

# Murder in the Red City

By Ethan Sansosti



## Part I: The Morning

“Did you see *Il Corriere* this morning? There was a third murder, this time at the train station,” I asked, looking past my cup of coffee to Professor Calvino.

He accepted his coffee from Andrea, who was behind the counter, and responded airily, “I did.”

“Well, what do you think? Are you not unnerved that there is a madman running through Bologna, murdering people at random?”

“There are a surprisingly few number of murders that occur at random, and this most certainly is not the work of one who murders indiscriminately. Three murders in three days would be too risky—even for the most calculated serial killer. No, there must be a clear motive for someone who has experience and resources.” Calvino responded kindly.

“So, you think it was someone rich?” I inquired.

“What do you think, Enzo?”

Professor Calvino often played this game with me. Antonio Calvino, one of the most respected minds at the University of Bologna, asking me, his young teaching assistant for my opinion on the matter. Sometimes it

seems that he is trying to teach me to approach questions like he does, sometimes I believe he is just looking for some semblance of discourse, even with a mind that is inferior to his own. I pondered his question for a moment.

There had been three murders in the last three days. I pulled a pen from my pocket and wrote on a paper napkin that I pulled from its holder on the bar.

*#1 - Businesswoman killed on Via Mascarella—shot three times*

*#2 - Shopkeeper found dead in the Fountain of Neptune in Piazza Maggiore—knife through the heart*

*#3 - Unknown man found dead in a bathroom at Bologna Centrale station—strangled and found with “invasor” written on his chest.*

“Was it a mafia killing? A woman shot, a man stabbed with a stiletto, and another man strangled to death. Sounds an awful lot like one of the mobs. Also, the mafia has a lot of cash to pull something off like this. Especially considering no witnesses have come forward.”

“Good guess.” I waited, knowing there is always more with Professor Calvino. “However, the mafia is usually not so tactile in their killing. If it was the mob who killed these three people, they would want someone to know. An organization like the mafia kills to keep their power in line. More blood on their hands is more respect to their name.”

We now walked out of the cafe, and stepped into the morning bustle of Via del Pratello. Professor Calvino offered me a cigarette, and we stood on the street smoking.

“So, you think there is some man among us, with a good bit of cash, running around Bologna killing innocent people, with some sick motive in mind?” I asked after a moment of cigarette smoke and cool December Bolognese air in my lungs.

“No one said the victims were innocent.” Professor Calvino responded evenly. “Further, these murders may not be the work of one man or woman, but perhaps a group of like-minded individuals, with one collective motive.”

I pondered this thought for a further moment, while a police car zipped past with its siren blaring. I watched Professor Calvino, as he observed the police car move past us with sort of fatigued sharpness. Professor Calvino was wearing his usual blue wool suit, with a grey scarf and grey top coat to protect against the morning December chill. His blue eyes sparkled behind his tortoise shell glasses, with a youthful curiosity that was not echoed by his lined face. His hair was neatly combed, full, and grey to match his coat. A handsome man of 65 years, Calvino had spent his whole life dedicated to academia. He and Valentina, his late wife of 40 years, had never had children, and they spent their days travelling and teaching. Calvino had long been established as one of the world’s greatest sociologists, writing numerous essays on society’s institutions, and how they essentially act with the same demeanor as an individual. He and Valentina met while teaching at the University of Bologna, and they often gave joint-guest lectures at the world’s greatest institutions. Valentina was a brilliant cultural anthropologist who passed away three years ago after a fight with cancer.

“The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places.” He told me after she passed. “But those that will not break it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these you can be sure it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry.” He quoted those lines from Hemingway with his usual curious twinkle behind his spectacles, but this time with a hint of sadness in those blue eyes.

Now, the Professor put out his cigarette and placed it into the nearest bin. We began our walk to the *Dipartimento di Storia Culture Civiltà*, where we held offices. My mind returned to the murders.

“So, do you think there will be another murder today?” I ask, trying to not sound too scared, or concerned.

“There is almost always another murder, but who is to say if it will be today.”

We continued walking, reaching our turn towards Piazza Santo Stefano. I was hoping my morning discussion with the Professor would calm my nerves about the murders, but his steady demeanor was causing me to become more scared. I felt cowardly in my fear for a moment, then allowed myself a moment to indulge my sense of alarm regarding the situation. After all, Bologna is a relatively small town—one where you would certainly not expect a string of violent murders. Growing up in Bologna, one is more concerned with the possibility of being blown up by one of the extreme political factions in the city. Politics don’t usually end with a strangled man in a train station lavatory.

As we started to turn off of Via Ugo Bassi towards Piazza Santo Stefano, another police car sped past the Professor and I. This unnerved me. Two police cars in one morning walk, the day after another murder in a string of carnage? Had they found the killer?

Professor Calvino must have sensed my anxiety, as he commented, “I agree, quite curious. If they had found the murders, I would have expected 10 or 12 vans full of *Carabinieri*, fully stocked for confrontation. However, as I am sure you saw, those were two detectives in that police vehicle that just passed us.”

“How do you know that they are detectives?”

“The make and model of their car. It is nearly 10 years old. If they were the type of police who would need to chase down a violent criminal at a moment’s notice, they would have a newer, faster, car.”

We kept walking towards our offices, and there seemed to be a mounting anxiety forming in the air. Maybe I was be fantastical, after all, the Professor had just planted a seed in my mind—there has been another murder. As we made our final turn through Piazza Santo Stefano and towards Piazza San Giovanni in Monte,

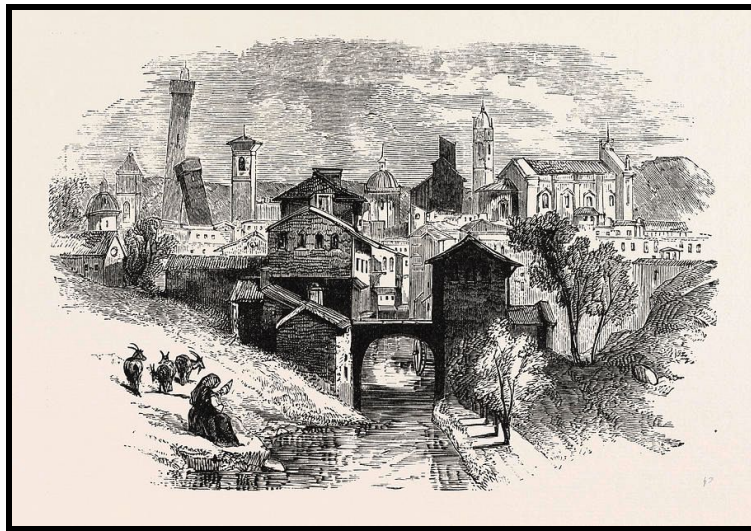
my heart leaped into my throat. There, in front of the normally quiet entrance to the *Dipartimento di Storia Culture Civiltà*, sat 3 police cars with their lights turned on, an ambulance, and three other official-looking police vehicles. I stopped walking in the middle of the street, unable to process the information before me. As I tried to continue to grasp the scene before my eyes, Professor Calvino continued to walk as if there was nothing unusual about the presence of the vehicles. He walked straight into the building, past two police officers whose expressions showed that their mind was still with the warm beds that they left behind on the chilly December morning. I hurried to catch up to him, drawing even with him on the steps up to the first floor classrooms and offices. As I had expected, the building was nearly deserted. Professor Calvino and I walked to work together nearly every morning—we lived in the same neighborhood—and we never arrived later than 7:30 AM. Most of the students and faculty would not arrive for another hour or two.

Reaching the first floor landing, the Professor continued straight down the main corridor, before making a decisive left towards a small alcove of offices. These 5 offices were reserved for a small part of the University's History department. I was not impressed with the Professor's ability to guide us to the scene of the crime thus far, for we only had to follow the sound of a few urgent voices, in a large building with few souls to fill it. However, I was impressed when Professor Calvino immediately asked one of the detectives in the corridor to show him the body of Dainotto.

Professor Dainotto was a good friend of Professor Calvino's, even though he taught in a different department. He had been at the University of Bologna for nearly two decades, but for the last ten years, he only spent the Summers at UniBo, guest lecturing and conducting research. For the remainder of the year, he was a professor at Duke University, in the United States. Given his absence from UniBo for the majority of the year, I did not know Professor Dainotto very well. However, Calvino always spoke highly of the man, and he was very kind during all of our limited encounters. It was certainly painful to realize that I was about to see his dead body.

Professor Calvino approached the chief inspector of the Bologna police, a man called Vincenti, who immediately made it known to his men that Calvino should be allowed through. The Professor often aided the police with consulting information on matters related to sociology, psychology, and theft of important historical artifacts. The Professor also gave me a look that told me that he wished for me to accompany him into Dainotto's office. I hesitated for a moment, collected myself, and then followed him through the door.

## Part II: The Note



Dainotto's office was very similar to my own, as it would have been to most followers of the humanities. It was large for the office of an academic: over four meters deep and three meters wide. All of the offices in this building of UniBo were like this, a product of the offices being expanded and used as cells for partisan prisoners when the Nazi's occupied Bologna during World War II. Sometimes, while working on research late into the night, I became terrified to think that my office was formerly used as a place of torture, pain, and suppression. Despite the large size of the office, the place was packed and cluttered with books of all types. Large volumes on the ancient trade routes of Mesopotamia, antiquated pamphlets on the obscure politics of leftist Poles, forgotten treatises on the potential application of weaponized electricity for naval warfare in the Indian Ocean. His desk

was littered with espresso cups from the nearby vending machine, miscellaneous papers, and half eaten sandwiches from a nearby cafe—it was clear that Dainotto was in the middle of some feverous research when he was interrupted. In front of his wooden desk, there had been a space cleared out on the rug that covered the hardwood floors. On that rug, laid the body of Professor Dainotto.

Although this was the first time I had seen a dead body outside of a funeral home, something immediately abandoned my expectations. Maybe it was because his body looked so much like the ones I had seen in a funeral home. His coat jacket was neatly on the leather chair behind his desk, and Dainotto was laid out, peacefully, with his slacks and shirt completely intact. He was on his back with his hands laid softly on his chest and stomach. His spectacles were not the least bit askew on his face, and he looked oddly like the bald, Italian, male version of Sleeping Beauty. To further add to the scene, it seemed that there was a carnation resting upon his chest, tucked under his left hand.

Professor Calvino was immediately at work, taking off his coat, surveying the room, and searching for clues. He walked over to Dainotto's desk, scanning the hectic composition of papers and books, taking notes in a small pocket notebook as he went. I noticed him quickly pickup a small piece of paper from the desk and place it into his jacket pocket—best to not ask questions about the paper with the police just outside of the door. The Professor moved next to his late friend's body, and bent down to examine him. Calvino produced a pair of leather gloves from inside his coat pocket, and after putting them on, moved Dainotto's head slightly from side to side, and quickly opened and closed his mouth, a seemingly brief examination of the man's body. Still perplexed by the unusual arrangement of the body, I asked, "Do you think the police straightened him out like this?"

"No, Enzo." He replied while moving his attention towards Dainotto's hands. "The police are not the most competent when it comes to the treatment of a crime scene, but they would never go as far completely rearranging the layout of a body."

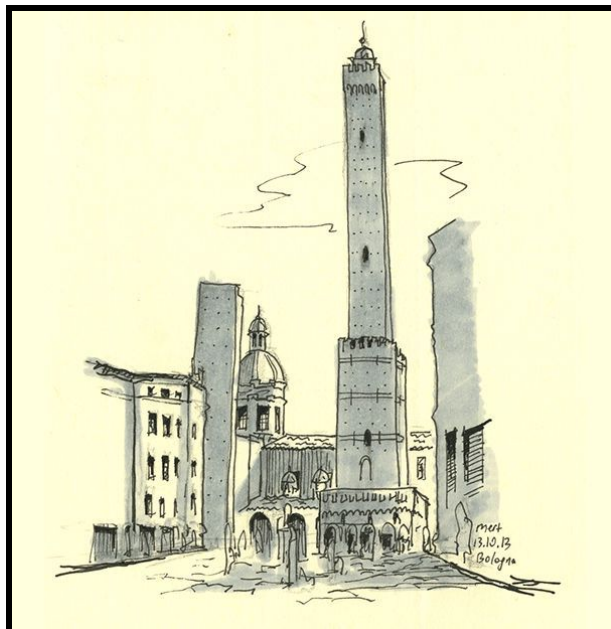
“So it was a suicide, then?”

“No, assuredly not. He has not been shot, and he did not hang himself. A man who kills himself with drugs or poison is far too incapacitated while nearing death to maintain the neat posture of this body. This is clearly murder.” Confirming my earlier observation, Calvino pulled a large red rose from under Dainotto’s left hand. He looked at it for only a moment, and then moved to his left hand. Moving the other hand revealed a small piece of yellowed parchment paper. With his gloved hands, Calvino slowly unfolded the piece of parchment. From behind Calvino’s eyes, I swore I saw a brief flash of something resembling excitement. Almost immediately, the sober, kind, eyes of a man who stood before his dead friend returned.

“Well? What is it?” I asked, failing in my attempts to be polite.

The Professor hesitated for a moment, before reading from the parchment, “*Morto per la libertà.*” Just then, Inspector Vincenti entered the room, and politely informed us that our time was up and we would need to leave.

### Part III: The Friend





“Died for liberty?” I asked Professor Calvino once we had moved beyond the now substantial gathering of people surrounding the entrance to the *Dipartimento di Storia Culture Civiltà*.

“Seemingly so.” Replied the Professor softly.

“I am sorry about Dainotto,” I offered my condolences gently. “I know he was a friend of yours, and he seemed like a wonderful man.”

“That he was.” Replied Calvino, locking eyes with me for the first time in nearly half an hour. I could feel his full attention suddenly drawn upon me. “He was a great man, one of the smartest and most compassionate that I ever knew.” He continued, “I feel that the police are out of their depth on this case. You have every right to go home and refuse my offer, but I would love for you to help me find out more about this case.”

I was shocked. “Are we amateur detectives now?” I asked bewildered. “Who decided to begin their careers tracking down some maniac who has killed four people?”

“This may be your first case, but it certainly is not mine.” He responded earnestly.

“Occasional consulting on a stolen medieval text palls in comparison to murder.”

“You’re right, it does. However, this is my dear friend. What’s more, I know how to solve crime, and I certainly know the way that humans think. The police do not stand a chance in finding the people responsible for this murder, and I believe we can provide honest assistance to their noble, yet lackluster, efforts.”

I contemplated his proposition for a moment. Although I was scared and a bit shocked from seeing a corpse, I did have to admit—there is a certain rush about being intimately involved with a murder investigation. Besides, it is not like I had kids, a wife, or really anyone to worry about when putting myself in danger. Maybe this excitement in my life could be good for me.

“Okay. I will help with the investigation.” I responded with a smile. “But if you start calling me Dr. Watson, I am going home.”

“Understandable.” Responded the Professor with a smile.

“So where do we start?” I asked the Professor, trying to mask some of my excitement.

He reached into his pocket and pulled out the piece of paper from the desk of Dainotto. “I think this is a good place.” On the piece of paper was the contact information for Professor Dainotto’s office in the United States. Below his name and contact, was another listing:

**Ciro Incoronato**  
**Assistant Professor**  
**Department of Italian and European Studies**  
**C: 919-237-2358**

“Dainotto was supposed to still be in the United States. Why don’t we give Professor Incoronato a call, and see if he can tell us why Dainotto decided to return to Bologna in the middle of December, in such a hurry that he did not alert any of his colleagues?”

“Seems like a great plan, how about we head to a cafe and give him a call?” I asked.

“Certainly. Why don’t you call him, on your cell phone. Introduce us and then I will ask a few questions.”

Something seemed odd about the way Professor Calvino was talking to me, almost as if he was waiting to tell one of his jokes that he found funny. I thought that it must just be the excitement and grief getting to him. We headed towards a bench in Piazza Santo Stefano, and—upon sitting down—I pulled out my phone and dialed the listed number.

*“Che cazzo vuoi?”* a man’s voice responded in Italian. Calvino chuckled at my shock for such a harsh greeting on the other line of the phone. Now in accented English, “Who is calling me in the middle of the night?” Now Calvino began to fully laugh. I looked at my watch. 9:03. 3:03 AM on the East coast of America.

I responded in Italian, “I am so sorry Professor Incoronato. My name is Enzo Eco. I am calling from Bologna and foolishly forgot to account for the time change.” I glared at Calvino. Now I know why he wanted me to call.

He exhausted the last of his laughter quietly and spoke into the phone, “Professor Incoronato, this is Professor Antonio Calvino speaking. My colleague and I apologize for waking you in the middle of the night, but I am sorry to tell you that I have some bad news to share with you. I figured you would want to know right away.” He paused and then continued, “It is with my deepest condolences that I must inform you of the passing of Professor Roberto Dainotto. It is my understanding that you two work together at Duke University, and I want you to know that he was also a dear friend of mine.” Silence from the other end of the phone. Calvino waited for a few moments, took a breath of the cold air, and kept speaking, “We have reason to believe that Professor Dainotto was murdered last night. His body was found this morning in his office.”

“Murdered?” Professor Incoronato’s voice came across the line breathlessly and disbelievingly.

“Unfortunately, yes. A cleaning woman found his body this morning. I examined the scene of the crime myself, and it is clear that he was murdered.” I recalled the distressed cleaning woman who was talking to the police outside of Dainotto’s office. “Professor Incoronato, would you have any reason to believe that someone could have a motive to kill Professor Dainotto?”

“Absolutely not,” replied Incoronato, “Roberto was well-liked and well-respected at Duke. He and I have been working together for almost three years now, and I have never once known him to have an enemy, or anyone that had any aversion towards him whatsoever.”

“Correct me if I am wrong Professor Incoronato—”

“Please, call me *Ciro*.”

“Of course, *Ciro*,” continued *Calvino*, “I am correct in saying that Professor *Dainotto* should not have been returning to Italy for another 5 months? Does he not usually spend the holidays in the States?”

“That is correct. He returned to Italy in a hurry all of a sudden. He left without his family—oh, his family will be heartbroken by this business—and he left on a plane from Durham to Rome two days ago. The day before he left, he seemed to be extremely excited about a breakthrough that he had in his research. He had been working on a book about Giuseppe Garibaldi’s private life, when all of a sudden he found something that forced him to return to Bologna as quickly as possible.”

“Do you know what he found, *Ciro*?” *Calvino* was gently prying for more information.

“Not exactly. However, he called his friend—Professor *Litzinger* is his name, I believe—and asked for books on communist activity in China. The man is somewhat of an expert on Chinese politics.”

“Do you have this Professor’s contact info, so we may know what books he supplied *Dainotto* with?”

“There is no need,” replied *Ciro*, “I spoke with *Dainotto* before he left, and he said the books were not helpful in his research. He left them behind in his office at Duke.”

“Ah, thank you.” *Calvino* said with a tinge of disappointment.

“Professor *Calvino*, if I may ask,” responded *Ciro* uneasily, “Why are you investigating the murder of Professor *Dainotto*? Are you working with the police?”

“No, but my assistant and I found that the police could use an extra helping of brain power on this unfortunate case.” replied *Calvino*, a bit embarrassed.

“*Certo*,” *Ciro* affirmed, “I used to work as a journalist in Naples, and I am all too familiar with how the police can be occasionally....unobservant.” *Ciro* added, “Well, I wish you the best of luck, and please, bring the madman who killed our dear Professor *Dainotto* to justice.”

“Of course, *Ciro*,” responded *Calvino* gently, “*Enzo* and I will not let you down.”

“*Grazie. In Bocca al Lupo*”

“*Crepì! Ciao, *Ciro**”

“*Ciao.*”

I hung up the phone, and asked Professor *Calvino*, “So what now? Did you find anything else in *Dainotto*’s office?”

“No, most of the papers and books are inconsequential to the task at hand, but I was expecting as much. *Dainotto* was a very smart man, and he would not risk having sensitive materials in such a public place like *UniBo*. Any curious student or staff could have easily tampered with his work, or noticed unusual patterns in his research. My guess is that he was only stopping by his office for an after-hours retrieval of some relatively menial item. Anything that was very important or irreplaceable would be in his apartment.”

We began to walk. I didn’t even have to ask what our next move will be. I knew that *Calvino* planned to break into the late Professor’s apartment and look for further clues.

“Won’t the police be searching his apartment when we arrive? Could they catch us breaking in and we will look like suspects?” I asked anxiously.

“No, the police will still be preoccupied with the scene at *UniBo* and trying to determine a cause of death for poor *Dainotto*. We should have no problem making our way to his apartment now, and looking around for a half hour or so.”

I nodded in agreement. Then, a question that made me feel incredibly stupid came into my mind. “Wait a minute—how *did* Dainotto die? He was not shot, stabbed, or strangled? Are we absolutely certain that this death is in line with the other three murders?”

“Absolutely certain,” replied Calvino as we walked quickly to Via Ugo Bassi. “Professor Dainotto was poisoned. It is clear as day. His lips were still ever-so slightly blue back in his office. Must have been some fast-acting agent that he ingested and killed him quickly. Likely cyanide. It will take a full toxicology report before the police uncover that, so we have some time.”

We continued making our way through the streets of Bologna. Nearly 10 AM now, it was obvious that the city had become aware of the fourth murder. Students on their way to school whispered to each other as they walked, café patrons showed each other articles on their phones in horror. I wondered if there would be a curfew this evening, for fear of the murderer striking again. We made our way to the end of Via Ugo Bassi, turned right onto Via Marconi and then ducked quickly into a café. The Professor casually ordered two coffees.

“I thought we only had an hour or so to safely enter the apartment?” I asked.

“Yes, that is very true, but do you have a plan for breaking through the wooden door that leads into Dainotto’s apartment building? We will enjoy our coffees at a table outside, and watch and wait for someone to pass through the door, catching it behind them.”

“And if no one comes?”

“Then we will implement plan B, but I hope it does not come to that.” Calvino responded calmly.

So, we took our coffees outside, and sat at a metal table that was uncomfortable in the December air. The coffee helped with the cold. Calvino was watching a door addressed “7” across the street, so I assumed that must be the entrance to Dainotto’s apartment building. We sat there quietly, watching the Bologna morning.

Without warning, Calvino sprung from his chair and hurried across the street towards number 7. I quickly followed after him. As we approached the door, we were narrowly beaten to the handle but a middle-aged woman wearing a navy peacoat.

Dainotto called warmly, “Ah! Letizia, good morning!”

The woman turned and responded, “Professor Calvino, how are you? It is so good to see you. What brings you here this morning?”

“Actually just doing a favor for our dear Professor Dainotto. He has a rare book on the history of the use of flour in Mediterranean diets in his apartment that he will be needing in the United States. He asked me to come along and retrieve it, so that I can ship it to him before a lecture at Princeton in a few weeks.”

“Ah, wonderful,” responded Letizia with a smile, “Well, I hope to see you at the next dinner-party hosted by the Dainottos—it is always a pleasure to hear from you.”

“The same to you, Letizia,” Calvino responded kindly, “Have a wonderful rest of your day.”

Now inside the building, Letizia stopped off at a ground floor apartment, while we continued up the stairs to the first floor. There were two doors on this landing, and Calvino approached the one on the left and placed his ear gently to the door. He listened for a moment. Then, he peered over the railing to the floor below, and then the floor above. Moving quickly he approached the door on the right, and threw a shoulder with his full weight into the space just above the door handle. The door flew open with a bang.

“Quickly!” He whispered. “Come inside!”

I hastily followed him into the apartment. It was definitely a nice place, but clearly only used for part of the year. Based on the doors leading from the sitting room and kitchen, it looked like there were three or four bedrooms and a study. Calvino walked directly to the study, and I followed directly behind. The study had a

similar feel to his office at UniBo, but even more frantic. There were books and papers everywhere, covering every surface in heaping piles.

Calvino was moving through the items quickly, clearly looking for anything that might even resemble a clue. When he got to Dainotto's desk, he stopped his search dead in its tracks. He reached down onto the desk, and picked up a handwritten note. I walked to his side and looked at the paper:

*Una mattina mi son svegliato,*

*o bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao ciao ciao!*

*Una mattina mi son svegliato*

*e ho trovato l'invasor.*

*O partigiano portami via,*

*o bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao ciao ciao*

*o partigiano portami via*

*che mi sento di morir.*

*E se io muoio da partigiano,*

*o bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao ciao ciao,*

*e se io muoio da partigiano*

*tu mi devi seppellir.*

*Seppellire lassù in montagna,*

*o bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao ciao ciao,*



*seppellire lassù in montagna*

*sotto l'ombra di un bel fior.*

*E le genti che passeranno,*

*o bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao ciao ciao,*

*e le genti che passeranno*

*mi diranno 'che bel fior.'*

*Questo è il fiore del partigiano,*

*o bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao ciao ciao,*

*questo è il fiore del partigiano*

*morto per la libertà*

"I knew the note was familiar!" exclaimed the Professor with frustration. "How could we have not realized it immediately. It's the final line to 'Bella Ciao'."

"The Partisan song from the war?" I was confused, "This was the anthem of the resistance that fought the Nazis and Fascists, no?"

"Yes it was, and it is still a hymn of freedom, resistance, and anti-fascism." marvelled Calvino. "Oh this is marvellous, can't you see Enzo?" He was examining the sheet of paper like the brushstrokes of one of the great masters. I was still thoroughly confused.

"So, Dainotto was a fascist?" I asked.

"What?" Dainotto picked up a pocket-sized volume from the desk, and was rapidly scanning through. Just then, we heard the door to the apartment open.

#### Part IV: The Flower



Calvino immediately locked eyes with me and he put a finger to his lips, while slipping the lyrics to “Bella Ciao” and the book he was reading into his coat. We tip toed out of the study and quickly ducked into an adjoining bedroom. It was clear that someone else was in the apartment with us. We heard slow and soft footsteps moving through the kitchen and sitting room. It did not sound like the police—there was only one pair of footsteps, and they moved hesitantly and curiously. The Professor silently grabbed my attention, and motioned for me to follow him into the bathroom, which connected our bedroom with the sitting room. We reached the bathroom, and we waited silently. The footsteps continued in the sitting room for a minute or two, and then moved towards the study.

Obviously, Calvino thought that our unexpected guest was firmly in the study, because he noiselessly opened the bathroom door, and slinked into the sitting room beyond. I did not even allow myself to breath as we moved through the sitting room, towards the front door. The study door was open, and Calvino peeked around the doorframe. He moved past and I followed, stealing a glance inside. My heart was pounding in my ears, as I looked past the door frame. A man was bent over Dainotto’s desk, with his back to the door. I did not get a good

look from his hunched position, but it seemed that he was an older man, and he was wearing a black canvas coat.

We continued past, reached the front door, and slipped out without so much as a whisper.

Once in the hallway, we both raced down the stairs and back out into the street. We quickly walked down the street and turned the corner, to put some space between us and the apartment of Dainotto.

“Who the hell was that? Was that the murderer?” I felt like my legs were going to give out from under me. The Professor looked calm and deep in thought.

“I don’t know if that was the murderer,” responded The Professor slowly, “But I have an idea of whom it may have been.” He was lost in thought for another moment. “What time is it?” Calvino asked.

“12:30.” I was confused. Who was in the apartment? How did Calvino know him? How is *Bella Ciao* so important for the four murders that have occurred in the city?

“Go home, get some rest,” ordered Calvino. “You must be stressed and tired from all of this excitement. Eat some food, and then we can meet at the café around 5:30. Okay?”

The Professor was right. I was tired, hungry, and scared. He also looked like he wanted some time alone to think about the events of the day. “Okay,” I responded weary, “I will see you at the café.” On the way home, I stopped for a quick Tagliatelle al ragù, and fell asleep as soon as I made it back to my apartment.



I woke up at 4:30, took a long shower, got dressed, and began to make my way to the café. I did not sleep well. I kept seeing images of Dainotto’s dead body, and I kept hearing the lyrics of *Bella Ciao* coming to me as an angry whisper. The December sun was beginning to set in Bologna, and as I walked in the cold, I struggled to make sense of the day’s events. Three people already dead. One shot, one stabbed, one strangled. Now a fourth shows up, this time poisoned. All different professions. All in public spaces, but not in close proximity to one

another. And the man found in the train station bathroom had “*invasor*” written on his chest. How was he an invader? Coming in off the train? Then, something clicked in my brain. *Invasor!* “*ho trovato l'invasor!*”! Another line from *Bella Ciao*! I raced to the café to tell The Professor. When I arrived, he was sitting at a table in the corner, enjoying a negroni.

“Professor! *Invasor!* It is another line from *Bella Ciao!*”

The Professor finished his ongoing sip of negroni, and smiled at me. “Of course, Enzo. It is now a certainty that these murders are connected, and I believe that we are truly on the verge of discovering a fantastic conspiracy.” He sipped his Negroni. “Have a seat. Let us talk for a moment before we head towards our next objective.” I ordered an Aperol and soda at the bar, and took a seat across from the Professor.

“So, what have you discovered?” I asked.

“When you look at the lyrics for *Bella Ciao*, written here, you can see that a dark red ink was used for all of the lines that mention a flower. The whole text is old and fading, but it is still noticeable. You will also notice that Dainotto did not write these words. In addition to the parchment being significantly older than our late friend, it is also not his handwriting. No, Dainotto found these semi-ancient lyrics somewhere, and someone likely killed him for it.” He took another sip and continued, “I also found this book next to the lyrics. *The Architectural History of Medieval Bologna*. Dainotto was attempting to use the lyrics of *Bella Ciao*, in order to find a secret location in Bologna.”

“How did he know to come to Bologna?”

“Bologna, *la rossa città*, has always been a stronghold for communism, education, and anti-fascist ideology. It makes sense that “*Bella Ciao*” would have roots with this city. Anyways, he made one major error, before he could find the secret location. His location was not inside the city, but rather just outside the city. Any anti-fascist would know the risks of hiding information in the city, when it could likely be occupied by the

enemy. This is exactly what happened in World War II. So, to find our location outside of the city, we need to look further into the song. Dainotto and the murders made me believe that the song is the key.”

I sipped my Aperol and waited in anticipation. The Professor continued, “Let’s look at the song from a mathematical view. The song has 6 stanzas. That is the first number 6. Also, the song has 24 lines. Summing the individual numbers of 2 and 4 will leave you with 6. We have found the second 6. Finally, there are 141 words in “*Bella Ciao*”. Our third six.”

“The sign of the devil?” I asked with a fright. “Are these murders coming from some lunatic satanists.”

“No, Enzo,” Calvino said, with a slight disappointment. “666 was originally just the number of man, of humanity. It was only later that satanists adopted the number.”

“Ah.”

“You have lived in Bologna for your whole life. Tell me, where do you see an intersection between the number 666 and a location outside of Bologna?” Calvino asked with a leading tone.

I thought for a moment. “*Madonna di San Luca*! The sanctuary on the hill! There are 666 *portici* that lead to that beautiful church on the hill that overlooks the city!”

“Exactly,” affirmed Calvino. “What’s more, in ‘*Bella Ciao*’, I was drawn to the line ‘*seppellire lassù in montagna / sotto l'ombra di un bel fior.*’ The dead partisan would like to be taken up the mountain and buried in the shade of a beautiful flower. If you recall, the crypt of *Madonna di San Luca* has a beautiful flower carved into the space above its entrance. A partisan who died in Bologna could literally be carried up the mountain to the old church, and buried in the crypt—beneath the shade of a beautiful flower!”

I was stunned. I tried to find a fault in the logic of the great mind sitting before me, but was utterly unable. It all fit together so perfectly, so cleanly. I took a large swig of my Aperol and soda, finishing it. “So, what do we do now?” I asked with a slight reluctance.

Calvino smiled and finished the last of his Negroni. “Now, my dear friend, we climb up the mountain and find what lies in the shade of the beautiful flower.”

#### Part V: The Mountain



451, 452, 453. I watched the numbers of each *portico* go past as we labored to climb up the steep path to the church. It was a long walk, nearly a mile and a half directly uphill, with switchbacks approximately every 100 *portici*. The *portici* were erected to give the sacrament a covered procession up and down the hill, in the event that there was poor weather when a procession was taking place. It was a very quiet night in the countryside outside of Bologna, and the Professor and I struggled up the incline in silence. As we climbed, I thought about what may lie in wait at the sanctuary ahead, and cursed myself for not going on the occasional jog more often. The Professor was an old man, no doubt, but in excellent shape for his age. He was an avid runner as a young man, and now he bikes to get his exercise and preserve his joints. We climbed for another 10 minutes or so, until we finally reached the courtyard that sat below the entrance of the church. We stopped for a moment to catch our breath, and the Professor turned to me.

“The church is closed to any visitors right now, Enzo, but the doors will be open. However, I think it is best that we do not make our presence known to anyone that may be inside. Stay close to me, keep quiet, and we should be totally fine. Do you know where the crypt is located within the Church?”

“Yes.” My mother would force us to join the annual procession from the city to the sanctuary every year.

“Good. I brought us two torches, but we should keep them switched off until we are inside the crypt. It will be very dark inside.”

With that, we ascended the steps towards the entrance of the Church. The Professor, with extreme care, inched open the door and slipped inside. I followed and ever-so-quietly closed the door behind me. The Professor was correct, the darkness inside the church was all-consuming. I could just barely make out the blob of dark wood that was the altar, and noticed some glints of gold in the moonlight, which must have been the frames of paintings and statues lining the transepts of the church. I put my hand on Calvino in front of me, and we inched towards the area to the right of the altar, where the entrance to the crypt lay. It took us every bit of three minutes to cross the space which could have only been 50 meters. We stayed absolutely quiet, and, as far as I could tell, we were the only ones in the church. Finally, we reached the entrance to the crypt. I looked up and thought that I could make out the shape of the flower above the door in the moonlight. A quote from Dante’s *Paradiso* came to mind: “*Puoi tu veder così di soglia in soglia / giù digradar, com’io ch’a proprio nome / vo per la rosa giù di foglia in foglia.*” I let go of Calvino as he walked under the flower and into the crypt, and I nearly fell down the stairs and on top of Calvino. Luckily the Professor caught me before I tumbled all the way down. We stood extremely still for a moment. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5—I could feel my heartbeat in my ears—6, 7, 8. The Professor let go of me and produced two torches from his coat pocket. Without a word, we turned them on and continued down the stairs and into the crypt.

At the bottom, we were in a narrow stone passageway for a few steps, which opened into a damp room with a low ceiling. The room had with aisles running on either side of tombs going through the middle of the room, and there were also tombs running along each wall. Naturally, we took one of the paths, and began scanning the tombs for clues. The room was nearly 20 meters long, and must have contained 40-some bodies. Most of them were monks and clergymen from the 17th and 18th centuries, and none of them gave any indication that they were connected to “*Bella Ciao*”. At the end of the room, there was another small passageway, that led into another identical room of tombs. We completed the exercise once more, this time examining the tombs of slightly older dead men, mostly from the 16th century. Finally, passed through another passageway, and reached a much smaller room.

The ceilings of this room were only two meters high, and the room was maybe 10 meters deep. There were only 10 or so graves that lined the walls of one large open space. We walked into the room, and began scanning. Most of the tombs in this room had older death dates, 15th century. Some of them had clearly been renovated long after the deceased had passed, decorated with beautiful sculptures of angels and new inscriptions.

“Enzo, come quickly.” Calvino called me. He was standing in the back corner of the room, shining his light on a flat portion of the wall. As I approached, I realized that it was not a flat portion of the wall, but a small and smooth grave. I approached the grave and read the inscription.

**SIBO SUGA**

**1080 - 1489**

**CHE BEL FIOR**

“Che bel fior. It is a line from ‘*Bella Ciao*’, no?”



“Yes, Enzo. I had seen this grave before. It is well known here, because the dates of life and death are mistaken. It is believed that the monks who renovated this place in the 16th century made a mistake when rewriting the gravestone. I am beginning to believe that there was no mistake made.”

“Do you know who Sibo Suga is?”

“No, but we shall find out.” Then, without warning, he smashed the back of his steel torch into the gravestone, and began to break away the stone that kept the dead away from the living. After three strikes to the stone, he reached in and pulled the pieces of stone away, revealing a hole in the wall. Inside, there was a stone coffin.

“Professor! What are you doing!” I was shocked by the actions of the old man before me.

“Hurry Enzo, help me pull this out.”

Without thinking, I grabbed the stone coffin with him, and we slid it out of its resting place. The coffin was surprisingly light, and we laid it on the floor at our feet with a slight *thud*. We waited a moment for the dust to settle, and then reached down to remove the smooth lid of the coffin.

I jumped back immediately, as there were only a few dusty bones in the coffin.

“Professor, what are we doing? Are we grave robbers now?” I asked with a fright.

“Enzo, my dear boy, do not worry. Our concern does not lie with the old bones that lay in this coffin. We are here for something else.” He then reached down and moved aside the bones, then lifted. The bones were sitting atop a thin piece of stone, and Calvino motioned for me to come help him lift the other side of the stone slab. I set my torch on the ledge of the grave and helped him. Below the stone slab, there was a secret compartment, filled with various artifacts. Directly sitting on top of these pictures, scrolls, and other various items, was a wooden tablet, inscribed:

**This is the secret grave of Father Ugo Bassi. He died fighting to free Italy from the chains of tyranny.**

**He upheld the values of our secret order, and continues to guard our secrets, to eternity. He is a true**

**Partisan.**

“Ugo Bassi? The priest who fought along Garibaldi during the revolution? I thought his body was never recovered after his execution?”

“It never was, publicly. Clearly someone from his secret order returned him to his home—Bologna.”

“That is right, we always try to bury our partisans as they should be. On the mountain and in the shadow of a beautiful flower.”

Calvino and I turned quickly. There were three men in black suits standing behind us, torches in hand, and red roses pinned upon their lapels. They all had stiletto daggers attached to their hip. The man in the middle, who had just spoken, looked extremely familiar.

“Professor Livraghi, it is good to see you,” said Calvino, unsurprised. Professor Livraghi! He is a professor in the history department at the University of Bologna!

“I figured you would be able to follow the trail to us, you seemed determined while examining the body of Dainotto.”

“Yes, and you should have seen us when you came to visit his apartment, but I am afraid that we were able to slip out before we were noticed. Such a shame, you probably could have saved us the trek up the mountainside. So, as you clearly plan to kill us, why not give us a good story before sending us to the gates of Saint Peter?” Calvino said this with no fear or nerves, as if he had not just openly acknowledged our coming demise. I was worried that I was going to vomit on the floor, thinking about being stabbed in this dark crypt.

“Yes, I suppose you deserve that much, Professor. After all, you are the first person in hundreds of years to make it this far,” countered Livraghi. He took a deep breath and began, “As I am sure that you know, we three belong to an ancient order of men and women. Those who operate in the shadows, behind the scenes, to

provide Italy with certain—protections. We like to think of ourselves as partisans, those who will break from any part of the established order, in the name of preserving the liberty of the people. Our order was founded during the time of the Italian city-state, in order to protect the people from flagrant tyrants. Some of them we burned—Savonarola for instance—some we poisoned—Boniface VIII. All the while, we remained anonymous and preferred to operate in the shadows. When it came time for Italy to unify, some of the greatest members of our order led the charge: Garibaldi, Ugo Bassi, and my ancestor Giovanni Livraghi. We supported the unification of Italy in order to advance the interests of our people, but made sure to foil any attempts for the monarchy to assume too much power.

“We continued to stand alongside a unified Italy, with her best interests in heart at all times. Then, a great darkness befell our land and our people. Fascism and Nazism took hold. Thousands were persecuted, tortured, and killed. Millions were silenced and oppressed. Our great order of partisans knew that we could no longer keep our numbers small. We needed to rush to the aid of the Italian people, and enlist their help to drive this great enemy from our land. So, the partisans of World War II were born. They adopted our name and our anthem, “*Bella Ciao*”, and defended this land with fervor and honor. Hundreds of thousands of men and women fought alongside us to liberate our land, kill the enemy, and protect our Jewish neighbors. Our secret order fought for years, supplying all of Italy’s partisans with supplies, training, and a battle plan. One of our greatest members of the secret order, Gino Bartali, rode a bicycle with a wagon attached across the Alps to smuggle Jews into safer lands. After our long and laborious effort, we were finally able to kill that devil Mussolini, and drive the Nazis far away.

“After the war, our newly adopted brothers and sisters returned to normal life, but the secret order remained. We continued to fight for all those who were oppressed, we continued to combat fascism, and we continued to lay down our lives for Italy. That is what you have seen in Bologna these past days. The woman that was shot three times? She was a neofascist who was planning on setting off a bomb in the Jewish quarter of

the city, in order to ‘purify’ Bologna. We shot her three times at the very spot where one of our own was killed over 40 years ago by the police. Francesco Lorusso was protesting against fascism in our great city of Bologna, and he was murdered for it. This woman was murdered to protect everything that he fought for. Then, there was the man who was found dead in *Piazza Maggiore*. I believe the papers said that he was just a shopkeeper? He was a shopkeeper, but he had also been known to wait outside of the city’s gay bars, and where he and his friends would follow gay men and beat them nearly to death in the streets. We decided to stab him in the heart and leave his body at the favorite place of one of the greatest Italian singers of all time, Lucio Dalla—who was also forced to hide his true self his entire life, due to the bigotry of the Italian people. Finally, you have the “*invasor*”. He was a German neo-nazi, who was passing through Bologna, looking to connect with some alt-right terrorist cells in Rome. We thought it would be best if that sort of person was stopped before reaching his final destination.

“We chose to kill these people on three consecutive days, in a very public setting, to send a message to all those who wish to perpetuate hatred in our land. Hopefully they will think twice before trying to harm the great Italian people. Then, there was poor Roberto. He was a dear friend of mine, and it pained me very much to hurt him. However, he was on the verge of uncovering our secret, and I could not let him discover us and publish it in his research. I saw him working in his office, and it was as simple as offering him a coffee with poison. He died with no pain, and we honored him as he deserved. He was a good man, who was forced to die for liberty. If there is a better place for us to go to when we are gone, I know he is there. As is your dear Valentina, Professor Calvino.”

My head was spinning. There was so much information thrown at me, and I had nearly forgotten that we were about to be killed. I looked to Professor Calvino for guidance, and he looked incredibly calm.

“It is a shame what happened to poor Roberto,” started Calvino, “and I agree, he and Valentina are certainly in a better place. Free of all the hate and horror that you just spoke of.” Then he turned to me, “Enzo,

it is time for us to go. We will not bother these men anymore, and I do not expect to see them again. I trust that you did not wish to see them again?”

“No.” My voice felt as if it was a million miles away.

“Then we shall take our leave.” The Professor extended a hand towards Livraghi, who looked shocked, but reached out and took it. Calvino picked up his torch, and began to walk towards the exit from the crypt, I followed.

Once back outside into the night air, I suddenly began to process what had just happened. Why are we alive? Why did they let us leave? Calvino must have known that I would ask that question, and he responded:

“Enzo, those are good men down there. They operate in the shadows, they look for no reward and no thanks, and yet they continue to protect us. They know why we went looking for answers. It was for a dear friend. We were not looking to publish a paper, or sell their secrets. Now, we will never speak of this again—and they know that. Murderers they may be, they do the world’s dirty work, so you and I may continue to live in peace and harmony with our neighbors. They have protected us, and now it is our job to protect them. Never speak of this to a soul, not even me. Besides, if we do, I have no doubt they will revisit us. The world is a fine place and worth the fighting for, and I would hate very much to leave it.”

