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Author	Mariolina Venezia
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PROPOSAL

The city of Matera was appointed European Capital of Culture 2019, and publishing these “literary noir” crime novels set in the ancient town which became famous after Mel Gibson made it his location for the film *Passion*, is more than timely.

Mariolina Venezia was born and brought up in Basilicata, last represented in literature by Carlo Levi’s *Christ Stopped at Eboli* (1945). Things have changed a lot since then, and Venezia claims her prosecutor protagonist, District Attorney Imma Tataranni, is a metaphor for the region - it is not beautiful in any traditional sense but bewitches you with its hidden qualities.

The character of Basilicata's answer to Calamity Jane, Imma Tataranni, is currently enjoying huge success (a 23.3% share of prime time with over 5 million viewers) in Season 1 of a TV series based on the first three books. The co-production between Rai Fiction and ITV Movie has announced Season 2 is in the pipeline.



Starring Vanessa Scalera and Alessio Lapice, the stories and the backdrop of memorable characters is reminiscent of Tataranni's enormously popular Sicilian male counterpart, *Montalbano*. The fact that the protagonist is a strong, intelligent woman, however, satisfyingly challenges common stereotypes regarding Italy.

The novels can be read individually or as a series. Each case that Tataranni and Calogiuri, her *Carabiniere* "partner", tackle sheds a fascinating light – aided by Venezia's tragicomic approach - on many of aspects of contemporary society in southern Italy. Taken together, aside from witnessing the strong characters and their inter-relationships develop and unfold, they provide a refreshingly original fresco of Italian life today.

THE FOUR NOVELS

Middle-aged, vertically challenged, perennially fighting the belly bulge – **Imma Tataranni** is no sex symbol. But her intuition, formidable memory, and intelligence – as well as her 5" heels and brightly coloured hair dye – are put to good use in her investigations, and she has no qualms in flirting with the dashing *Carabiniere*, Calogiuri, several years younger than herself. Caustic, determined, incurably optimistic, Imma is by nature incapable of small talk, and tackles problems at home – her unruly teenage daughter, a leaking tap - with the same unnuanced, results-oriented approach she adopts when investigating domestic violence or an unsolved murder. "As implacable as a cuckoo clock", Venezia writes.

1. In the first novel, ***Like Plants Among Rocks***, Imma struggles to solve the case of a young man who has been stabbed to death. In addition to Imma's husband,

daughter and mother in law, the handsome *Carabiniere*, Calogiuri, is introduced, as are her chronically absentee assistant, Maria Moliterno, the obtuse police captain, La Macchia, and the irrepressible cultural heritage superintendent, Montemurro, who helps her in a secondary case of illegal trafficking in 7th century BC votive offerings from early Greek settlers in the region. The plants in the title that grow despite the rocky terrain of the region are a metaphor, again, of Imma's determination to survive and grow in her job, despite the aridity and imperviousness of those around her.

2. In the second novel, ***Bad Weather***, Spring has come late and it rains relentlessly – hence the title. Imma Tataranni has become more ruthless in her attempts to reconcile the various aspects of her life: the laundry, a surveillance operation, her daughter going through a crisis, Calogiuri, gourmet meals, and – vitally for the unfolding of the plot - a pathological liar, Lolita, who spins stories about corruption and people in power which nobody believes. During the election campaign for a new governor of the Region, when the girl mysteriously disappears, Imma wonders whether Lolita's stories could actually be some sort of decoy or setup. The investigation takes Imma to the Capital, where she searches for clues astride a Vespa - her Carabiniere friend driving – from the Coliseum to the dismantled film studios of Cinecittà, from Piazza di Spagna to the Italian Parliament, and then back again to Basilicata. The truth appears to lie in the past. The pumps gushing newly discovered crude oil in the Val d'Agri, and the badlands of Craco, where the town abandoned owing to subsidence is now a film set, cast a sinister light on the proceedings, and even Calogiuri comes under suspicion. Atavistic attitudes mingle with an awkward modernity. An old woman claims the 'evil eye' has been cast over the investigation, but this turns out to be shorthand for the moral corruption of political institutions and of the press, as well as the disenfranchised state of young people with no work and no future – all of which is reflected in the physical destruction of the environment and the landscape as drilling for the new gold takes precedence over every other consideration.
3. The ***Rione Serra Venerdì*** that gives the title to the third novel, was a suburb designed by town-planners where the inhabitants of the ancient "Sassi" were forced to move in the 1950s and where a contemporary of Tataranni's is found murdered, while a series of further troubling incidents begin to pile up on her desk. In the course

of her investigations, the public prosecutor delves deep into the region's distant past, and, in doing so, is forced to face up to some uncomfortable truths about herself. The spectacular dolomite rock formations of Lucania, and an increasingly invasive tourism in the old town of Matera, form the backdrop to Tataranni's journey of self-discovery. Meanwhile, her "partnership" with Calogiuri becomes more one of equals, threatening the carefully-crafted balance of her home life, just as her teenage daughter herself struggles with her own relationship issues.

4. In *The Path of Redemption*, the fourth and most recent book in the series, property speculation, under the pressure of the rising popularity (and property prices) of the ancient city of Matera, is the focus of the public prosecutor's inquiries. The body of a realtor, with one gunshot wound to the heart, is found in a room hung with paintings depicting the seven sins in the once splendid, but now decayed, Palazzo Sinagra, currently uninhabited and on the market. Tataranni and Calogiuri's investigations focus on the ancient "Sassi" district of Matera, in the buried cloisters and caves, and in the hidden folds of society, where so many secrets are harboured. Time appears to have stood still in this primeval, pulsating heart of the town, but contemporary values – greed for one - are beginning to impinge on, and threaten, traditional ways of life. Just as Tataranni's family is being threatened by the deepening attachment, and increasing demands, of her "partner".

MARIOLINA VENEZIA was born in Matera and lives in Rome. Her novel *Mille anni che sto qui* won the prestigious Premio Campiello in 2007 and has already been translated into 17 languages, including English ('Been Here a Thousand Years', Picador 2010). *Come piante tra i sassi*, the first instalment in the Imma Tataranni series, has been published in France by Robert Laffont.

To follow: a sample translation from the second novel, **Bad Weather**, Chapters 2, 3, 4, 9.

SAMPLE TRANSLATION FROM “BAD WEATHER”

Chapter Two

From the room next door, she could hear her assistant Diana chatting to the new police officer. Jessica, she thought she was called, had been sent a couple of months ago straight from her little village in Sicily. Imma Tataranni had seen her cat-walking in the corridors as if she had been practicing for Miss Italy. Diana had taken her under her wing and fed her coffee and home-made cake in her office.

That day, unusually, they were not badmouthing. They were talking in glowing terms about the new congressman, who was also a bestselling author and was running for Regional Governor. Martelli was his name. They shut up as soon as they saw their boss at the door, knowing full well that any mention of the man put her in a foul mood. Judging by her sour expression, there was no need to make things worse.

Without wasting time on niceties, Imma asked for the file on the Neica case and went back to her desk. As the near-miss pageant queen sashayed down the corridor, Diana placed the file on the only clear corner of her desk.

Just as she was leaving, her assistant turned back and said, “Yesterday someone was looking for you.” Diana handed her an envelope and went out without saying another word. Inside was a hand-written letter dated February 19, 2005. Yesterday.

Dear Dr. Tataranni, I am an admirer of yours. I've been following your career since you blocked the oil pipeline. I think the citizens of the Basilicata region need more people like you. People who are brave enough to call a spade a spade, and go against the powers that be. There are some things I need to tell you about the oil in our region. This is why I'm writing to you, the only person I can trust, the only person who will defend the rights of those of us nobody listens to. Sometimes good things hide bad things, and bad things hide even worse things. You'll see what I mean when we meet. I'll leave you my phone number and I'm confident you will call as soon as you can. You are my only hope, and not just mine.

A phone number and an indecipherable signature followed. The letter paper was headed Dr. Donata Miulli. Garaguso – Rome – Berlin – New York.

Imma stared at the tidy handwriting. The day was not starting out well. Well-wishers, threats, anonymous letters. Her life was hard. And anyway, she hadn't managed to prove a single thing on the oil pipeline case. She looked at the little red butterfly drawn in the top left-hand corner of the letter. Then she crumpled the note into a ball and took an aim for the wastepaper bin.

For the next two hours there was perfect silence. The only thing you could hear in the office was the endless rain pattering against the window.

Imma was looking at two witness statements that didn't tally on the Neica case – the murder of a Romanian farm worker – when Diana stuck her head around the door.

“Ma'am, there's ...”

Without lifting her eyes from the statements, Imma wagged her finger to say no.

She heard a struggle outside, a familiar voice.

She leaped up from her desk and rushed to the door, fast as a bullet. Diana stepped aside, and there was Corporal Calogiuri, bright red in the face, rocking awkwardly from one foot to the other.

“I didn't want to disturb...” he said, desolately.

“You're not disturbing Calogiuri...” she started saying, but the words died in her mouth. Her dirty dreams, the lottery numbers, her horoscope. All these came to mind and her face burned – as if Diana could actually see the *Carabiniere's* hands exploring her breasts in her dream.

But her assistant had already gone back to her office, though there were no guarantees she wasn't listening behind the door, or spying on them through the keyhole.

Calogiuri had just come down from Rome on the Marozzi night coach, which arrived in Matera at 7.30 a.m. On Monday, he was due to take the stand as a witness in a big trial against the Basilicata Mafia he had been involved in before leaving for his course, he told her.

“How come you came down today, then?”

“Since I'm here, I may as well turn up for duty, Ma'am.”

Had he come specially to see her? If that were the case, she wasn't going to let him leave straight away.

“Let’s go and get some coffee. But don’t make me angry, okay?”

Meaning she’ll pay. They understood each other perfectly.

They talked a bit about his course in Rome, the weather, the traffic, and a Basilicata Mafia suspect who had gone underground and whom they had been unable to find.

They hadn’t seen each other for six months, since he had left for the course that would make him a Major, on the 14.40 Marozzi coach after offering a round of Amaro Lucano to all his colleagues and thanking her in particular because, as he had said, without her he would never have gotten to where he was.

And why had she helped him get onto the course, she wondered? Why did she have to deprive herself of one of her best men, the only officer who didn’t open his mouth without thinking first, and who drove without making her feel sick? I suppose all those moms who send their kids off to college must feel the same, when all they get out of it is paying their fines.

After their coffee, Calogiuri walked Imma back to her office and for half an hour it felt as if he’d never left, as if this weren’t the rainiest winter for years, as if corruption didn’t exist, as if all mother-in-laws were extinct, as if cancer

But the time to take their leave soon came.

“If by any chance you come to Rome, Ma’am...” Calogiuri started, adding briskly, “... and need me for whatever reason...” He stopped mid-sentence, apologized for no apparent reason, and then left.

Please stay, Imma would have liked to say.

She stood watching his dashing figure as he strode down the corridor, which was lined with tins of dried paint left over from some wild impetus to restore the building of which these tins – and their empty coffers - were the only remaining trace.

A loud voice made her jump. “Where will we find another one like him, eh?” It was Diana.

“Hmm,” Imma muttered, without turning around. “Around here, an officer who keeps his mouth shut is impossible to find. We would need to order another one from the factory.”

A window slammed shut somewhere in the vicinity.

“I want all the witness statements from the laborers who worked on the farm where Neica was killed,” she said. “And while you’re at it, find those other documents that disappeared a couple of weeks ago. Remember?”

Diana nodded. She had asked for it after all.

Chapter Three

The chance to go to Rome soon presented itself, without her doing anything to make it happen. The circumstances were such, however, that Imma appreciated them as much as she would a trip to the dentist. Her brother-in-law had just been made head surgeon at the hospital where he’d been working for the past twenty years. The whole family, led by her mother-in-law, was going to Rome to celebrate.

Valentina refused flatly as soon as she heard. No way would she go; there’s far too much going on. She said she could stay at her friend Bea’s, even though her mother knew they’d cooled down since the beginning of middle school, though she wouldn’t admit it. Or she could stay home alone. She was old enough now.

Imma couldn’t bear listening to her daughter whining any longer, and was tempted to give in. If we organize things properly, maybe you can stay here. It was her husband Pietro, who was usually softer than her, who actually put his foot down. What would the grandparents say? And her aunt and uncle? They were so looking forward to celebrating together, and Valentina was the only grandchild and niece.

“Why didn’t they go and make themselves a nice big family if they liked it so much?”, Imma huffed to herself.

Her mother-in-law had already started discreetly inquiring into the outfit Imma was planning on wearing, and hinting at possible improvements. Imma had shut her up by saying it was going to be a surprise.

Imma was convinced that the other Romanian in preventive custody for the last few weeks had not been Neica’s killer. She had nothing in hand to prove it of course, except the name of the owner of the farm where the murder had taken place. Calculli...

She finally understood why the name kept ringing in her head. “Cal-cul-li, Cal-cul-li”: it had been that morning, while she had been waiting to speak to Valentina’s teachers at the parent-teacher conference. She’d missed the last one, and she really needed to be there this time. She also hoped to stop by the shoe shop on the way back to work. They were selling their whole stock at incredible discount prices.

It clicked, just as she was thumping the automatic dispenser to get her change for the bottle of mineral water she had just bought. Years before Calculli had been accused of harassing a laborer, but then the accusation had been withdrawn, and that had been that.

It won’t be easy to find the file now. Before court, where she was due to give her closing remarks, she decided to go to the archives and have a look herself, because she couldn’t trust the clerks to do it.

[...]

At the archives she heard the clerks gossiping and laughing among themselves. Maria Moliterni was chatting to two of them about Congressman Martelli, again. He’s such a good public speaker. And a real looker, too. Distinguished. Witty. Well-dressed. Jesus.

Imma slammed the door, to make it sound like the wind had done it. They shut up immediately. Thank God.

At the court house, she saw a young woman, standing right in front of her, and almost tripped over her she was so surprised.

“I haven’t introduced myself. My name is Dr. Miulli.”

Miulli, Miulli... the one whose letterhead boasted Garaguso, Barcelona and New York. Imma looked her up and down, took in her grey trouser suit, and had the vague impression she’d seen her somewhere before. She was really young. Twenty-two, or twenty-three? Nice looking, her hair a couple of shades more golden than was natural, her lips just full enough to make you suspect she had had them re-shaped. The first thing she brought to mind was a door-to-door robot-vacuum cleaner or insurance salesperson, but, on consideration, she looked more like a TV investigative journalist, one of those aggressive chroniclers with a smile printed on their face, reporting on gory murders, extreme sexual transgressions, and psychos on the loose.

She would have looked good on local television, that was for sure.

“I need to inform you about certain things. It’s urgent,” the young woman said.

“Come with me,” Imma said, impulsively.

Dr Miulli followed her with an air of suppressed triumph. When they got to her office, Imma opened the door and pointed to her desk, piled high with folders.

“This is what urgent means in my office,” she said, turning around and slamming the door shut.

“I have some serious revelations about a person you know,” the girl said, trying to attract her attention. “I’ve seen you together in a debate on television.”

Imma slowed down, imperceptibly.

“Congressman Martelli. I was his lover,” she managed to slip in, before Imma went back into the courtroom. “Being lovers is not a crime”, Imma said, lifting her eyes enough to take a glimpse of her, before shutting the door behind her.

Thank God she wasn’t there when she had finished. The D.A.’s office was teeming with pathological liars and perjurers. And Imma Tataranni – they’d better stick this in their little brains – was neither Joan of Arc nor Don Quixote. She had had enough.

Chapter Four

The woman was there again at Valentina’s school, the same school she herself had gone to years before. As Imma paced up and down the corridor waiting to talk to her daughter’s Italian teacher, Donata Miulli was again by her side.

“I want to know whether I can press charges against the person I told you about.”

The woman had followed her into the school. She couldn’t believe it.

Imma turned around, but the girl never gave up. She came up close so as not to be overheard.

“It’s not because we were lovers; it’s not that. Terrible things are about to happen. Dangerous things,” she whispered.

“What do you do in life?” Imma asked her eventually, as she stared at the teacher’s door, behind which she thought she heard laughter. Her daughter was being picked on at school, there was no other explanation. She was doing badly in History and even worse in Italian. How come last year they read out her essays in class they were so good? She couldn’t wait to give Valentina’s teacher a dressing down.

“I don’t really know where to start. I’m setting up a web TV channel, I’m a journalist, a photographer, a beautician, and swimming instructor.”

Practically nothing, that is.

“What has Martelli done to you?”

“To me?” she stuttered. “That’s not the point. I could accuse him of misappropriating funds, but I’m not interested in that.” She went bright red.

“Misappropriating funds?”

“I know what it means, don’t worry,” she said, brushing her hair back behind her ears. “He gave me a Breil watch, a Nokia mobile and a pair of Ray Bans, as well as the latest Sony Walkman. And then, he gave me a lift to the Marozzi coach station in his official car.”

The smell of dust and chalk hadn’t changed since her day.

The bell rang, and the students began to charge down the stairs, but the door behind which Valentina’s teacher was supposed to be receiving parents was still closed. If it had opened at that moment, she would have screamed at her and that would not have helped her daughter’s school career.

“He’s one of those men who take advantage of you, who pays you with compliments, he’s a hypocrite,” the photographer cum swimming-instructor was saying.

“So, you worked for him?”

“You could say I did.”

Who knows, maybe one day Valentina would set up a web-TV channel, become a journalist, or a beautician, or whatever else she may decide to do. It would be her mother’s fault, of course, for neglecting her while she wasted time taking up lost causes. Like the oil pipeline case. They all come back to haunt her.

Imma turned around, and strode down the corridor, gaining speed as students poured out of the classroom for recess, hyperactive and ready for the kill after hours of forced immobility. Her nerves were fraught. For her daughter's good, and for the family reputation, it was best to come back another time.

The woman followed her as she walked, head down, along via Nazionale. The shutters of the shoe store were half-closed. It took all she had to persuade the store assistant to serve her. Imma tried on a pair of shoes, with golden stiletto heels and a bright blue flower stuck on the strap, but they were too big for her. She ended up with an orange pair. There were certain people who would have something to say about how the orange would match the shocking pink outfit she was planning to wear in Rome, but this pair of shoes were 70% off. A bargain she couldn't resist.

"I'll start at the beginning," the woman said, marking her closely as they weaved between the people on the street and the cars. "We met in a strange place. It looked like we were in the middle of the countryside, but it was in Rome."

Her voice felt a little like an electric drill in her ear.

"I think it was Rome, anyway. At one point I think I saw an obelisk..."

At the traffic lights, Imma looked at her out of the corner of her eye. Unfortunately, this was enough to encourage the girl to go on.

"The interesting thing was who he was with."

Imma set off, as soon as the light changed.

"I'm talking about the oil concessions," the woman called out, catching up with her. "Martelli is about to announce that he's going to revoke them. If I tell you why, you'll see why I came to see you."

The streets were beginning to empty out, as usual at lunch time, when the last stores pulled down their shutters and the languorous smell of delicious cooking filled the air, until they opened again at five p.m. I wonder whether Pietro has put the water on to boil for the pasta, she thought.

Stopping abruptly, Imma snapped at the woman.

"Look, what do you want from me?"

She was nearly home and if the stalker found out where she lived, that was the end of her.

"If you want to press charges, you have to go to the *Carabinieri*."

Translation Proposal and Sample. Mariolina Venezia. The Imma Tataranni "Literary Noir" Crime Series 1-4 by Clarissa Botsford.

“You don’t believe me, do you?”

Imma glared at her.

“Do you watch too much TV or something?”

“Me?”

“I thought you were the one who wanted to live in Rome – Barcelona – New York?”

“Well, yes. With the Internet the world is at my fingertips, but in the meantime, I can enjoy the peace and quiet we have here.”

Peace and quiet. That’s a laugh.

“Do you like living like an old age pensioner, doing nothing?” Imma asked her.

“Leaving is not an option for me. It’s not the privilege they make us believe. It’s a scam.”

Imma looked askance at her.

“Can I give you some advice?”

The girl nodded enthusiastically.

“Go home, and have some lunch. It’s late.”

“I’m used to fighting. I’ve been struggling since the day I was born. Before contacting you, I got in touch with Paolicelli, the journalist. You must have heard of him.”

Imma remembered he had been attacked in the car-park near his house. The local television had turned the episode into a media frenzy. Petty crime had finally made it to Matera. They were over the moon.

“They intimidated that journalist so that he wouldn’t publish my revelations,” Miulli said, taking a deep breath. And then she played her trump card. “Fifteen months after that famous November in 2003, when the citizens of Basilicata managed to stop the nuclear waste being buried in Scanzano, the government still hasn’t come up with an alternative site. Now they want to revoke the oil concessions. In a year or two, they’ll be using the empty oil wells to bury nuclear waste illegally.”

Imma stared at the little butterfly earring the girl wore in her left ear.

“Did anyone suggest you came to me?”

She shook her head and tried her very last card. “What if I brought you some proof?”

Right.

“When you have all the proof you need, come to the D.A.’s office. You know where to find me. I need to go home and cook lunch now.”

“Ma’am, one last thing,” she implored, her hopes raised. “I read that things haven’t been easy for you either.”

“So?”

“Well, at least you have a chance to change things now. We can only do what we can.”

It was past two. If Pietro has gone ahead, the pasta will have turned into glue.

Chapter Five

In the old days, girls were either plain or nice, pretty or ugly, stunning or hideous. Nowadays, like apples, they all look the same. Their hair is dyed, their noses straight, their lips full, their breasts large, and their hips small. Some are better-endowed, by nature and by the hormones they have ingested all their life, starting with their baby food. Others take action, when neither nature nor hormones have helped them. The really unsightly girls, Imma thought wistfully, stay at home.

The young woman from Garaguso was a typical product of her age, and that was why, maybe, Imma kept thinking she’d caught sight of her in a queue at the post office or at the supermarket, in front of the D.A.’s Office or at the entrance to Valentina’s school. Every time she expected the girl to approach her and waste her time with her implausible stories and paranoid conviction that there were plots behind everything. Although Miulli had threatened to get in touch, however, there was no sign of her, and Imma managed to waste time in other ways.

“Has anyone been looking for me?” Imma asked her assistant, as she came into the office the day before she was due to leave for Rome. If she thought about all the things she still had to do, she’d tear her hair out.

“Yes, Ma’am. A journalist from the Gazette, about that accusation against him for absenteeism.”

“Right. Anything else?”

“Your friend from university, with the husband who’s an engineer...”

“Okay, okay,” Imma interrupted her.

The woman hadn’t come to see her. It was strange, because usually these people come out of the woodwork when there’s a deadline of some kind.

Vito Pertuso, a farm laborer, chose that very moment to come and confess what he knew about the murder of the Romanian. They had interrogated him for days to no avail. And now he’d decided to tell her it was the farmer who had killed his friend, because they had been arguing over wages. All the laborers had stood back and watched, and had done nothing to stop their boss.

[...]

Two hours later, when she had finished with the laborer, she set out for her hairdresser’s appointment, and prayed Maria would do a good job for once. She bumped into Diana in the corridor. A few days before - she had no idea why - she had asked her assistant to find out whatever she could about Congressman Martelli’s campaign for Governor. And there she was, following her down the corridor, waving his latest campaign speeches at her. Martelli, it seems, was intending to revoke the oil concessions, currently in the hands of the multinationals. Her assistant brandished a local newspaper, which had published an interview with the spokesperson for the oil companies, Mark Zachary.

“Mark Zachary?” Imma repeated.

“Yes, the very one.” Diana chased after her boss, reading out loud from the article. Zachary, it seemed, was accusing Martelli of wanting to plunge the Basilicata region back into the Middle Ages.

Imma was half way down the stairs, when she came to an abrupt halt.

What if the girl had been telling the truth?

Looking at the picture of Martelli and his wife in the glossy magazine at the hairdresser’s told you far more than one of those long-winded reports, full of spelling and grammar mistakes that she should really mark up in red ink - as if there were any point to doing so.

The first thing you noticed was that his wife was a good five years older than him, and that these years were visible, despite her assiduous application of sunlamps, night creams and designer sports' clothes. She was definitely a presence to be reckoned with. There was something in her gaze, a quality of her personality, that in men's personal ranking of preferences usually lies just below cellulite, stretch marks and halitosis. That is, a commanding attitude. She had worked hard to get her boyfriends, fiancés, lovers perhaps. But her father's position had certainly helped.

Martelli, on the other hand, was a good-looking man. Dark flowing hair, a touch of salt and pepper in his sideburns, high cheekbones, a strong nose, hazel-green eyes. And a slightly fatuous look, hinted at, not over-stated, an inane smile dancing on his well-shaped lips, which he hoped looked ironic – and which most people fell for.

The couple had been together since they had studied law together in Salerno. Martelli had been chronically behind in his course, graduating years after her, in a private institute where you can practically buy your degree. Mr. Tantalò can't have been that happy to have acquired a son-in-law quite like this one, but his daughter had been adamant.

The future son-in-law's only activity at the time had been writing a novel. What unemployed good-for-nothing does not dream of penning the novel of the century? Surprisingly, though, Martelli had completed the manuscript and, while it was not the novel of the century, people found it ironic. Like his smile. And that is how he first became successful. In the next two years, he churned out two more, and turned his life around.

As a famous author, Martelli had fought for noble causes, from women condemned to death by stoning, to the rights of racoons. There were no limits to his good causes: neither geography, nor species, nor age. The result was that his books were always on the best-seller list. People started to invite him to talk shows, asking his opinion on every possible subject. The trampoline was ready. It was time to launch himself into politics. With ready-made consensus.

“Shall we layer your hair a bit? What do you think?”

“What did we decide last time?”

Imma closed the magazine with the election special, and looked at herself reticently in the mirror.

“Layering is all the rage these days.”

“Just do what you like, but get on with it. The stores are closing, any minute.”

Filomena's grocery store was crowded. At the counter, behind a woman with blue hair rinse, there was a line of about five or six people, who were beginning to lose their patience.

The woman asked to try a piece of *provolone* cheese, then wrinkled her nose. Have you changed producer? The one you used to have was less sharp, and melted in your mouth like butter. She shook her head, inconsolably. Two hundred grams of *prosciutto*, slice it really thinly, Filomena, you know how I like it. As thin as a piece of parchment.!

"Of course, of course, we know how you like it. Have you tried the *ricotta* today? It's really special."

Filomena's husband came to help serve, otherwise they would all miss lunch.

"It's my turn," Imma called out, standing on tiptoe, so they could see her. And just as she was about to get served, she saw Miulli walk past the shop window. It looked just like her, at least, though she was dressed casually.

Imma rushed out of the shop, the surprised customers staring at her as she left, and started chasing her. In recent decades, women's average height had practically doubled, and the woman's legs were twice as long as hers. Imma ran as fast as she could, given that she had a pair of platform shoes which kept her feet rigid, but made her at least six inches taller. As she ran, she thought of a Greek poem she'd studied at school, "Now she runs away, but she'll soon pursue you; Gifts she now rejects - soon enough she'll give them." "So why did she always end up on the wrong side?" Imma wondered. At the first junction, she turned off the main road, and went down via Lucana. And there she was.

"What's going on?" said Imma, trying to catch her breath,

It was her. There was no doubt this time.

"Excuse me?" the young woman said.

She looked straight through Imma, as if she'd never seen her before.

"Weren't you supposed to come to the D.A.'s office?"

She didn't answer, at first.

"I decided it wasn't a good idea."

"How come?"

“You said you were very busy.”

“Well I was. What did you want to tell me about Martelli? And what about the oil story?”

“I made it all up.”

“What do you mean you made it up? I don’t get it.”

The girl looked like she was thinking.

“You know Andy Warhol?”

Imma shrugged.

“We all have a right to our fifteen minutes of fame. That’s all I wanted. I made a mistake. Sorry. I need to go now. I have a coach to catch.”

She walked off with an elegant stride, her long legs the result of an improved diet since her own day. Imma stood on the street and watched her disappear. She was puzzled. But then she decided to forget it. It was one less thing to think about. And she said it out loud, just to make sure the concept was clear.

She bought a string of cured sausages at Filomena’s, six sweet ones and six spicy ones. She also bought a spicy *salami* and a garlic sausage, two smoked cheeses and two plain ones. A plait of *mozzarella* and a kilo of *mozzarella* knots. A kilo of *ricotta* which was as creamy as Filomena had promised. Five kilos of Matera bread, made with hard durum wheat that lasts more than a week, even if you don’t put it in the freezer. Two white pizza breads, four packs of *taralli* bread rings, and three kilos of dried *friselle*.

At least for a while the in-laws wouldn’t die of hunger.

[...]

Chapter Nine

It was still raining. In the old days the peasant farmers in Matera never had enough rain to grow anything on their stony land. Now the San Giuliano damn was about to break its banks and the Bradano and Basento rivers were running faster than the Hudson or Ontario rivers Valentina had just finished studying in Geography.

For two weeks, there had been no let-up. It had just gone on raining. In the old days, maybe they had nothing else, but at least they had the sun. Where has that gone now? Whenever she spoke to her brother in Turin, and it was not that often she had to admit, he told her in that funny northern accent he had long since picked up, that the sun had been shining up there. Down here, she told him, there were clouds, grey skies. She couldn't admit to rain. That would have been too much for her pride.

"Any news?" Imma asked Diana as she went into the office.

"Yes, Ma'am. The heating's broken down again."

Imma took a long, deep breath and counted to ten.

"The girl who went missing. Have we heard anything about her?" Imma said, as she exhaled.

"You mean the girl from Garaguso?" Diana inquired, her face lighting up. "They were talking about her last night on TV. There was a special about her. They think some immigrant must be behind it all."

Nobody else was in yet, except a *Carabiniere* from Bergamo who had just been posted down South. Imma didn't trust him. As soon as he saw her, he would click his heels, salute and utter something that sounded like the drone of a bagpipe. Something like "GoodMorningDoctorTataranniCanIBeOf Service?" It reminded her of an article she had read at the hairdresser's. An expert explained how psychopaths always repeat the same actions or words, independently of their context, and are unable to pick up any signals from the people they are surrounded by. Since she had given him plenty of fairly explicit signals, and he hadn't taken a blind bit of notice, she couldn't help imagining, when she looked at him, that he had just chopped up a little girl or an old woman, and buried the pieces in the back garden of his semi-detached house.

"What do we know so far?"

Diana told her there had been no sign of Donata Miulli, apart from a few people who had reported to the local TV station they had seen her, but these witnesses were not considered reliable. The bad weather had damaged the Telecom tower, so they had not been able to trace her mobile. The mast was being fixed now. None of her friends in Rome knew anything. The rain had hampered the sniffer-dog search, because the land around the town was like a bog. They were holding off until the rain let up a bit. They were beginning to fear the worst, some immigrants had been seen hanging around...

Imma nodded, and refrained from commenting but, as she walked away from her assistant, she started thinking, and then she started getting angry. Years back, any crime was always blamed on those

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useless beggars from the South. Now it's the immigrants. A colored patch that would fix every problem.

The really dangerous ones - but people just don't want to accept it – are in the family. Fathers, grandfathers, brothers, uncles, cousins or sisters-in-law, not to mention daughters or grandchildren, wives or ex-husbands, mothers even. A veritable slaughter of the innocents. The media and the politicians go on ratcheting up our fear about Romanians and Albanians, pedophiles on the Web, and petty burglars at the Tobacconist's. Sunday lunch with your family, that's what you should be scared of.

What should she do now? Go to her boss, Vitali, and tell him she had met with the girl? He couldn't wait to catch her out, especially now he was up for promotion. From a procedural point of view, she had done nothing amiss. Best to wait. They were doing their best to find her, weren't they?

She tried concentrating on the things she needed to do urgently. What with stuff going on at home, and work piling up at the office, there was enough to send her to the nuthouse. As a welcome gift on their return from Rome, they had found water seepage in their bathroom, and an urgent housing committee meeting had been called. Her few days out of the office had produced new piles of papers on her desk, plus she had to get her closing remarks ready for court. She hunkered down to work, but every ten or fifteen minutes the door opened.

[...]

Diana had become more zealous than ever, and whatever Imma asked her for, she came back with ten times more than was needed. She would come into her room, or follow her down the corridor with it. She would even wait for her outside the bathroom. Today her assistant had gathered together all the news articles which mentioned Martelli. Why the hell had she ever asked her for them? She didn't have time now.

Martelli's father was a surveyor, it turned out, and he'd grown up in a suburb of Potenza. When he was a teenager, he was a member of Catholic Action.

"That Paolicelli, the journalist," Imma interrupted her. "I want to look over his case file again. De Falco has it I think."

"You mean the fight in the car-park? Shall I go and ask De Falco?"

"No way! You're friendly with his assistant, aren't you? Get it from her. And while you're at it, get hold of Paolicelli and get him to come into the D.A.'s office to see me."

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[...]

Imma asked the journalist whether he knew Donata Miulli. Paolicelli nodded, they had occasionally worked for the same newspaper. She asked him whether the girl had recently given him any information about a well-known person.

The man smiled and waved his hands eloquently.

“These kids nowadays. They live on the Internet, and they can’t tell fantasy from reality. If I were a managing editor, I wouldn’t trust them. But when a girl is as attractive as Donata...”

She couldn’t get anything else out of him.

Imma studied the witness statement given by Paolicelli’s neighbor, who had seen the aggression against the journalist. A modern-day version of Aesop’s *The Wolf and the Lamb*. She heard a knock at the door. It was Puddu, the Sardinian *Carabiniere* on duty.

“Ma’am, I’ve come to up-date you on the case you asked me to look into a few days ago.”

“Sorry?” Imma answered, as if she hadn’t understood a word he was saying, although she knew perfectly well what he was talking about.

“It’s about Donata Miulli. We’ve found her.”

“Thank goodness for that. Where was she?”

“In the badlands under Garaguso. The place is called *U ciend’l du chainchiaredd*, I can’t really pronounce it properly. It means the shepherd’s stool, or something like that.”

“I see.”

“She’s dead.”

“What do you mean she’s dead?”

“She threw herself off the cliff, or that’s what they say. They found her by tracing her mobile.”