

Chapter 34

Weylin and Svetlana spent a pensive evening at the Castello discussing their plans for the further investigation of the wine debacle. By the time the sleep hour had arrived, they were each immersed in their own world of thoughts.

At sunrise, following a room service delivered European breakfast, they showered, dressed and headed back to the vineyard in silence. As Weylin drove along the gravel covered road leading to the vineyard's entrance he was struck by the scene unfolding before him. The small parking lot was cluttered with unfamiliar vehicles as well as numerous sedans sporting the Carabinieri insignia. "I suppose the posse has arrived," he announced, while squeezing into a tight space alongside Capelli's black sedan.

"I hope they don't give you a hard time," Svetlana remarked, as they exited the car and passed through the entrance.

The crowd, consisting of uniformed Carabinieri and cheap suited Interpol agents, had gathered around the long table in the wine tasting room. As they approached the doorway,

Svetlana glanced at the austere group and shook her head. “I think you can handle this yourself,” she said, “I’ll wait in your office.”

“I could use your moral support but go ahead, I’ll manage,” he replied, with audible disappointment.

Weylin entered the room where Capelli was holding court. He was in the process of expounding upon their wine’s virtues when he caught sight of his boss and stopped mid-sentence. “Gentlemen,” he announced, “allow me to introduce the proprietor, Dr. McCain.”

All heads turned towards Weylin as he lowered himself into a chair that had been reserved at the head of the table. A question and answer session followed that lasted several hours and then broke for lunch. As the law officers slowly left the parking lot in search of a suitable dining venue, Weylin approached Capelli. “They seemed considerably more civilized than I would have expected,” Weylin remarked.

“Compared to what I have seen of your American police movies, I understand your impression but do not let their politeness fool you. They will return at two-thirty, I suggest that we arrive before them.”

Weylin walked towards his office as Capelli headed for the parking lot and home for lunch. “Are you hungry?” he asked, upon finding Svetlana gazing intently at his computer screen.

“I am always hungry,” she chuckled, “but I suppose you are referring to food?”

“We’d better get going, we have less than two hours.”

She quickly rose from the computer and followed Weylin to the car. “How did it go?” she asked, securing her seatbelt.

“They seemed to be on a fact finding mission this morning but Capelli feels that the real

fun will begin when they return from lunch.”

“Do you mind if I borrow the car this afternoon?”

“Not at all, where are you going?”

“I thought that I might drive to Florence for some shopping while you are busy.”

After lunch, Svetlana dropped Weylin off at the vineyard and drove on to Florence.

At two forty-five P.M., the inquisition began in earnest. “Dr. McCain,” an Interpol agent said, “what proof can you offer to convince us that you had no prior knowledge of the poison?”

Wondering how much he could say without breaking his promise to Paolo, he gazed briefly at the ceiling, composing his response. “The wine responsible for those unfortunate deaths,” he said, “was produced and bottled before my purchase of this vineyard.”

“But that by itself is not absolute proof and regardless, you are the current owner,” the Carabinieri chief politely observed.

“You don’t really believe that I would have purchased this business with the knowledge of an impending disaster, do you?”

“You offer that as proof?” the chief replied, with stinging sarcasm. “I don’t think you understand the gravity of your situation.”

The chief’s words had struck home, and realizing that he owed no real allegiance to Paolo, he prepared to open the proverbial can of worms. “I have reason to believe that the poisoning began several years before I arrived on the scene,” he said.

“Where is the documentation?” an Interpol agent inquired, emphasizing each word with the tap of his flattened palm against his thigh.

“I do not have the evidence in my possession but if you were to request the mortality records from several of the local state run hospitals, I am certain that you will find it.”

His suggestion created a commotion among the Italian contingency that quieted down only after an Interpol agent began banging his fist upon the table. “Decorum, gentlemen, decorum,” the agent shouted.

“Are you implying that our government procurement officers knowingly acquired tainted wine?” an irate Carabinieri asked.

“Not at all,” Weylin replied.

“Then what are you saying?”

“Only that there was a spate of unexplained deaths during the time of Camalia’s contract with the local State hospitals and that the number of such deaths dropped off precipitously following its expiration.”

“I fail to see anything more than a statistical relationship,” an Interpol agent observed, “however, there might be cause for further investigation into the doctor’s allegations.”

“Well, it seems a reasonable assumption to me,” Weylin said, indignantly. “My source could provide no alternative explanation.”

“Who is this source?” the Carabinieri Chief bristled.

“I promised to protect his identity.”

“It would appear that this information is circumstantial at best,” interjected a heavily accented Carabinieri lieutenant.

The inquiry continued for the better part of the afternoon. At its close, an Interpol agent remained behind to speak to Weylin in the privacy of his office. "I'd prefer that you did not light that," Weylin said to the agent, as he gripped a thin French cigarette between his lips.

Removing it with dramatic slowness, the agent stuffed it into his breast pocket, repositioned the chair that sat in front of Weylin's desk and carefully lowered his large body into it. "We at Interpol do not place attach much credibility in your personal involvement," he said, with an amusing French accent.

With visions of old Pink Panther movies, Weylin suppressed a smile. "I appreciate that sentiment," he said. "This terrible tragedy has been a complete mystery to me."

"Do you have any idea who might have been behind this?"

"Why no, I thought that was your area of expertise."

"Ah yes, we do have that reputation, don't we."

"Where do we go from here?"

"Your FBI has asked us to intervene while they gather their forces. You see, all this terrorism and such has kept them quite busy."

"Does that mean that today's discussion will have to be repeated?"

"I am afraid so."

"Then why the big inquisition today?"

"There were deaths on Italian soil, we had to appease them."

"Do you have any idea when I might expect the American authorities?" he asked, while thinking about his planned trip to Geneva.

"In this matter, we are merely servants. They will come when they are ready. But, I

assume that they will await the findings from today's team of hazardous materials investigators.”

“They made a mess, you know. I understand they tore our laboratory apart.”

The agent shrugged his shoulders, suggesting that he could not have cared less.

“Is there anything else I can help you with?” Weylin asked, inwardly hoping for the man's rapid departure.

“No. And as you say in your country, have a nice day,” the agent replied, as he removed the cigarette from his pocket, placed it back between his lips and headed out the door.