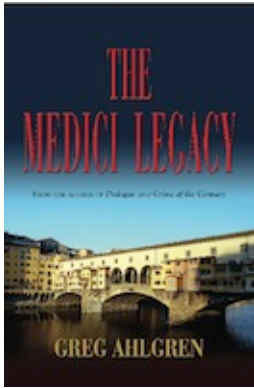


THE MEDICI LEGACY

FROM THE AUTHOR OF *Prologue* AND *Crime of the Century*



GREG AHLGREN



When Antonio Ferrara of the Italian Polizia di Stato discovers that the seemingly random victims of a Tuscan serial killer are all illegitimate descendants of one Giovanni de Medici, a 15th century Florentine banker, his superior scoffs at his theory while the Italian military police caution him to leave the case alone on the basis of "national security." Undeterred, Antonio enlists Medici scholar Rachel Fuller and, together, they travel to America to unlock the secret.

The Medici Legacy

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Prologue
Florence, Tuscany
February 1743

“**Y**ou'll catch your death, M'lady,” Carlotta said. The tall figure standing at the open window, gazing out on Florence's magnificent piazza, didn't react. The servant girl opened her mouth to repeat her warning, but closed it silently, pulling her black woven wrap tighter around her shoulders.

She cleared her throat.

“Father Joacha will be along shortly, M'lady. I saw his coach pull up before the front gates.”

Anna Marie Medici turned so swiftly Carlotta stepped back. Even from the distance she could feel the anger smoldering in the Electess Palatine's body.

“And the good Father,” the Electess spat, “he will be able to pray away the six thousand Austrian soldiers defiling our land?”

Carlotta knew better than to answer or move.

The Electess turned back to the piazza, sighed, and closed the window. Turning again to the room she took three steps and stopped, reaching out gently for the corner of a table. Carlotta moved toward her but the woman waved her away.

“It is nothing,” she said, momentarily swaying. Without assistance, she walked to her bed in the center of the chamber and sat on it.

“Such a sad, dark place,” the Electess muttered. “Darkened streets. Darkened houses. Beggars everywhere. Monks parading about pointlessly in dark robes, with no salvation for themselves, let alone for Florence.”

She turned to face the servant girl.

“Luigi Genero. Our very own *Arte dei Giudici e Notai*. He will come today as well?”

“No M'lady,” Carlotta said. “He sent a message saying he was unavoidably delayed, but that your will, and the treasures of the Medici, are safe. The Lorrainers will never take...your...art...”

Carlotta fell silent under the Electess Palatine's piercing glare.

“Indeed. Some...lawyer assured you of that, did he? ‘Unavoidably delayed’-running for his miserable hide-he assures you our treasure is safe?”

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He's safe from the Lorrainers, who care less for him than for a mange-ridden dog, perhaps that is what he meant."

The woman turned her face to the ceiling, covering her eyes with her hand.

"Do you have a headache, M'lady?" Carlotta asked, turning toward the door. "I think I hear the—"

A noise of voices and boots tromping up stairs grew louder and Father Joacha's powerful voice boomed through the Ducal apartments. "For the sweet Virgin's sake, Leo, some wine!" he bellowed, adding in a lascivious tone, "Of course I'm not talking about you, Maria," as Maria, giggling, opened the door and announced the priest. Joacha brushed past Maria, who squealed and slapped his hand before darting away.

He strode to the bed where he knelt and took the old woman's hand.

"And how is the Duchess today?" he asked.

"The same as yesterday, and I am still not a Duchess. You know well enough, Joacha, that being the younger sister of the last Duke does not a Duchess make."

"You haven't changed in 58 years, Anna Marie." He turned to the still-open door. "Giovanni's blood! Where's my wine?" he yelled, as a young kitchen boy hurried up the stairs and stumbled into the room with a decanter and glass.

"Three *Pater Nosters*, young man, and I won't damn your soul to hell for making me wait," he said, slapping the lad on the shoulder. He grabbed the decanter and waved the glass away. Opening it he took a long drink. "Tastes as good as it does when it's blood," he declared, chuckling at Carlotta's reproachful look.

"So," he said, wiping his mouth with the sleeve of his cassock. "To what do I owe the pleasure of a visit to My Lady's chamber?"

"The pleasure of seeing an old lady pass from the earth," the Electess said, lying back on the bed.

The priest snorted. "God isn't quite ready for you yet, Anna Marie," he said, swigging at the wine. "You're as healthy as I am."

"Which of my servant girls can I confirm that with?" she asked, narrowing her eyes.

Father Joacha roared with laughter. "Ah, take your pick." He turned to Carlotta. "Who have we here?"

"Carlotta. From the Caucasus. Recently arrived, I think."

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He eyed her up and down before giving a quite noticeable wink. Carlotta stiffened and turned to busy herself with something on the other side of the room.

“Joacha, I have a favor to ask of you.”

“Here? Now?”

The Electess almost smiled. “Such a dry wit. No, Joacha, I need an old friend for this one. Some worm of a lawyer has written a will in my name stipulating that all the treasures of the Medici—the palaces, the art, the sculpture—will pass to the Lorrainers but remain within Florence when I die, that the Lorrainers are not to take them away. Of course you and I know they will take what they please, and that the other jackals of Europe will do nothing except sniff around for scraps the Lorrainers miss.”

Joacha pointed with the decanter out the window toward the unseen encampments in the hills above the city. “They wait even now. Five hundred years of Medici rule in Tuscany will come to an end when you pass, Anna Marie. Glorious indeed.”

“Just so. But do you know, Joacha, that the true treasure of the Medici will not pass to them. Carlotta, you may go.”

Carlotta left the room, closing the door and standing outside, making softer and softer footfall sounds. She knelt down to listen.

Chapter 1

Florence, Italy

“Espressos?”

The clerk behind the counter was mid-fifties and balding. A large paunch protruded through the white apron on which he eagerly wiped his hands.

“No, grazie. Are you Signore Santini?” Deputy Inspector Antonio Ferrara asked. When the clerk nodded nervously the police officer continued.

“I’m Deputy Inspector Antonio Ferrara and this is Detective Giancarlo Cordone,” he said, indicating his companion. “You called about a building complaint?”

Behind Antonio the bell over the front door jangled. He heard laughter and voices, in English, with British accents. The clerk searched anxiously over Antonio’s shoulder.

The officer smiled. “Business is business,” he said. “We can wait.”

The two police officers moved off to the side as the tourists, two couples, ordered Espressos and cakes.

The tiny shop was crammed with baked goods piled on shelves and unopened boxes stacked in the aisles. From where he stood at the counter, Antonio could smell the pungent odor of imported coffee blends. On the other side of the plate glass window the sidewalk was mostly deserted.

“Strange place for a coffee shop,” Giancarlo whispered.

Antonio grunted and ducked his head as he moved through a low archway into the other half of the shop. It was the same size but crowded with six round tables covered with red and white tablecloths.

“He must do a lunch business,” Giancarlo said, picking up a plasticized menu and turning it over in his hands. “I wonder if the food is any good.”

“They’re trying to invigorate this part of town,” Antonio said absently. “Get more tourists over to this side of the river. They concentrate too much in the Historic District around the Palazzo and the Uffizi.”

He moved to the window along the sidewalk and pushed aside the curtain. Over in the Historic District, north of the Arno, early morning tourists would be crowding the streets and shops. But here...

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“Are you going to Scannelli’s Christmas party tomorrow at that new place, Club Lavate?” Giancarlo asked. “It’d be a good place for your retirement party.”

In front of the shop on the *Via Antonio del Pollaiolo*, the one-way morning traffic was starting to abate. In another hour the avenue, like the adjacent sidewalk, would be almost deserted.

“I can’t,” Antonio answered. “Paulo is bringing his fiancée to meet the family. And I told you, no party. It’s not retirement when you’re 32 years old; it’s called quitting.”

“I thought your brother was already married,” Giancarlo said.

“He was.”

Giancarlo grunted. “That’s too bad. Rico was planning on you playing guitar again. You were the life of the party last year.”

“Only because everyone was drunk,” Antonio quipped, “and mistakenly believed I could play well.”

“And drunk they’ll be again this year,” Giancarlo continued. “But you are too modest. You have real talent, Antonio. You have to be the best guitar-playing *poliziotti* in all of Italy.”

“And,” Giancarlo added mischievously, lowering his voice, “the girls from Dispatch will be there again. You missed an opportunity last year, my friend. I mean, look at you, tall, with that dark skin and black hair the women love so much now. You could have gone home with any one of them.”

Antonio laughed. “Yes, and after a few months when it ended badly no doubt faced an administrative complaint. It isn’t right to date a subordinate. Tempting, perhaps, but not right.”

Giancarlo shook his head. “You are too choosey. That new girl, Rosalita, is going. She went to university and I hear spends her spare time reading books. She might be the one for you.”

“I fear that my type may not have yet been born,” Antonio said, scanning the far side of the avenue.

Although he laughed as he spoke, Antonio feared it might be the truth. He often felt out of place, torn between two worlds. There was the world of the station house, and the social obligation to sit around Republic Square after hours raucously drinking and laughing, recounting the day’s events in that us-versus-the-world mentality of his fellow officers. And there was his private world of music, and the occasional stroll through a quiet art gallery on an off-day to view an exhibit by an unknown who had grabbed his attention.

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And what woman could possibly share both lives with him? he wondered with a pang. Lola had perhaps come the closest, but in the end she had inclined too much toward the ribald and not enough to the *galleria*. It was a realization he had come to long before the relationship's official end. However, he had put off acting upon it because, he realized with a jolt months after its demise, he had no other options and just didn't want to be alone.

Should he have tried harder, or made more concessions? Lola had been dark complexioned, like him, with long hair that always covered half her face, lending her an air of seductive mystery. He was acutely aware that she turned the heads of his fellow officers who nodded and winked behind his back. Yet although he suspected that their actions secretly pleased Lola, they did nothing for him. And, most difficult of all, she had been his father's favorite. "Regal," the elder Ferrara had called her.

"So, Boss," Giancarlo said, tossing the menu back onto the table, "you think Sevigna believes a zoning violation really needs two detectives? Or was he trying to get rid of us since the auditors were stopping in from Rome?"

Antonio grinned and let the curtain fall back into place. In the other room the bell jangled as the four British left. Antonio watched them walk past the window. "They must have got lost," he mused.

The shopkeeper stepped into the room. "Sorry about that," he said.

Giancarlo straightened up and adjusted his tie. "What can we do for you, Signore Santini?"

The shopkeeper moved to the window and gestured outside.

"It's the building across the avenue," he began.

Behind Santini, Giancarlo raised his eyebrows at Antonio as if to say, "I told you so."

Antonio ignored him and looked directly at the shopkeeper.

"And...?"

"I've been here six months," the shopkeeper said, turning to Antonio. "When I rented this shop I was told it was being renovated as an art gallery. I thought that was wonderful. A gallery would certainly bring more tourists over this way."

"And they'd need coffee," Giancarlo quipped, straight-faced.

Antonio continued to ignore his companion. "And, so?" he asked.

The shopkeeper gestured again. "Look at it. That was six months ago. The building is still boarded up. The truck comes and goes but nothing ever happens."

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Antonio looked behind the man to the clock on the rear wall. It still wasn't 9:00. If he finished early enough he and Giancarlo could get back and begin poring through the box of bad checks that cluttered his desk.

"Perhaps the owner ran out of money to finish the reconstruction," Giancarlo suggested.

The shopkeeper shook his head. "With a madman on the loose one can never be too careful. All these people who have been kidnapped..."

Giancarlo reached into his jacket and removed a notepad. He flipped through a few pages and began scribbling.

The shopkeeper shook his head again and turned back to Antonio. "There are still comings and goings. Every day the slants go in and go out. They park their truck at the loading dock but nothing ever gets fixed."

Giancarlo stopped scribbling and lowered his notebook. "Slants?" he asked.

The shopkeeper turned, red-faced, and quickly held up both hands, palms outward. "I am not a racist. I know we need the Japanese tourists."

"What truck?" Antonio asked evenly. "What kind?"

The shopkeeper shrugged. "A big silver one. With no writing on the side. Who delivers anything in Florence without advertising on the side of their truck?"

The bell in the other room jangled again. The clerk's eyes darted wistfully to the archway.

"Go," Antonio said. "Take care of the customers."

The shopkeeper gratefully headed back to the front room.

"What do you think, Boss?" Giancarlo asked when the shopkeeper had disappeared.

Antonio cringed. He never liked the term "Boss" when Giancarlo used it, even if only in jest. He had only been on the *Polizia di Stato* eight years and was ten years Giancarlo's junior. He knew Giancarlo meant no disrespect by the term, but still . . .

"There were suspicious Asians seen outside of Perini's building a few hours before he disappeared," Antonio said.

Giancarlo nodded. "In a truck, wasn't it?"

"Yes. And isn't there a report of a Chinese man knocking on doors around the time that the Valpraisi woman disappeared?"

Giancarlo nodded again. "A silver truck was seen but no one linked it up with the Chinaman. You think we have our killer across from this coffee shop, Boss?"

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Antonio turned back to the window. The building the shopkeeper had indicated was a three-story gray stone structure. To its left was an open grove where another building had probably been torn down. The space gave a clear line of sight to the edge of the rear loading dock, which stood empty. If there were a silver truck there now it was at the far corner, out of sight, or tucked into the parking lot behind a second row of buildings.

“What do you think?” Antonio asked.

Giancarlo returned the notebook to his pocket and shook his head. “I’d say drug lair. Or maybe meth lab. The windows in front are boarded up, and look at the metal chimney that runs up the side near the rear. Would anyone put an art gallery here?”

Antonio shrugged. “My grandfather used to call this part of the city the *Dilladdarno*-beyond the Arno. Most of the better galleries are located on the other side near the Historic District to entice the tourists. Over here there is only the Pallatina. There wouldn’t be much competition,” he said, looking up and down the avenue. “Let’s take a walk.”

Antonio pushed open the glass door to the café section and stepped onto the sidewalk. He focused straight ahead but his eyes searched the far edge of the avenue. He stuffed his hands in his pockets in a practiced air of nonchalance, lowered his head, and dodged the one-way traffic as he crossed, Giancarlo at his side.

At the near edge of the grove Antonio glanced around, as if confused, and then walked to the rear of the gray stone building.

“Did you see the windows?” he asked, nodding upward, when Giancarlo stepped up next to him.

The detective shook his head.

“Tinted,” Antonio said. “Heavy. Top to bottom. You can’t see in.”

“It’s supposed to be an art gallery,” the detective offered. “Wouldn’t they tint the windows to keep the light off the paintings?”

Antonio nodded. “To keep them from fading, absolutely. But you want natural light in a gallery. The windows on this back side face north. You never tint windows on the north side of a gallery.”

“How do you . . .?” Giancarlo began to ask. “Oh yes, of course, your father.”

Antonio stepped up onto the loading dock. There were two rear entrances to the building. Heavy iron double doors stood in the middle of the dock. At the far left, away from the grove, a windowless wooden door was secured by a lone deadbolt.

Antonio rattled the iron doors. Giancarlo moved to the left and studied the wooden one.

“You still thinking meth lab?” Antonio asked as he joined him.

“Or crack house,” Giancarlo answered. “I don’t think serial killers have a headquarters. Although, with the disappearances, no bodies have been found.”

Giancarlo pushed gently against the wooden door. It moved only about a quarter of a centimeter. He looked around, and grabbed a piece of tapered rebar lying on the dock. He tried to wedge it in between the door and the frame, but couldn’t get the tip past the edge.

“I don’t think we have a magistrate’s entrance authorization,” Antonio protested as he turned and studied the row of storage buildings that faced the rear of the loading dock. He carefully positioned himself behind Giancarlo and folded his arms, keeping watch over the alley and the rear buildings while shielding his partner from view.

Giancarlo pulled out his wallet and extracted a thin piece of twisted metal. He inserted it into the deadbolt and within seconds the door swung open.

Antonio turned at the sound of the rusty hinge.

“Oh look,” Giancarlo said in mock surprise, “it’s wide open. We should secure the building.”

Giancarlo stepped through and Antonio followed. There was no light fixture. Antonio let his eyes adjust. To his right was a small storage area just inside the double iron doors. Directly ahead of him, a set of iron steps ran up against the outside wall of the building.

Antonio pointed to the right, then turned and began creeping up the stairs. Heavily tinted windows on the west wall of the building allowed only dim filtered light. Giancarlo nodded and moved off to the right.

At the top Antonio paused. The stairway opened on to a labyrinth of inter-connected office rooms. The floor was caked in dust. Abandoned office furniture littered the rooms. The space was a long way from being a gallery.

Antonio stepped straight ahead and quietly tugged open the drawers of a black metal desk. Finding nothing inside, he turned his attention back to the stairwell. A set of matching stairs rose to the third floor. Antonio began moving up. This stairway turned back at a landing and Antonio cautiously zigzagged to the third floor.

At the top step he walked out onto a clean vinyl-covered surface. In the corner a tattered couch faced a card table on which was propped a

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television. A newer looking refrigerator stood against the side wall. Antonio could hear its low hum.

Directly ahead was a wall covered with heavy rubber mats that stretched from floor to ceiling. They looked like the aerobic mats at his gym. In the middle of the wall a doorway opened into a dark interior. He could make out nothing beyond the doorframe.

Antonio stepped toward the opening and peered in. The room was windowless and dark. He instinctively reached for a light switch but could not feel one. He pushed the door open wider.

In the far corner a long platform lay close to the floor. He stepped inside the room and approached cautiously. He had left his flashlight in the unmarked Alpha Romeo *Civetta* behind the coffee shop.

It was a bed, or maybe just a cot, and on it was . . .

He moved closer, stopping a meter from the cot. The woman's right arm was extended over her head, back toward the wall. In the dim light her face appeared bluish.

He moved to her side and put his right hand to her neck. No pulse. With his left he raised her free arm. Rigor mortis had set in, and had not yet left. She had only been dead a few hours, probably not yet a whole day, and certainly not two.

From the hallway he heard Giancarlo moving about.

"In here!" he called out.

She was fully clothed. Her lips were darker blue, and twisted. Antonio studied the chain that ran from her right wrist to an eyebolt secured to the wall behind her head. There was not enough slack to have allowed her to move to any of the other walls, and certainly not enough to have let her reach the door.

He had been in death rooms before and was surprised at the lack of smell. There was no waste bucket. Whoever had done this had moved her back and forth to a bathroom, probably located somewhere on the third floor.

"It's a homicide," he said when he heard Giancarlo behind him. He turned to the doorway.

A dark figure with a red kerchief tied around his neck stood motionless in the doorway, silhouetted by the dim light from behind. His face was turned. His right arm, extended toward Antonio, held a semi-automatic pistol.

Antonio straightened up.

"Who are you?" Antonio demanded.

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The man stiffened his arm. Antonio knew he should dive to his left or right, reach for his own Beretta under his left armpit, do anything, but he froze.

A silly way to end a mediocre police career, he thought absently. He heard the shot and felt a warm mist spray his cheek and lips as the man pitched forward, blood spurting from a gaping wound in his face. The man twisted to his left and fell motionless to the floor as a dark stain, brown in the dim light, spread from under his head across the vinyl. His left eye remained open, staring up sightlessly. He was Asian.

Giancarlo stepped into the room, still clutching his own Beretta in his left hand. He kneeled quickly at the prostrate figure and placed his pistol to the man's ear as he felt for a pulse on the man's neck. After a moment he looked up at Antonio and shook his head.

"Are you okay?" Giancarlo asked as he stood up.

Antonio swallowed and nodded. He still hadn't moved from where he stood.

Giancarlo stepped over to him and softened his tone. "It's okay," he said. "It's okay."

Giancarlo looked down at the body on the bed behind Antonio and crossed himself.

"Holy Mother of God, what is this?"

Chapter 2

“Why didn’t you call for uniformed assistance?”

It was not a question; it was an accusation. Fiorello Sevigna sat on the corner of his cramped desk and hunched forward, glaring at Giancarlo Cordone and Antonio Ferrara who sat opposite in metal chairs. It was especially bothersome for Antonio, who always had difficulty finding a suitable position for his lanky frame. Sevigna’s office chairs were especially uncomfortable, and Antonio assumed that was purposeful.

Like the chairs, Sevigna’s office was too small, even by station house standards. Its one extravagance was the Italian flag that stood in a floor stand in the corner behind the desk. As a Chief Inspector and Antonio’s immediate supervisor, Sevigna was certainly deserving of more spacious accommodations. But in the eight years Antonio had been a policeman in his home town of Florence, Sevigna had retained the small corner room with the two green office chairs that faced the slightly unbalanced desk.

“Why would we, Chief Inspector?” Giancarlo answered blandly. “You sent us to check on a building code violation, remember? A restoration project may have run over the time allowed by the City Permit. Are we to request assistance on such a call?”

Sevigna slapped his hand on his desk and stood up. He stepped to the side. The desk too was small, but Sevigna kept his files and envelopes all squared to the edges and corners. Antonio wondered how a man who did not care that his desk tilted on three legs could be so meticulous, no, compulsive, in how he arranged his desk clutter.

“It was not a building code violation,” Sevigna wheezed. “Two people are dead. A suspect is dead by you, Detective.

“You know, we are not the military police, the jack-booted *Carabinieri*,” Sevigna continued, his eyes narrowing in distaste, “marching around in blue jumpsuits and berets, chasing the Red Brigades, the New Rightists, the Arab Terrorists, or the latest international spectre haunting Italy. We are merely the *Polizia di Stato*, the civilian national police force that humbly combats the more mundane crimes like burglaries, thefts and homicides. The press will ask questions.”

Giancarlo nodded. “Yes, and if he were not dead by me then Deputy Inspector Ferrara would be dead. Or I might be. I think they would ask more questions then, don’t you think?”

Sevigna continued to glare. “If you thought it was just a code case why did you break into the building?”

It was a question Antonio had been dreading. The crime scene technicians had arrived quickly at the warehouse together with Deputy Inspector Verdone, only minutes ahead of Sevigna himself who had assigned Verdone to handle the scene and take control of the investigation. Antonio and Giancarlo hadn’t had time to talk together as they had been whisked back to Sevigna’s office in separate *Panteras*, sirens wailing. He hadn’t been alone with Giancarlo prior to this meeting.

Giancarlo shifted slightly in his chair. “Break in?” he asked with what Antonio recognized as feigned confusion. Giancarlo turned to look in astonishment at Antonio.

“Did he say ‘break in?’” Giancarlo repeated and turned back to Sevigna. “The door was ajar. There was no vehicle. We thought the site was empty and wanted to secure it before thieves could enter.”

Antonio breathed an inward sigh of relief. Giancarlo was good, he had to give him that. His lack of university education was not hurting him here.

Giancarlo waved his hands around. “We heard it was going to be an art gallery. We wanted to stop anyone from taking paintings that may have already been delivered.”

Sevigna leaned forward, his face inches from the detective’s. “Open? You are full of shit, Detective Cordone. You think I do not know about your special talents? I know what tool you keep in your wallet.”

Giancarlo blanched. Don’t overdo it, Antonio thought.

“Chief Inspector,” Giancarlo started, “surely you don’t imply. . .”

Giancarlo reached back and wrenched his wallet from the rear of his pants. Shaking it open he held it in front of Sevigna.

“Chief Inspector, look, the only tools I keep here are two condoms. One for Sophia tonight and one for my wife some time this month or next. I don’t know what else you are talking about.” Giancarlo extended the wallet to Sevigna who ignored it, instead continuing to glare at the detective.

“And the crime scene squad, they will not find a lock pick in that building, Detective?” Sevigna snarled.

Giancarlo shrugged and relaxed back in his chair. “Search me. The place is so cluttered I would not be surprised at what they find. But I can assure you, Chief Inspector, none will be found with my fingerprints.”

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Sevigna moved back to the rear of his desk and sat. He placed his hands flat in front of him and drummed his fingers on the wooden top between two stacks of evenly spaced files.

Antonio shifted uncomfortably. He had suspected when he entered the room that Sevigna would direct the hard questions to Giancarlo. Sevigna would consider Giancarlo, a man without formal higher education, who had entered police work after a stint as a paratrooper, as the easier prey. To his left, Giancarlo remained motionless.

“Why did you two separate in the building?” Sevigna asked calmly. “Standard police procedure would require-”

Giancarlo shook his head. “Separate? We never separated, Chief Inspector.”

“Don’t lie!” Sevigna bellowed. “The suspect was standing between you two holding a Glock when you fired. You had obviously separated.”

Antonio swallowed hard and started to speak but Giancarlo cut him off. “Chief Inspector, after Deputy Inspector Ferrara found the body he immediately took charge and sent me down to call for assistance. I was on the stairs when I heard the Deputy Inspector talking to the suspect, trying to talk sense into him. I crept back up and arrived just as the suspect was about to shoot Deputy Inspector Ferrara. I fired, and saved the Deputy Inspector’s life.”

Sevigna leaned back and stared at Giancarlo for what seemed like an eternity.

Perhaps Sevigna should have suspected that Giancarlo would easily handle his questions, Antonio reasoned. Despite his lack of formal higher education Giancarlo had ten more hardened years of police experience than Antonio. In many ways Antonio was almost embarrassed that at age 32, after only eight years of police experience and no military background, he had already risen to the rank of Deputy Inspector, while at 43 with 18 years experience Giancarlo was still only a detective.

If Giancarlo bore any resentment he hid it well. Despite Giancarlo’s slower rise through the ranks, Antonio considered him in many ways more qualified for police work. A full head shorter than Antonio, Giancarlo was thick with muscle below his military haircut, a testament to his daily regimen of free weights. He might not be from the same social circles, but there was no one Antonio would have preferred to have with him that morning.

With a start, he realized Sevigna wasn't picking on Giancarlo because he thought him intellectually easier. He was deferring to Antonio's social background. Well, his father's anyway. Antonio reddened.

As if sensing Antonio's realization the Chief Inspector shifted his attention.

"Why did you send Cordone here to make the call? Why not use your radio?" Sevigna demanded.

It was again Giancarlo who answered. "Chief Inspector, there was a homicide of a beautiful woman. The press would have monitored the radio transmission and arrived before the crime scene squad. To preserve the scene, Deputy Inspector Ferrara realized that a telephone call should be made instead. And I had mistakenly left my cell in the squad car."

Sevigna had not taken his eyes off Antonio. "Do you agree with this, Deputy Inspector?" Sevigna asked evenly.

Antonio nodded and cleared his throat. "Absolutely. It is as Detective Cordone has said. Exactly."

Antonio held his supervisor's gaze without blinking.

Finally, Sevigna turned away. "Okay, then," he said. "That's your story. Go write it up. I'll have more questions after I see your reports."

He waved his hands at the door. "You may go."

Giancarlo and Antonio stood and turned to the door when Sevigna interrupted them.

"Oh," Sevigna added. "In case you have not thought this through you both realize that we now have a dead serial killer. We have a prominent young woman as his last victim, the first body that has been discovered. The press will be active. They'll be here from Rome and Milan. If that is your story make sure that you both write it up correctly, and stick to it."

"So then, it was indeed Zarah Costanza?" Antonio asked in a hoarse voice. The uniformed officer in whose car he had ridden back with had mentioned the name. "You have a positive?"

Sevigna nodded. "Zarah Costanza-Conigli. She is married, you know. Her mother identified the body. We're still waiting for dental records."

"What about the gunman?" Giancarlo asked. "Do you know who it is?"

Sevigna curled his lip. He didn't look at the detective immediately and for a moment Antonio thought he was not going to answer.

"There's not much left to identify, Detective," Sevigna said, slowly turning to Cordone. "You made sure of that. He had no identification on him."

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“He was Asian,” Antonio said. “Like the ones seen when Federico Perini disappeared. Maybe Vietnamese.”

“One,” Sevigna corrected. “There was only one Asian seen at Perini’s. This man was Korean.”

“I thought you said he had no identification,” Antonio argued.

“Detective Tretta said that some of his clothes bore a DPK of Korea label.”

“But how does that make him-?”

“-Korean?” Sevigna finished. “You think North Korean clothing is so well tailored that other Asians covet it?”

“Korean?” Giancarlo asked. “How did a North Korean come to Florence to commit serial killings for two years and dispose of bodies so that none were found, and have no papers on him? He has to have a partner, no?”

“There were two Asians seen the day Perini disappeared,” Antonio pressed. “Dig out the reports, I remember them.”

Sevigna turned back to him. “Do you know many psycho-sexual rapists who work in pairs?” Sevigna scoffed. “There was only one. The witnesses in the Perini neighborhood got it wrong.”

“What about the truck?” Antonio asked. “The shopkeeper saw it several times. Have we found it?”

Sevigna sighed. “It’s not your case, Deputy Inspector.”

“I interviewed Zarah Costanza’s mother ten days ago.”

Sevigna shrugged. “Everybody interviewed somebody. It still isn’t your case, Deputy Inspector. Maybe if your friend here had taken the gunman alive instead of blowing his face off we’d have been able to find out more.”

“Oh sure,” Giancarlo barked. “Maybe I should have let him shoot Antonio, then wrestled this Korean to the ground, like on American TV.”

“Was she brutalized?” Antonio asked quietly. “I didn’t see any marks on her.”

Sevigna shrugged. “I don’t know. I asked for the preliminary report from the coroner’s office.”

“Preliminary report?” Antonio asked, confused. “You mean the autopsy?”

“There will be no autopsy,” Sevigna said. “The body is being released. Forthwith.”

Antonio was stunned. “No autopsy?” he sputtered. “How will they determine cause of death?”

Sevigna scoffed and then laughed out loud. “For what? There will be no trial now, remember?”

Sevigna softened his tone and waved his hand. “The Costanzas are Jewish. They have to bury within a day, or something like that. Also, they can’t have their bodies desecrated. As an accommodation, as soon as the dental records arrive we are to release the body. We do not want to offend anybody, certainly not one of Florence’s most prominent bankers.”

He pointed to the door. “Go write your reports. And someone from Central Precincts Counseling Services will be in touch with you,” he added, curling his lip, “if you need such a thing.”

Giancarlo tugged open the door and the pair walked into the hallway at the top of an expansive stairway that dropped straight to the lobby. Giancarlo closed the door behind him. Antonio was grateful that the *Polizia’s* Internal Affairs Unit from Rome did not routinely investigate police shootings-only allegations of bribery or corruption. Their questions would have been much harsher than Sevigna’s. Only if Antonio’s supervisor suspected something nefarious would Internal Affairs have been brought in for an investigation. And, unlike with many other police departments in the European Union, there would be no mandatory leave for him and Giancarlo pending its outcome.

Below, the public bustled to and from the main desk. Through the adjacent window Antonio could see two white news vans parked on the street, their satellite dishes tilting skyward.

“Even the damn Frog news is here,” Giancarlo scoffed. “There must be no crime in Paris.”

Antonio looked out the window and shifted uncomfortably.

“Thank you,” Antonio said without looking at his companion. “Let me say thank you.”

Giancarlo snickered. “For what? You just have to know how to handle the grizzled one. He wants to make sure there is consistency in what we write.”

On the street, technicians were setting up portable lights and running sound checks while a television reporter checked her makeup in a compact mirror.

“That’s not what I meant,” Antonio said without turning. “In the warehouse, when he pointed the gun, I . . .”

Giancarlo clapped him on the shoulder. “Don’t,” he said. “There was nothing you could do. You were trapped.”

“And I did nothing,” Antonio said simply, still staring at the trucks.

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“Come on Boss, let’s get out of here,” Giancarlo said, and began descending the stairs. “We’ll go see that Department counselor and she’ll give us each a week off, maybe two. I’ve done it before, I know her. If you want, why don’t we drive to Turin. I know a couple of real good looking hook-”

Half way down Antonio stopped and grabbed the detective’s arm. Directly below, by herself, a woman in a blue tailored suit and expensive pumps shuffled toward the front door, head bent. When she reached the door she paused, her hand on the release bar.

“You go on,” Antonio said. “I need to talk to her.”

Giancarlo followed his partner’s gaze, and then looked back up and smiled.

“You know her? Perhaps a little old for you Antonio, but a looker, nonetheless. Sometimes it is these older women . . .”

Antonio squeezed his partner’s arm. “I know this woman. I interviewed her ten days ago.”

He left Giancarlo and went to the woman’s side.

“Signora Costanza,” he said to her. There was no way they should have let her wander back into the lobby by herself. Someone should have driven her home. But, still, on a day like today, with everything . . .

The woman turned, a tight smile protruding from pencil lips.

“Inspector Ferrara, I heard that you were there, that you were the one who found my Zarah. I was hoping to see you just now, to talk to you.”

Outside, the television reporter began moving up the steps, a large handheld microphone in front of her, leading two cameramen and a tangle of wires that snaked back to the van.

“Come this way,” Antonio said, turning her gently with his arm. “We can go through the basement.”

He guided Signora Costanza to the side of the lobby and down another stairway. Opposite the bottom of the stairs a set of doors led into a cafeteria, empty at this hour.

Signora Constanza followed without protest. He sat her at a table at the rear with her back to the door, and then sat beside her facing the front counter.

“You have already spoken with the investigators upstairs?” Antonio asked softly.

The woman nodded and opened her purse. Her lower lip trembled as she fumbled through it.

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Antonio recognized the symptoms and, reaching into her pocketbook, grabbed a pack of cigarettes. He shook one out and offered it to her.

She did not hesitate before taking it.

“Grazie,” she said. She put the cigarette into her mouth and waited.

Antonio smiled to himself and pulled out her lighter. “Allow me,” he offered.

She neither protested nor thanked him. A woman used to having cigarettes lit for her, he thought as he flicked the lighter.

A woman stepped from behind the counter and began approaching menacingly. Antonio waved her off. The cafeteria attendant hesitated, and then pointed angrily over Antonio’s head. He turned and spotted the no-smoking sign behind him. He turned back to the Signora.

“You recognized me,” Antonio began kindly.

The woman took a deep puff and exhaled past Antonio without looking at him.

“I knew you when you came to the house after, after...” she began.

“You and that short fat fellow, your intern, what was his name, Mario? I knew who you were. I know who your father is.”

Antonio nodded. “Of course.” Everyone knew who his father was.

“I didn’t know that Alberto Ferrara’s son was a police officer,” she added.

Antonio studied the woman’s face but discerned neither criticism nor condescension.

“But children do what they want, don’t they, Inspector?” she asked.

“*Deputy* Inspector,” he corrected instinctively. He added a smile. “I’m not that high up.”

Signora Constanza blew a long trail of smoke and watched it waft away.

“Did she suffer, *Deputy* Inspector?” she asked at last.

It was the second question of the day Antonio had been dreading. “I don’t know,” he answered simply.

The woman nodded. “You are honest. I would expect nothing less from the son of Alberto Ferrara. Upstairs,” she jerked her head toward the ceiling, “they assured me that she did not suffer, but we don’t know, do we?”

“They also told me that she had been dead not long, maybe even only a few hours. Is that true?”

Antonio swallowed. “Yes, it is true. A few hours only, maybe a bit more.”

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When she turned and looked at him wordlessly he felt compelled to explain. "Rigor mortis-it sets in just a few hours. It will leave a body after perhaps 36 hours. She was still in rigor mortis." Damn, did she really need to know that? he asked himself reproachfully.

If she were fazed by the information her features did not reveal it. She merely nodded.

"I knew it," she said. "A mother knows. When you came to the house I told you she was still alive. I knew it. And in these past days I knew she was alive. A warehouse, if only..."

She shrugged. "I never go to that part of town."

Antonio took a deep breath and plunged in. "Signora, I know you've been over this. I know how difficult this is for you. When we first spoke you said you had no idea who could have done this, who would have had a motive for taking your daughter. But today, the man, it will be on the news anyway, they think he may have been a Korean. Did your daughter have anything to do with any Koreans that you know of? Friends, enemies, social acquaintances?"

Signora Constanza turned and looked blankly at him. She slowly shook her head.

"Why, Deputy Inspector, do you suspect more? Upstairs they told me that it was just a random killer, that he was the one who had been taking the others, ten others over the last two years, and now he is dead. Soon they will have him identified."

"Where she shopped, clubs, gymnasiums, spas, anything, do you know any of them that had Asian employees?" Antonio pressed. "Someone she may have mentioned to you, someone who made her nervous or uncomfortable, a bartender or waiter or parking lot attendant who stared at her, anything?"

The woman paused before shaking her head. "Zarah did not go to spas or country clubs. For the past two years all she had been trying to do was start a family with her husband. They spent most of their time this last year at doctors' offices, and clinics. So no, she never mentioned anyone like that."

Antonio leaned back and nodded.

"We are quiet people," she continued. "I am from Naples. My husband's family is from here. I've lived here 35 years now since marrying."

She reached over and impetuously stamped out her cigarette on the table. There was no ashtray. "Thirty-five years and I still feel like an

outsider. Zarah was my only daughter, and I wanted so much to have a grandchild. I thought that, maybe, if I could have a grandchild . . .”

Her voice trailed off.

Behind her a man burst through the doors into the cafeteria. Antonio turned to look at him. He was in his late fifties, with unkempt black hair and wild eyes. His striped shirt was open at the collar and his sleeves were rolled up. Antonio noted the Rolex on his left wrist. He started moving toward them.

Press, Antonio thought instinctively as he stood to block the intruder.

Signora Constanza also stood and touched Antonio’s arm. “This is my brother, Deputy Inspector,” she said. “He has come from Naples. He is going to take me home for a few days.”

Antonio offered his hand but the man held it only briefly before turning to his sister.

“Leora,” he said. “I came at once. They told me at the desk you had left but someone else said that they had seen you come downstairs. I told you. I always told you.”

“Told you?” Antonio asked, bewildered.

Signora Constanza turned back to him. “Please pay my brother no mind. He is upset, Inspector.”

“I told you 35 years ago not to marry the Medici, that no good would ever come of it.”

Antonio was confused. “Medici?” he asked.

Signora Constanza waved her hand. “A legend, Deputy Inspector.”

She held out her hand. Antonio took it.

“I’m glad it was you who found her. My little girl, my hope, is gone. But at least now we can lay her to rest,” she said, and with that, she leaned on her brother as he escorted her from the room.

Chapter 3

Antonio Ferrara spent the next day at work filling out forms, attending briefings, making calls about bad checks, and initialing reports. He avoided eye contact with his fellow officers, and only saw Giancarlo once-when the detective pressed into his hand a scrap of paper with the name of the department counselor on it.

“Here is the ticket,” Giancarlo had whispered conspiratorially, “for our week off in Turin.”

Giancarlo had winked. Antonio took the scrap without protest and shoved it into his pocket. All day long he found himself fingering it, but never pulled it out to check the name.

At 16:00 he threw on a light brown leather jacket and trudged along the hallway past Sevigna’s office, still lit, and down the stairs and out of the lobby. The news vans were gone, off to chase some other human tragedy, he mused. At the bottom of the entry stairs Antonio turned left and began walking along the *Largo Fermi Enrico*. He had driven to work that morning but on impulse decided to leave his Fiat in the lot between the building’s two wings and walk the three kilometers.

It was still warm for mid-December and shoppers were out in force. He hadn’t even begun his own Christmas shopping. If it were just him he would buy nothing, but his nephews would eagerly await their presents from *Tio Anthony*.

It was the type of night he loved-cool and rainy, where the hum of the streets was as melancholy as the finest jazz. Antonio had enjoyed his year as an exchange student at NYU in America for the opportunity to sample a different music club every night.

Music was a vacation from his mind. With other *poliziotti* it was drink, family or immersion. Wine was a fact of life, of course, as it should be, and a good sambuca was always a fine way to top off a meal or an evening, but that was enough. He had no immediate family of his own, and he wondered if that explained why he remained so close to his father and brothers.

What a week, he mused, for Paulo to be bringing his fiancée home, the daughter of a gallery owner in Verona. She would wonder what kind of family she was marrying into, future brother-in-law on the news, a man

dead. Antonio had already met her, and knew that Paulo could have done worse—in fact had done worse, but first marriages were for practice, right?

What would he get his nephews for Christmas? he wondered as he zipped his jacket tighter. Maybe he should have driven after all. Funny, Christmas was to celebrate the birth of the Savior yet an Asian man was dead and he hadn't been able to save anyone, not the Korean, not the Costanza woman, not even himself when faced with the Glock. Why hadn't he dived behind the cot, or lunged at the man? What was the line from The Beatles song, Eleanor Rigby? "No one was saved." Well, no one was saved yesterday. Maybe music did hold the answer. Charles Mingus or The Clash, Saint-Saens or John Lee Hooker, Bob Dylan or Yanni, each a different country with its own landscapes and charms, and none of it required a tour of ongoing cases. With music, part of his brain could work in peace, humming away in the subconscious, making connections and observations where such work was always done best.

What had the Signora said? "A mother knows." Did the Blessed Mother know her only child would be murdered on the cross? Did Signora Costanza know that? Did other *poliziotti* wonder that? Would others freeze when confronted by a Glock? Is that why so many plunged into daily family distractions or a bottle of Chianti—to let the subconscious do its work? Some had enforced off hours. He knew one detective who played video games for hours on end, another who watched old spaghetti Westerns, one after the other, until he fell asleep in front of the television.

But for Antonio it was a state-of-the-art sound system and an electric bass he'd had since university. Put on a CD or record—vinyl records were best for the quality of sound that really filled a room. He still had his important jazz albums on vinyl. It wouldn't occur to him to buy an Ornette Coleman or Jaco Pastorius CD; he'd as soon take a woman to McDonald's for dinner.

That was it. A glass of wine, music on the sound system, Antonio sitting on the sill of the large window of his apartment overlooking the piazza, fingers running up and down the bass fret board, tapping and plucking strings...more than one crime in Florence had been solved that way.

But not tonight, he thought as he turned up the walk to his father's apartment and rang the bell. No, tonight he'd be trying to explain the difference between the news accounts and as much of the reality as he could. There could be worse evenings, God knows, but not many.

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“It's The Gifted One!” Antonio heard his father boom out along the hallway of the apartment when the new servant let him in. She was in her late forties, with graying hair pulled back into the same bun she always wore. Although she had been with his father for almost a year Antonio struggled to recall her name.

“Hello Papa,” Antonio said, kissing him. As he did every time he entered the apartment for the last 22 years, he crossed to the mantle above the fireplace and kissed his mother's picture and the yellowed Mass Card with draped rosary beads that had been propped there since he was ten years old. He lingered at the faded photograph in the gilt frame, studying the features. Like him, she had been dark, with the same green eyes, dark curly hair, and thick eyebrows that distinguished him from his older and lighter skinned brothers. Was that why his father showered him with preferential treatment?

He glanced at his father sitting erect in his favorite high-backed wooden chair. His father was studying him with that same expression Antonio had never been able to fathom. Antonio wondered if he had lost any weight since the last time he had visited him a month earlier. The white cardigan that matched the remaining hair on the side of his head made it impossible to tell. Alberto Ferrara's doctor had been chiding him to lose just five kilos to help control his sugar. Antonio reached out and touched the Mass card before proceeding to the middle of the room.

“*Tio, Tio!*” the nephews screamed in unison as they rushed to him. One carried a toy AK-47, the other pantomimed a machine gun with both arms-American gangster style. “Tell us how you shot the Gook. Was he a spy?”

The boys' father's sharp command from the next room stopped them both. Crestfallen, they turned away.

Antonio forced a laugh. “I didn't shoot anyone,” he said, hoping his smile appeared genuine. His two oldest brothers entered the room trailed by the wife and the fiancée respectively.

“It was my partner,” he said, just as the third oldest of the four brothers, Silvio, decked out in full frock, entered the room. Antonio caught his eye momentarily before turning away to his nephews. “Don't believe the news.”

“We were so worried,” his sister-in-law said, “when we heard it was you.”

“It was not me,” he corrected. “I was only there.”

Knowing he had to eventually anyway, and given their expectant looks, Antonio filled them in on the bare details of the day before. Halfway through the discourse the new housekeeper brought him the sambuca in a

small brandy snifter. She remembered the three coffee beans. He smiled appreciatively. As he prattled on he thought he caught a look between her and his father. Something there? he wondered as she withdrew.

When he was finished his cursory explanation it was his oldest brother, Giovanni, who spoke first.

"I know the Costanza family," he announced. "Good people. They have dealt honorably with our family for several generations. It is a shame that such a thing has to happen to them."

"Generations?" Antonio asked. He turned to his father who had remained silent throughout his story.

"Did you know the family well?" he asked.

His father nodded. "Florentine society is not that large. I knew this girl's father, Abramo Costanza. And my father knew his father, Leo Costanza, during the war."

The elder Ferrara waved his hands. "My father always told me the stories."

"What stories?" Antonio asked, leaning forward and putting down the empty glass of sambuca. To his right Antonio noticed that Paulo was also listening intently.

His father shrugged. "It was all during the war, when the Nazis occupied our land. As you know, the Costanzas are Jewish. Now there is resentment against them for what happened, even their own people are jealous and say things."

"Well, Papa!" Paulo boomed, "don't leave us all hanging. If my Rosa is to marry into a mystery please tell us."

"People are anti-Semitic," Alberto Ferrara said. "And so they talk. They tell stories where there are none. During the war Leo Costanza did not leave when the Germans came and he was never rounded up and deported. Two hundred forty-three Florentine Jews were rounded up and deported including their rabbi, Rabbi Cassuto, but not Leo Costanza. Foolish people here later said that Leo Costanza had bribed his way out of it with some secret treasure only the Costanzas knew about. You see, with the Jews, people always want to believe corrupt money."

"I understand anti-Semitism," Father Silvio said quietly. "We all have to struggle against it. But how did he avoid deportation if there were no treasure?"

"How?" Alberto Ferrara asked, beginning to beam. "I'll tell you how. For over a year Leo Costanza went to Mass every day and acted like the

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Pope himself. And in the end he even married Maria Petrocelli, right there in the *Basilica di Santa Croce!*”

With that laughter erupted around the room. The housekeeper brought in more sambuca. Antonio watched as Rosa grabbed the first glass from the platter and half-chugged it. Someone made a comment that Maria Petrocelli must have had big breasts and then more laughter spilled forth.

“Excuse me,” Antonio said as he stood and wended his way out through the kitchen to the rear garden, deserting the humor behind him. It was not as cool in the protected garden as on the walk over but still, standing with no coat, Antonio felt the deep chill. He leaned against the wrought iron railing and gazed into the adjacent yard.

“It looked much bigger when we were small, eh Antonio?”

Antonio had not heard Father Silvio come up behind him.

“Yes, but the world was also smaller,” Antonio answered without turning back.

Silvio joined him at the fence and placed his own hands atop the wrought iron.

“I sense there are thoughts you did not say in there, about what happened,” Silvio said.

Of course Silvio was right. Antonio knew it to be useless to pretend otherwise. “Yes,” he said simply, “guilt.”

There! Hearing himself speak the word shocked Antonio, not because he dared admit his feelings so quickly to Silvio—he had long been too close to his brother not to, even before Silvio had joined the Church—but rather because he had finally identified what had been churning within for the past 24 hours.

“Ahh, of course,” Silvio was saying, “but you also know that you could have done nothing to prevent the girl’s death.”

Antonio snickered. “And is the role of a good priest simply to remind, rather than inform?”

When his brother did not answer Antonio continued. “She told me she knew Zarah was alive,” he said. “I should have listened to her more closely.”

“And what would you have done differently?” Silvio asked.

“It’s not just that,” Antonio said, “it’s...well, had I taken Signora Costanza’s intuitions more seriously, who knows? I am so lousy interviewing family, I wish I had your touch, your knowledge of people, your-”

“Stop it, Tony! You’re wallowing.”

Antonio smiled. "Yes, I know I've been wallowing in the what-ifs, obsessing over details. It's what makes one a good policeman, of course, but it's not easy to live with outside office hours."

"It also makes you a natural-born appraiser as well," Alberto said, entering the courtyard from the house behind the pair. "Plus, you don't get shot at." The elder Ferrara seated himself at the garden table behind them.

Silvio winked at Antonio. "So then what's the fun of it? As a policeman our Tony gets to obsess over details, plus get shot at. The only danger in the art business is fending off the collectors' daughters."

"If he avoids those as well as he avoids bullets, true," his father said.

Antonio turned around. "How's Giovanni doing?" he asked abruptly.

Alberto shrugged. "He works hard. He is good. He does as well as he can with the business side and will be ready to take that over from me when the time comes. But when you come back as our gifted appraiser we will have no worries."

"Larghetti isn't working out?" Antonio asked, ignoring the overture.

Another shrug. "Larghetti isn't a bad employee. But he's not gifted."

Antonio turned back to the fence and rolled his eyes so that only Silvio could see. "Gifted...okay, so I can tell a few things about art. I can look at a painting and see things that are plain, really, evident for anyone with two eyes. One eye would suffice. What's so special about that?"

They'd had this talk before-too many times. "You're right," his father would say, "others can see what you see. But only one in a million can know what they mean. No, not even that. One in a million can *feel* what they mean."

"I have been thinking," Antonio said. "After what happened yesterday this might not be a good time for me to leave the *Polizia*."

Antonio paused, waiting for his father to speak, but behind him there was only silence.

"I have no head for business," Antonio continued, "as I've told you over and over. No desire to spend my days traveling around Europe doing something so, well, easy, something that is no challenge, that, frankly, bores me."

"That's what Giovanni's for," his father said. "He's the businessman. You do the art side of things. Giovanni can do the rest."

"Did what happen in the building change something?" his father asked. "I thought you had already put in your paperwork and were leaving the end of January."

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It mystified Antonio why nobody else could seem to find what he could in art. It was so plain, so...there. Yet it was almost a physical joy for his father to watch him appraise art, to see his eyes drink in a painting and miss nothing of texture, color or composition, to see his mouth twitch at things nobody else even noticed, and then to hear him explain why this painting was worth something other than what Giovanni would have said.

Antonio could still remember the day, the painting, the client, when Alberto had realized that Antonio was the Picasso of art appreciation. Alberto had trembled, and had to sit down, knowing his son was effortlessly able to do what he only dreamed of doing after twenty-nine years of work. Maybe Andre Agassi's father felt this way when he watched his son hit a tennis ball with that one-in-a-billion court vision.

"What happened in the building, as you phrased it, was a shooting. A woman had been murdered and a man killed," Antonio explained, continuing to lean over the fence. "If I left now it might appear to others that I was leaving because I lost my nerve.

"I have already spoken with Personnel in Rome," Antonio said with finality as he turned back to his father, "and withdrawn my resignation. It was early enough that I could still do it. Some additional minor papers need be filled out, that is all."

"So, you have decided," his father said quietly.

"I have."

Alberto sighed. "I had thought you had resolved the other way. If you would come back to the business you could get a much nicer apartment than the one you have on Purgatorio Street. I even told Benito to get my old Lamborghini out of storage and back on the road for you. It would fit the image of an art appraiser very well. You like it?"

Despite the tension of the moment Antonio smiled. "That would be a bad trade, my badge for the Miura P-400. Just when I would need my police credentials most, pulled over on the *Autostrada*, I would not have them."

"I'm not saying that working for the *Polizia di Stato* is wasting your gift," Alberto said, ignoring his son's humor, "I mean, it is a respectable profession, and you are not working for art forgers or con-men where you could be making thousands more euros, being one of the *poliziotti* isn't wasting your talent but..." Alberto allowed his voice to trail off.

"It's cold," Antonio said, "let us go inside." Antonio turned and led the three of them back inside from the garden. This is what hurt him the most, disappointing his father. Antonio knew he was the favorite son, and suspected that his brothers knew it too. But he also knew that they accepted

that every parent has one and didn't hold it against him. Of all the brothers he looked the most like the picture draped in rosary beads on the fireplace mantle, and he assumed that he acted most like her as well.

Inside, the conversation had turned away from speculation about Maria Petrocelli's attractive features to the new pope, who Silvio admired. Eventually, the conversation lagged and Paulo helped Rosa to her feet and led her unsteadily to the door. Shortly thereafter, Giovanni left with his wife and children. Antonio looked at the evening's last glasses of wine and wondered whether after they all left the housekeeper would clear the table, or whether...

"Antonio," his father was saying, "you know I admire your choice of profession. It has been good for you. I see more seriousness, maturity in you. I am proud of you, Son."

Alberto gave a quick nod to Silvio who did not respond. "I am proud of all my sons, no matter what path they have chosen. But do you plan to stay in the police force until retirement?"

Antonio shifted in his seat. "Hard to say, Papa. I enjoy my work. There's nothing I'd rather be doing."

"Of course. And you're good at it, I know. But the shooting, the danger..."

"Yesterday was the first time I've been around live fire, Papa. Many police go for their entire careers and never hear shots fired in anger. I think yesterday I hit my quota."

"Yes, I know the police are not as dangerous as the movies and television would have you think, but still, you might be looking for a quieter profession some day."

"Yes, Silvio and I have been talking about that; he can recommend a good seminary."

Silvio nodded solemnly, and put a hand on Antonio's arm. Antonio tried to keep a straight face. But when his father looked stunned Antonio had to laugh.

Alberto Ferrara flushed. "I know you don't like an old man nagging you, Tony. I don't mean to nag. I just hate seeing gifts go unused, you know. And I would love to have the family working together. But please," he said, putting up his hands in the gesture of warding off all possible misunderstanding.

"Yes, Papa. When I no longer want to catch bad guys you'll be the first to know."

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“Ah, you're a good man, Antonio; I'm a proud father. You know that. Just keep the business an option. That's all I'm asking.”

“Yes, Papa.”

Silvio stood up. “Come on, Antonio, I'll give you a ride home.” Antonio got unsteadily to his feet.

On the ride home Silvio told Antonio that he didn't sound good. “Even Papa's offer to put the Lamborghini back on the road didn't seem to jolly you,” he teased.

Antonio snorted. “At least he didn't say that I had to bow down and adore him in order to get it.”

It was Silvio's turn to laugh. “Come now, Papa is not evil. But I don't think your decision to stay in police work is for the reasons you stated. When have you ever cared what others thought of your decisions? At times your whole life appears to have been motivated by some desire to break with expectations.”

Antonio slouched back in his seat and turned to study his brother. The effects of the sambuca still warmed him. Silvio gripped the wheel with both hands, staring soberly ahead, as he guided the car toward Antonio's apartment. For a brief moment Antonio was tempted to ask Silvio to stay the night. He would make up the guest bed after vanquishing the dirty laundry and scattered case file remnants, and they would lie on their backs and talk, like they had those so many summers ago at the stone vacation cottage in Capo Corvo where they shared a room.

“I know, this case, it's over now,” was all Antonio said.

“I'm not so sure, Tony,” Silvio said softly. “I think you may need to do something. This one's different.”

Dong-Min squinted through the crooked boards nailed across the window, and wondered if the freighter had arrived in the harbor. There was nothing else to do. The Arab still hadn't arrived with their evening meal. There was a television tuned to a French station, but he didn't speak the language. One of his fellow soldiers did, and told the others that the two faces on the news were those of the murderers. Dong-Min studied their features intently.

It was boring hiding in this cramped, dusty storage building. It was also uncomfortable keeping latex gloves on constantly, especially when he left to use the waste bucket in the level below. Captain Ryu had insisted on the

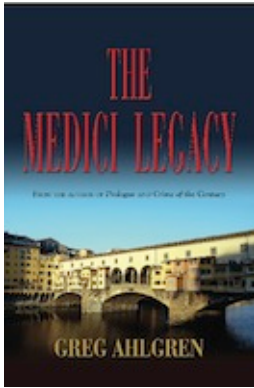
Greg Ahlgren

gloves-he didn't want to waste time wiping down the hiding space when it came time to leave-and Dong-Min respected Captain Ryu.

When the Arab arrived with the food-chicken again-he spoke to Captain Ryu excitedly in his own native tongue. Dong-Min did not speak the Arab's language, but did not need to. The freighter was there.

The Arab leaned over and placed the chicken on a wooden crate. Captain Ryu picked up the bottle of liquor he had insisted the Arab bring and, holding it up by its neck, read the label. As the Arab turned to leave, Captain Ryu swung the bottle down suddenly onto the right side of his head, splitting open his temple. Captain Ryu dropped the bottle, grabbed the man by his jaw in mid-stride, and jerked his head violently to the right, snapping his neck. The captain let go, allowing the body to fall naturally, and then reached over and undid the Arab's pants, roughly jerking them down to his knees. Striding quickly to a corner, the captain grabbed a vinyl tarpaulin and then gently covered the body where it fell, blood still oozing from the head gash. The tarpaulin would not hide the body forever. The foreign police would eventually find it, but seeing the body covered and the pants down they would quickly conclude that he had been the victim of a crime of passion by a sexual intimate who cared deeply about him. The covering would be interpreted as a sign of remorse.

Dong-Min was glad that the crate had not been knocked over. He reached for a wing and began munching.



When Antonio Ferrara of the Italian Polizia di Stato discovers that the seemingly random victims of a Tuscan serial killer are all illegitimate descendants of one Giovanni de Medici, a 15th century Florentine banker, his superior scoffs at his theory while the Italian military police caution him to leave the case alone on the basis of "national security." Undeterred, Antonio enlists Medici scholar Rachel Fuller and, together, they travel to America to unlock the secret.

The Medici Legacy

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