, Attilio gave his approval.

Attilio and Gennaro looked at each other as Attilio turned the ignition. They were still among the living. Attilio fixed his mirrors and turned his head to move the car in reverse. "One last thing," Attilio said as the car began to move. Gennaro waited for the rest of the sentence.

"You might want to put the Ruger tucked into your waistband in the glove compartment."

VI

Gennaro reached behind to the small of his back and gripped the Ruger. He gave Attilio a sidewise glance. He found the man suppressing a smile. Attilio didn't gloat, but he was smug. Gennaro placed the Ruger into the glove compartment.

"You came back," he said while he stared straight ahead over the dashboard. He acted nonchalant and lowered the visor. "Where did you go?"

"To the post office." Attilio made a turn without looking at Gennaro. "I have a question for you." Pause. "Do you trust your manager?"

"Are we being paranoid now?" Gennaro said, perplexed.

Attilio had his hands tight on the steering wheel, eyes ahead, focused and intent. "You think I'm paranoid?"

"First, you check underneath my car for a bomb, then the door and, did I mention, under the hood?"

"Your car had been left unattended," Attilio said in a calm voice. "My question was: Do you trust your manager? I ask because he sent you down here with nothing more than a book."

Attilio turned his head. Gennaro saw those gray eyes, darker now in the shade from the buildings on a narrow street.

"The question, my friend, is whether you are paranoid enough. Had Borsellino written down Matera, or – what is your boss's name?"

"Ciro"

"Or had *Ciro* given you the name of the city?"

Gennaro's silence prompted Attilio to continue his theory.

"That's what I thought. "Of all the regions and towns, how did your *Ciro* choose Matera? I want you to think about that."

"Why don't you come out and say it? Say *Ciro* is involved."

"I can't. I can't because I don't know if he is."

The car sped along a long stretch and slowed down again when it came to an unpaved road. Gennaro tried to get his bearings. Countryside. Deep into Matera countryside, into the heart of the Murgia plateau, he saw more hewn rocks and caves, and he saw sheep. He saw sheep!

"Where are we going?" Gennaro asked.

"To *Contrada Perrapenta*, and before you start asking a thousand questions like some kid in the backseat of the family car, I'll tell you what is there. *Cripto del Peccato Originale*. Don't worry, Gennaro, it isn't too great of a detour. Our excursion is a short distance south. I'll show you around, you take some pictures, and then we'll drive to Naples. Say, how long did it take you to drive from Naples to Matera?"

'Crypt of the Original Sin' careened around his head. He mumbled. "Uh, about three hours."

"I'll make better time."

Gennaro said nothing. He took in the view of the Murgia outside his window. This was God's country. Literally. Snippets of his forgotten evening photographing Belvedere at sunset came to him now. Humiliated and not wanting to dwell on the bender, Gennaro wanted answers.

"I don't get you. You're Camorra, and you're willing to return with me to Naples?" Gennaro snapped his fingers. "Just like that, you'll walk into the police station. I don't get it." Gennaro started to laugh. "Maybe this is all a trick; maybe you're taking me out here to put a bullet in the back of my head."

The gray eyes directed their gaze on Gennaro. Attilio didn't smile; he didn't laugh.

“Now, who is paranoid?” He let out a sigh. “I’m going to Naples because I’m already a dead man. I’m also tired of living like an insect. Whether it is in a jail cell, or some other point in time, I am dead. I know that for a fact. Christ knew his destiny. I know mine.”

Gennaro crooked an elbow against his door. He rested his head against his clenched fist. “I don’t appreciate the comparison. I’m not judging you, or your choices, but you shouldn’t blaspheme and compare yourself to Christ. I’d like to understand your motivation.”

“Have you ever been to Potenza?”

Like a kid in the backseat, Gennaro had a snotty retort this time. “Can’t say that I have. And it doesn’t look like I ever will, thanks to you. Why do you ask?”

Attilio didn’t answer. Like a parent, he wouldn’t take the bait and lower himself to using sarcasm. He drove another kilometer and let Gennaro stew in anticipation. He fiddled with the knob on the air conditioning. He adjusted the vents. At last, he spoke:

“Potenza is to Basilicata as Naples is to Campania.”

“Thanks for the analogy, maestro. I know that the cities are regional capitals.”

“That’s not my point. My point is that both have appalling poverty. Naples has Scampia, and Potenza has, well, Potenza. I know poverty like a sister. My father died of cancer and my mother made do, much like your late wife, Lucia, did. I had wanted to go to art school, but couldn’t and...”

“I’m sorry, but no violin here to play the sentimental song in adagio.”

Attilio made another cut of the wheel. Gennaro braced himself. The sudden jerk was Attilio’s way of telling him to shut up. The man had control of the Cinquecento. Gennaro could see why Attilio had been the getaway driver. He had the reflexes of a man who could kill flies and the Zen-mind of a Formula One driver. Nothing distracted him. Eyes, reflexes, foot and hands merged with the curves and gradient of the road.

“If you went to Potenza, you would see government housing,” he said. “You would see why the Camorra and mafia flourish. Sometimes you need to get out of your neighborhood to acquire a different perspective. Where there is despair and poverty, there is criminal opportunity.”

Gennaro cleared his throat. “Excuse me, but I don’t recall hearing of either the Camorra or the mafia in Potenza. I would know.”

“Would you, *Commissario* DiBello?” Attilio had said it with a withering look. “Are you that naïve? Earthquakes ravaged Potenza, the last one in 1980. Who do you think rebuilt the housing? Rome had asked for the lowest bidder. Who do you think got those contracts? As for Matera, the government evicted people from the caves and suddenly everything is gentrified. Coincidence? I wonder who did all that construction. As for your petty comment about blasphemy...”

The car had slowed down, but Gennaro wouldn’t turn his head. He waited. Attilio stopped the car, undid his seatbelt. He kept the car running so they would have air conditioning.

“You’re a Catholic, Gennaro. Christ went into the desert where the Devil took him up to the highest mountain and tested him.”

Gennaro raised his hand. “Yes, I know my Gospel of Matthew. ‘All this I will give you,’ Satan had said, ‘if you will bow down and worship me.’ What is your point, Attilio?”

Their eyes met. Gennaro drew up his best venom. “Is that your point? That you and all the poor, whether in Scampia or Potenza, had fasted the metaphorical forty days and nights? Is that it?”

Despite all the hospitality and food, all the kindness and conversation between them, Gennaro had never forgotten that Attilio was complicit in terrible crimes. *Ecce homo*. Behold the man of violence. Attilio had lived the *Dies irae*. Days of wrath.

The soft, almost gentle voice surprised Gennaro.

“No, that is not *it*, Gennaro. You’ve forgotten the important part from that passage in Matthew. I’m talking about the bit at the end: ‘then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.’ My point, my dear friend,” Gennaro could hear the bitterness in Attilio’s voice, “is that the people had kept faith, and they had served Him. The point is the last verse, ‘then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.’”

Attilio turned the key. The engine died. He pulled the keys out. The air conditioning had slowed down and stopped. Attilio hunched over to find the lever. His hand was on the brake.

“That’s the part nobody remembers. The Devil – whether it was the Camorra or the mafia – had never left. As for those angels? Whether they were judges or politicians, northern or southern – they never attended to them. Some angels!”

He jerked the brake and flung his door open.

The Crypt of Original Sin is a keyhole into a limestone cliff. Stonewalls, adorned with frescoes of scenes from the Old and New Testaments, greeted visitors. Dating back to the eighth century, the style was Romanesque and the influences, Byzantine. Attilio identified Adam and Eve, the apostles Andrew, John, and Peter, and other figures. Red, blue, and gold -- the colors had withstood millennia. Attilio the painter knew his art history. He heard the docent’s spiel, too. “The caves are Paleolithic and the artwork, medieval. This cavern was discovered in 1963. A private foundation maintains the place.”

Attilio left it to Gennaro to determine what he wanted the camera to capture and document. The archangels, Gabriel, Michael, and Raphael, had absorbed his attention. Gennaro was enamored with the rock artwork. Latin epigraphs for guidance and commentary and iconography on friezes instructed and elated viewers, members of the faithful.

“People moved into caves to avoid invaders and to reflect on their faith,” Attilio said in a low voice.

Gennaro had stopped before the Archangels. He had already seen the transfigured Madonna. Gabriel and Raphael wore the same clothes and they maintained the same stance. Each archangel held in his right hand, the cross, and in his left, the globe.

Attilio whispered into Gennaro’s ear. “The globe is the symbol of earthly power.”

Somewhat annoyed, Gennaro whispered back, “I know that. Let me take some pictures.”

In the darkness, Attilio answered. “Take your pictures, but I want you to consider one last thing before you meet me outside.”

“And what might that be?”

“Once upon a time, the Devil was an angel.”

Outside, Gennaro found Attilio sitting alone. Attilio’s colloquy about angels and demons was now long gone from his mind. Gennaro had close to a roll of film spent and in the can. A frisson of novelty chilled him in the hot air. He snuck up on Attilio, who might’ve not known Gennaro was there, had he not been so engrossed with another sight, another flurry of activity.

“What is that?” Gennaro asked. He raised a hand to his eyes to block the late morning glare. “I see people.” He shifted his vision here and there. “Can’t see much, but it seems like an archaeological site. If it took to 1963 to find this cave, one can imagine what else awaits us.”

Attilio said nothing. He sat quiet in observation. Gennaro excused himself. He had seen an enterprising vendor who had set up a cart. The young entrepreneur had water and other cold drinks, and a line of customers. Gennaro found his sunglasses. He had forgotten all about them. It was a good day after all. He had snapped pictures. He had a *camorrista* in tow. He had his place in line for a cold beverage. He crept along until only one person stood between him and a cold beverage. The man in front of him waited for change.

“Another archaeological dig?” Gennaro asked the kid.

“Artifacts,” the man said. “My colleagues and I suspect that there was a Roman garrison in the region.”

“Ancient Roman antiquities. Are you a classicist?”

“Hardly. We’re speleologists, or cave experts. I came down from Rome with friends.” He pointed to a small group near the mouth of a cave.

Gennaro assessed the young man. The kid was handsome, fit, and young enough to be his son. In his twenties, dust mixed into his dark hair, he was most definitely Roman, with that nose and accent. He was wearing a jumpsuit and Gennaro caught the name on the stitched label: Dante.

“Have a nice day, Sir.”

Signore. Gennaro felt old again. He purchased two bottles of water. He approached Attilio with his two prizes. Attilio had bolted to his feet. He slapped dust off his legs and his bottom.

“We’ve got to go.”

“Let’s enjoy our water first.”

“We don’t have time.”

Steps away now, Attilio kept walking and Gennaro gave chase. Gennaro had abandoned the idea of taking a sip of water. He followed Attilio back to where they had parked the car. Behind him, almost on his heels, Gennaro caught up with Attilio and grabbed an arm and spun him around.

“What the hell is wrong? You ask me to meet you and I meet you. I get us water and you want to leave. You said yourself that we’d make it to Naples in good time. If you’re that worried, we get to Naples when we get there, and you can stay with me; it’s the least I can do.”

Attilio reached for his keys. “We have to get on the road now.”

“What’s the rush?”

“I saw the van.”

“What van?” Gennaro stood there, two bottles of water sweating in his hands. “I didn’t see any van.”

“While you were getting the water. Now, get in on your side.”

“What van?”

“The one from Rome with a small sticker that said *Amici di...*”

Attilio didn’t finish his sentence. Shots had rung out.

Someone was shooting at them.

VII

Within seconds, Attilio had the toaster of a car humming. It had happened fast. He didn't look over his shoulder for pedestrians. Life or Death, he k-turned the car into reverse as bullets smashed into the body and rear window. Shattered glass spewed everywhere. The car took body blows like a boxer.

"Some piece of crap you rented, Gennaro."

"I got a deal."

"I hate Fiats and I hate this one in particular!" Gennaro heard a horrible crunching sound. He glanced over the back of his seat. Attilio had rammed their car into one of the shooters, crushing him against a parked car. Gennaro counted three men and then saw another car.

"They've got wheels, and a shooter is coming up fast on your side"

"Now would be a good time to get that Ruger out."

Attilio had his foot on the brake, the gearstick shifted, the steering wheel between his thighs. He had one finger jammed down on the button for the electric window. The assailant had his gun raised and Attilio got his Glock out and the window down in time to shoot him in the gut.

Gennaro aimed the Ruger through the absent rear window. His eyes widened. He saw a motorcycle. "Camorra!"

"You think?"

"I saw a motorcycle."

"Kalashnikov," Attilio said, with a glance to his side view mirror. That was when Gennaro saw it. Blood.

"You're hit. Is it bad?"

"It's certainly not good. Shoulder."

"Can you still drive?" Attilio's answer to Gennaro's question was a surge of acceleration. He understood yet again why Attilio was a wheelman. He intended to take this carapace to its limit. Only someone with his skills could negotiate the narrow and serpentine country roads. Over his shoulder, Gennaro saw a car, dust coughed up around it, and the glimmer of a motorcyclist materialized behind it. "Think we'll make it back to Matera?"

"Fourteen kilometers? No way."

"How bad are you bleeding?"

"Enough to ruin a linen shirt. I'll be fine. Here, hold the Glock."

Attilio swerved and cursed the idiot sheep in the road. The car behind them, black with tinted glass, was gaining on them. The car had muscle and speed. Attilio maneuvered their car, left and then right, to block the other driver from either bumping them off the road and down a ravine, or forcing a hard kiss into the mountain wall. Attilio's eyes checked the rearview. "There are two cars."

"There can't be," Gennaro jerked his head to get a view through the back window. "It was a car and a motorcycle a second ago."

He saw it: another dark car.

"Do you still see the motorcycle?" Attilio asked. "That's the one that worries me." Gennaro understood why. Motorcycles, the preferred mode of Camorra assassins, could move faster than cars, faster through traffic, and fastest around people and things.

"No, I don't see it," Gennaro said. He saw down the length of Attilio's arm. The linen shirt wasn't pink; it was crimson. The man was losing blood fast. Their eyes met.

"Don't worry, my friend. I have an idea." Attilio took one hand off the wheel. He grabbed the buckle. "Get your seatbelt on and give me the Glock back."

Gennaro clipped in, saw the belly of a curve ahead. Attilio studied the road ahead one second, the images from behind in the mirror next. One hand on the wheel now, the Glock tight in his other hand. The corner of his lips lifted into a cocky smile. “Hold on tight.”

He didn’t know what Attilio had in mind, but he braced himself. Attilio stepped on the brake, cut the wheel to obstruct the road, and opened fire. Gennaro lost count of the rounds. Casings flew and bounced. A hot one scalded the back of his hand. His heart ached when he opened his eyes and saw the car hurtling toward them. Attilio had skills. The car swerved and crested into bright blue air before it plummeted down the ravine.

He would’ve whooped and shouted, but there was the other car. Gennaro heard the worst sounds that a cop could ever hear.

Click. Click. Click.

Attilio was out of ammo. Gennaro struggled against the seatbelt to push Attilio down so he could deliver his own volley. As he raised his weapon, he squeezed off one round and watched the driver’s head explode; the car speared them.

Gennaro didn’t hear the crash. He didn’t see sky, or white clouds. Images flew past him: Paolo’s wry smile; Giovanni laughing; Farrugia’s white shirt; Ciro behind the desk; the tarantula; and Lucia. Then everything went black.

The next thing he saw was white, a white ceiling. He heard a voice.

“You’re awake.” Ciro’s voice. “You’re in a hospital.”

Gennaro attempted a question, but his mouth was cotton and his throat, sand. He tried to raise his hand, but that was an Olympic trial. He panicked. He tried to move his legs and couldn’t. Then he wiggled his toes and saw the sheet move.

“You’ll be fine,” Ciro said.

Ciro, his head huge and his eyes, big and frightening as a child’s doll, looked down at him. Gennaro tried to move his head again, but Ciro’s hand touched his chest. “Don’t exert yourself. They’ll be plenty of time for that later.” Ciro turned his head. Gennaro had never considered Ciro in profile. Cinematic. Handsome. “Nurse, can you give us a moment.”

A door closed and Ciro went out of view for a second. His eyes searched for Ciro.

“You’re lucky to be alive, Gennaro. I wish I could say the same for your friend, the driver.” Gennaro closed his eyes. He had figured as much. Attilio was on the side of the car that took the tip of the spear. The loss of blood didn’t help. Ciro was talking. Gennaro concentrated.

“You amaze me, Gennaro. You found *Il Tufo*. He really existed. Paolo had told me about him, but the man had always been a ghost. Too bad he’s dead. Now, we’ll never know his story. The guys in the other car were Camorra. Real scum.”

Gennaro tapped the metal railing. He tapped twice. Ciro didn’t understand. Gennaro struggled but he managed it; he raised two fingers. Ciro read the sign.

“We arrested the men in the second car. The Camorra had gone all out for you. Police were called in after reports of gunfire in the parking lot. A Ruger? Seriously? We found your Beretta, along with your clothes in the bushes. Seems like your suitcase exploded on impact. Your M9 survived. That’s what I call Italian craftsmanship. And don’t worry; all your film has been saved. Wish I could say the same about your camera.”

Gennaro moved his lips. He wanted to joke that he should’ve bought an Italian camera. His lips quivered. Speech was as monumental a task as moving his feet. His lips sputtered.

“What is it?” Ciro came closer. He put his ear next to Gennaro’s mouth.

“Mo-mo—moto.”

“Motorcycle. That was who’d called for backup. It seems a GdF detective went undercover,”

Ciro pulled out a small notebook, “some young kid by the name of -- here it is, Dante Allegritti. Some archaeological group from Rome was his cover.” That Cerlino smile again. “Looks like Rome came through for once.”

That was a good one, Gennaro thought. It was painful to smile.

Ciro sat down and pulled a chair close. Serious expression. The voice lowered.

“You have physical therapy and rehabilitation coming at you, fast and hard. Note that I said rehabilitation. I know the doctor here and he owes me a favor. He’s going to treat you for your drinking problem. He told me no paperwork on that rehab, so your jacket stays clean and your integrity intact.”

Ciro raised his index finger. “You get this one chance. Don’t screw it up.”

Weeks later, Gennaro walked out of the elevator to the sound of applause. He did the obligatory bow and made his way down the hallway. He nodded to

Ciro. He managed the walk without any help from the wall. He felt strong, restored, and happy to see his office.

He saw Farrugia at the desk, phone to his ear. He said hi with his hand raised. A moment later, he hung up.

“Welcome back, Commissario.”

“Good to be back.” Gennaro looked around. “I didn’t see the secretary when I came off the elevator.”

“Brezigar?” Farrugia had a pencil between his hands, twirling it.

Gennaro stopped short. “Who?”

“Silvio the secretary, that’s his last name. *Ciro* had said that the late Borsellino wanted him rotated through all the anti-mafia offices. He’s in Rome now.”

“You know his last name?”

“It might surprise you, but I am a detective.”

“Of course you are,” Gennaro said, sorting through the stack of mail piled on his desk. He didn’t toss any of it into the wastepaper basket. In one of his *Alcolisti Anonimi* sessions, he recalled a conversation with Attilio, who had told him something before black out. The Camorra paid off office cleaners to collect official-looking paperwork and notes made by anti-mafia detectives. He would talk to *Ciro* about putting in a request for a paper shredder.

Gennaro sat down behind his desk, leaned back and closed his eyes as he reacquainted himself with the angle and familiar contours of his leather chair. It was good to be home, in Naples. He heard Farrugia clear his throat. Gennaro opened his eyes and looked over at the desk.

“I’m not good at this, but thanks for the gift from your holiday; it came while you were in the hospital. You really shouldn’t have.”

“What gift?”

“Over there on the wall. The painting.”

On the wall, out of direct sunlight, there was an oil painting of Belvedere at sunset. Very El Greco, in the style of Caravaggio. Gennaro lost his color. He took slow steps towards the wall. He ignored whatever Farrugia was saying. Gennaro unhooked the painting.

“Give me a letter opener, something sharp. Now!”

“All right. Wait a second.”

“The letter opener, please.”

Gennaro heard sounds, rummaging and then a drawer closed shut. He ignored Farrugia’s words.

“I know the spider I got you is nothing compared to the painting, but I like it. A little somber, but it’s grown on me.”

Gennaro teased the edge of the brown paper used to cover the back of the painting. He lifted the edge away and found what he had suspected.

Attilio had sealed his testimony. This is what he had mailed from the post office that day. Some errand. Both he and Farrugia read page after page that detailed payoffs between judges and politicians. There were amounts, dates, places and times.

“I wish there were photographs,” Farrugia said.

“He was a painter.”

Farrugia’s finger indicated a name. “He knows the prime minister.” The finger moved again. “Camorra, Calabrian and Sicilian mafia, and a veritable directory of the judiciary. This is serious information, Gennaro.”

“Too bad it’s inadmissible; you can’t indict using the words of a dead man.”

Gennaro saw a small envelope, sealed and with his name on it. He opened it with the side of his finger, and not the letter opener. It was a note from Attilio.

“Sorry I picked your wallet. Farrugia’s card was there. Hope he is a good guy and gives this package to you. You took plenty of photos of me at Belvedere. Hope you like the painting and that you remember me as a good painter, my friend.”