The background image is a photograph of a river flowing through a valley. The river is in the foreground, with white water rapids. To the right of the river is a gravel path and some yellow wildflowers. In the background, there are green trees and mountains under a cloudy sky. A small building is visible on the right side of the river.

Slow Fishing the Fresh Waters of Italy

Trying to make his way in a complex world, a talented but preoccupied young man's love of fly fishing leads him to learn how to enjoy life's moments and pleasures, unhurried

Michael
Sena



SLOW FISHING THE FRESH WATERS OF ITALY

MICHAEL LAWRENCE SENA

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to all my mentors who have helped me choose the paths I have walked and the rivers I have fished.

Prologue

Fly fishing lore is filled with stories about chalk streams in England and Pennsylvania, freestone brooks in Vermont, salmon rivers in Norway and Iceland, brown trout waters in New Zealand and wild rainbow streams in Montana. The literature is not populated with tales of catching trophy trout and grayling in the rivers and streams of Italy. I had never heard of it before I happened to be in Italy on the 25th of March 2011, when suddenly I had a lot of time on my hands, and, as fate would have it, I met someone old enough to be my father who knew a thing or two about catching fish with a fly. He was also knowledgeable about food, architecture, politics and personal relationships, all subjects to which I had not given much thought during my thirty-one years, spent mostly in Sweden.

That was five years ago. Fishing for me back then was the only way I could take my thoughts away from what had happened thirteen years earlier. I blamed myself for the deaths of my parents and nothing anyone could say could convince me otherwise. I wanted them back. I knew it wasn't possible, but that fact did not stop me from wishing. After the funeral, an idea came to me of how I could keep other sons and daughters from losing their parents as I lost mine, and the idea was what got me through university and into my first job. My first and only employer promised to let me work on my idea for as long as I stayed with the company. I never imagined that the company would not always be there. Without a job—THIS job—I would not be able to do what I HAD to do.

Sofi, the only woman I had let into my life after my parents died, believed I would work and fish less, and enjoy life more, if we had a child. She was, and still is, a wonderful and loving person, but I could never explain to her in a way that she could understand that I didn't want to work less because there was something more important than anything, including

our relationship, that I had to finish, and I needed to fish in order to give my brain a rest from the guilt. Even though we had not lived together since I rejected the idea of starting a family with her five years before, she was still my best friend, and I continued to rely on her for support when I reached my deepest levels of exhaustion and depression.

Catching fish using flies, which is the way I have always fished, rather than with bait or lures, requires your full concentration, from deciding where and when to fish, reading the water, selecting the fly—wet or dry, imitation or attractor—to presenting the fly, hooking, playing, landing and releasing the fish. It's like the difference between taking a walk in the woods and using it as a time to think about how to solve a problem with a co-worker or a friend or a partner, versus concentrating while you are walking on spotting birds or discovering where the mushrooms are hiding. In fact, I believe that most of us who fly fish intensely, as I did five years ago, do so to avoid thinking about anything else, especially thoughts that hurt, like the death of a loved one or separation from a partner, or thoughts that cause anxiety, like deciding whether to make a commitment to start a family. At least that's what I have found. People who try fly fishing and give it up don't usually do so because they don't catch fish or feel it's a waste of time; they leave it because they don't have a reason to block out the world. Or if they do, they find that drugs or alcohol are faster, more effective or just easier. Fly fishing is also work.

It was pure coincidence, then, that led me on that day in March, 2011 from a life that was destined to be an unhappy one to having a life today that balances work, family and fishing in a way that in Sweden we call *lagom*, just right. The process of change started with me having to take a forced vacation because my company could not pay my salary. I was working in the automobile industry, which turned out to be the wrong industry to be in at the wrong time. The worst global recession since the Great Depression

had begun eighteen months before, in the autumn of 2009. People had stopped buying cars. Large automobile companies like General Motors and Chrysler had to declare bankruptcy. My company, Saab, a small Swedish car producer, had been sold by General Motors in January 2010 to a Dutch businessman named Victor Muller, who owned another car company called Spyker Cars. Saab had not made a profit since 2001. After he took over Saab, Muller spent all the money he was able to scrape together to keep Saab running, but the money was running out and the bad news was arriving in a steady stream. Finally, Muller was out of options. We would all be out of our jobs. I had tried hard to push the thought of Saab closing and me being unemployed out of my mind. When it finally arrived in a phone call from my boss, I definitely felt the only thing I could do was to go fishing.

During those few weeks of fishing, with the help of my new companion, Alessandro, his friends whom we met in ten of Italy's twenty *regioni*, and his goddaughter, Raffaella, an accomplished fly fisher who had her own reasons for fishing, I gradually began to see myself and the world around me differently, more positively. I was with people who were filling the voids that had been in me since that night thirteen years before when I became an orphan, and I was becoming a whole person. I gradually slowed down the pace of my fishing and eating and, eventually, my life, in order to enjoy the pleasure of the moment. Fly fishing for me today has become a passion, not an escape, one that I share with my loved ones. I have other passions, too, like cooking, and I have a new vocation, which still involves helping people but not in order to soothe my own conscience.

I invite you to come along with me to experience my transformation and perhaps learn a few things along the way about the food and the fishing in a beautiful part of the world called Italy.

Nicklas Laurentzson

Milano, Italy - 14 October 2016



Chapter One

Unaware

My mobile phone rang while I was eating a hard boiled egg in its shell and brewing my second cup of tea in the breakfast room at the NH Hotel in Trieste. The meeting that was scheduled for 10.00 a.m. had already been cancelled with an SMS I received from the company's purchasing manager. He didn't need to explain why. I had left a message with our travel agent to reschedule my flight home, so I thought this call might be from them. I pushed the answer button on my Nokia.

"*Pronto!*" I said jokingly. The caller line identification gave the caller away.

"Nicklas?" asked the voice on the other end of the line. "Is that you?"

"*Si, si,*" I continued. It was my manager, Lars. He was always so serious and easily confused, but never irritated by my silly pranks. He was a really decent person who worked hard, supported his staff and did everything he could to make us feel like our work was appreciated. He had spent his entire life with the company, having grown up in Trollhättan. His father was an undertaker, just as his father before him had been an undertaker. Lasse, as everyone called him, decided he would do something else, so he studied automotive engineering at Chalmers in Göteborg, returned to Trollhättan with his degree in hand and went to work at the biggest employer in town. He was also a dedicated member of the Jehovah's Witnesses, had five children, all boys, and, in my eyes, he was married to the most beautiful woman in West Sweden except for Sofi, who was to me still the most beautiful woman in the world.

“Very funny,” said Lars. “You’re going to need your good sense of humour. I’ve got bad news.”

“Viktor has appointed himself head of R&D?” I interjected.

“That would be really bad news,” laughed Lars. “This is just the bad news we were all hoping we wouldn’t hear but deep down inside were sure we would. Jan-Åke has resigned and Viktor is taking over as CEO. The loss came in at €218 million, bigger than even the pessimists had thought. Jan-Åke said that he wanted to spend more time with his family.”

I had been expecting this, but it still stung when Lars said it. Jan-Åke Jonsson was the heart and soul of Saab. He led the search for a new owner when GM decided to dump us in 2009. GM had owned Saab outright for ten years, and had a fifty percent stake in it for the previous ten, but it had its own troubles and needed to shed as much cost as it could. Saab had to go. A deal with a Swedish sports car maker, Koenigsegg, fell through. Then Jan-Åke found a Dutch company, also making sports cars, called Spyker owned by Viktor Muller. Spyker had sold forty-three cars in 2010 and lost €25 million doing it. Saab lost fifteen times that amount selling 90,000. Jan-Åke put the deal together with Muller. Now he was leaving. I guess he just could not keep on lying to us anymore, telling us that we were about to round the curve toward profitability.

“At least he didn’t say he was leaving to ‘pursue other interests’. What’s next?” I knew the answer but wanted to hear it anyway, and I was doing my best not to sound as worried as I was becoming about being out of work. Lars knew that my joking was my way to cover how I really felt.

“Production will most likely stop. We’re running out of money and some of our suppliers have already halted deliveries. The government is giving Antonov a hard time, so his cash probably won’t be doing us any good.”

Vladimir Aleksandrovich Antonov was a Russian financier who had invested in Muller's Spyker Cars, but who was being prevented by the Swedish authorities and by GM from putting any of his money into Saab. They were sure that he was connected to the Russian underworld. The Swedish National Debt Office was investigating him. Viktor was doing everything possible to get Antonov's money into the company, including selling his sports car business to him for a paltry €15 million.

"What's everyone else doing?"

"Taking a real spring vacation, which I suggest you do. We'll get this next salary, but then things look uncertain. You have a few years' extra compensation time coming to you, which you are unlikely to ever see. It's time we all put some distance between ourselves and this mess and think about what we should—or want to do next. I know you have had offers. Have you gotten back to Lagström? Working with him would be a good fit for you."

Bengt Lagström was the head of R&D at Volvo Cars. I knew him from Chalmers. He was one of the good guys at Volvo, not part of the old guard club who saw Volvo as their privileged domain and adult playground. The change of ownership of the car division to the American Ford Motor Company in 1999 hadn't succeeded in breaking down the barriers for everyone who was not part of 'The Club'. Ford sold Volvo to Geely, a Chinese car producer, in the spring of 2010, and I had not seen any signs of change since then either.

Neither Bengt nor I took part in the singing and dancing at Chalmers that guaranteed entrance into the inner circles at the big companies in Göteborg, especially Volvo and SKB. We were hired on our merits, did our work and usually got the little extra over the annual average wage increases negotiated by the unions. When things started to go badly at Saab, Bengt phoned me

and told me that if I wanted to come down and put in an application he would be happy to give me a good recommendation.

“I promised I would phone him as soon as I was certain which way the wind was blowing.”

“Bob Dylan says it perfectly: *‘You don’t need to be a weatherman to know which way the wind blows.’*”

Lars was as far from being a ‘Flower Power’ hippie as anyone could be, but he was born in 1960 and grew up in a Sweden that was still rich and expansive, at least that’s what I had learned in my history classes. My favourite teacher didn’t always follow the course material. He had his own views on Swedish history. He told us that Sweden’s industry was intact after the War as a result of its appeasement politics during the War to both sides. He said that while our neighbours were still rebuilding, Sweden was refining its welfare state social policy. We indulged our children in experimental education projects and our young adults in experimental living arrangements. We were naively lecturing the non-communist world leaders on the advantages of a socialist approach to democracy, and idealistically providing financial support to any revolution that claimed to support the socialist principles of solidarity with the masses and economic equality for all. Lars’ grandparents had become Jehovah’s Witnesses in the 1930s as a reaction to the growing secularisation of the country and the more relativistic interpretation of Lutheranism. There was no experimentation when it came to Lars’ and his brothers’ and sisters’ upbringings. Lars described his parents as very strict, but the most loving parents a child could hope to have. That about sums up what it means to be a Jehovah’s Witness, he explained.

“Nicklas,” said Lars, now with his serious tone of voice, “I know you are worried about what will happen with your work. You have done so much already and we all feel that your ideas were very close to being testable. I’m

sure that Volvo will help you continue. If you want, I can talk to my friends there once we know for sure what is happening here.”

“Thank you, Lars, I would appreciate that. Maybe a vacation right now wouldn’t be a bad idea. I’ll give it some thought.”

“You have your rod and reel with you, don’t you Nicklas?” He knew I always carried them with me, a four-piece Sage pack rod and a lightweight Loop reel. “Take a few days off and go fishing. Think about it. There must be a river somewhere near Trieste that has a few trout. Isn’t late March a good time to fish?”

Lars knew nothing about fly fishing, except what I had told him on those occasions when he had asked me how my trip to one or another river had been. But he was the kind of person who showed a genuine interest in every one of his staff’s hobbies. He encouraged us like an indulgent uncle. We even called him ‘*Farbror Lasse*’, Uncle Lars, amongst ourselves. I’m sure he knew that.

“That sounds like a plan, Lasse. I have enough gear for a few days of fishing. Don’t let them sell my desk while I’m away.”

“It will be here when you get back if you return before we finally go bankrupt. Then you might have to take it as part of your salary.” He laughed a hearty laugh, then shouted: “Tight lines,” and gave another big laugh. He had once asked me how to say good luck to a fly fisher. He’d been wishing me ‘Tight lines!’ ever since, even when I just left for the weekend. Just before we hung up he said, “Try not to worry, Nicklas.”

I started fishing when I was seven years old. My mother’s older brother, Mikael, gave me my first rod, a Fenwick fibreglass for a 5-6 weight line, and my first reel, a Pflueger trout reel. *Morbror ‘Micke’* was leaving for America when he came by our house with the rod, reel, an original Orvis

tackle bag and several Wheatley fly boxes filled with dry, wet and streamer flies. His company, L.M. Ericsson, was sending him to their US office in Texas for a two-year assignment. That was twenty-five years ago and he is still there. He moved from Ericsson to AT&T and worked in their Bell Labs until 1997 when it was spun out with the equipment manufacturing business into a new company named Lucent Technologies. He took a few years off to do a PhD at MIT and then settled into a new life as a professor of material physics at MIT. He bought a condominium near Harvard Square and walked to and from his office near Kendall Square every day. When he wasn't working, which was almost never, he was fishing. He said that New England suited him much better than the New York and New Jersey area from the standpoint of weather, and it was also a bit closer to his favourite Canadian salmon waters. He never married, although my mother told me that he was living with a woman before he left for America. She went over to America shortly after he had gotten settled, but life in Texas was too different from what she was used to in Sweden. She left after a couple of months and that was the end of their relationship.

Although I inherited his fishing gear, I didn't inherit his single-minded devotion to the sport to the exclusion of more social activities, like playing sports, visiting family and having strong personal friendships—at least not until after the accident. That's when my intensive fishing began, when I found that it was a perfect way to escape, to be totally on my own and not have to make any excuses to anyone about why I was doing what I was doing. I was fishing, and it's totally all right to do that alone. It became my substitute world, where the worst that could happen was to not catch fish, and the best that could happen was to catch a lot of fish, and all the while I did not have to think about anything else.

Morbror Micke took me with him up to Canada the summer after the accident, before I started my university studies. He and a group of his

friends had been spending the last week in July for the previous ten years at Skinner's Camp on the Big River in Labrador. We flew from Boston to Halifax, Nova Scotia and then to Goose Bay, Labrador. The last leg of the trip to the Big River was on a float plane, a 1950s de Havilland Beaver. We fished mornings, afternoons and evenings for five days. Each day I hooked a one-to-two kilo sea trout on every other cast, and a three-to-four kilo salmon on one out of ten casts. My largest fish was a bright salmon that weighed over ten kilo. I have never matched this fishing experience, and *Morbror Micke* says that he has not done so either, even on subsequent trips back to 'The Big'. Maybe it was time to try, I thought. I still have the hat I was given by *Morbror Micke* and his fishing friends in a ceremony on the last day when I became an official member of the Big River White Wolff Club.



Lasse and I hung up and I returned to my breakfast. My method of separating a hard boiled egg from its shell was unorthodox, like my way of tying my shoe laces, but it was effective. I cut off the top quarter of the egg with a knife and scooped out the egg with a small teaspoon. The teaspoon first picked up a small dollop of *Kalle's Caviar*, which I had squirted straight out of its bright blue tube that I had brought with me from home. I always had a supply of *Kalle's Caviar* with me whenever I travelled. This delicacy

rarely finds its way out of Sweden except in suitcases. Even IKEA had stopped selling it in favour of offering its own brand until the company's customers protested so loudly that they had to bring it back. Eating the egg in its shell saved the trouble of having all those small egg shell pieces from a completely scaled egg littering the plate and getting into the mouth by mistake.

I brewed my third cup of tea and decided that I would stay through the weekend, four more days, and find a place to fish in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, the region in which Trieste is located. Maybe I would learn why the region could not be satisfied with a single name, like Tuscany or Lazio, and needed three. After having spent so much time in Trieste without ever having made one excursion to its hinterland, I felt like I owed it to the region, especially having used my one previous opportunity to fish in a different country altogether. On that trip I had rented a car and drove to Bled in neighbouring Slovenia. The rivers around Bled, a former retreat for Marshall Tito and his cronies, were well known for their abundance of trout and size of the fish. As I walked along the shore of Lake Bled in the middle of the town on my way to the sport fishing store from the hotel where I spent the first night, I had a first glimpse of the local species. They were too thin to be carp, I thought, and too fast to flee when my shadow passed over them to be bottom-eating suckers. The sport fishing store proprietor confirmed my conclusion that they must be trout by pulling out a drawer full of photo albums showing the fish in various stages of being caught. During two days I fished the gin clear *Sava Bohinjka* with a guide named Revi. I caught native browns and grayling, stocked rainbows, and the marvellous marble trout for which the region is famous. Why not go back, I thought, but then I decided it was time to give Italy a chance. Maybe I would be surprised, maybe not, but I was up for a challenge.

Before I left the breakfast room I phoned Sofi. We had lived together for two years after we finished university, but I was hopeless at being in a relationship. She tried very hard to help me, and still does. In the five years since we decided to live apart I had not been able to think of being with another woman, even if I allowed myself the time—which I didn't. She sees other men, but there hasn't been anything serious. She is still my best friend, and we talk almost every day. I knew she would be worried if I took off on a fishing expedition and just disappeared into a GSM black hole where we could not call each other.

It was almost 9.00 a.m. She would have been at her desk for the past hour. She was a medical researcher at AstraZeneca. During the two years that we were a couple and lived together, she took one express bus from Kungälv to central Göteborg and then another express bus to AstraZeneca's offices in Mölndal. It was almost an hour-and-a-half door-to-door. Because of the traffic, it wouldn't have saved her much time if she drove, although it would have been more comfortable. She had no interest in driving. She had a driver's license, but I don't recall ever seeing her behind the wheel of a car. Since she moved to Göteborg, in the area close to the University, she took the trolley and walked to work and everywhere else. The phone rang a few times and then there was her voice.

"Sofi Dahlberg."

"Hi, Sofi. It's me."

"Hi you," she teased. "Are you having a slow morning? You probably have already heard the news about Jan-Åke, haven't you?"

"Lasse phoned, and I am now having a very slow morning. He said that production is going to stop soon since we can't pay our suppliers. He's telling everyone to take a time out until the dust settles. He suggested I stay here and do some fishing."

“He wants to keep you as far away as possible from Trollhättan because he knows you wouldn’t be able to stay out of the lab. He can read you like a book, much better than I can.”

“How about if I come to Göteborg and hang out with Sassy?” Sassy was our cat, and now it is Sofi’s. She walked through the open door in the summer cabin we rented on Smögen Island ten years ago and she has been with Sofi ever since. I asked for visiting rights when we separated.

“You’ll be off to Trollhättan at the drop of a hat. Stay where you are and try to relax. You have been wound up like an old pocket watch for the past few months. Maybe you should give your friend Bengt a call and tell him you’ll be coming to see him when you’re back.”

“I’ll call Bengt as soon as we hang up. Tell Sassy I’ll see her soon, maybe in a week, possibly two. Do you want regular reports on my catches?”

“Call me when you know how long you will be away, and then not until you are ready to come home. Now I need to do some work. *Hej då*, Nicklas.” Then she hung up.

I kept my promise and phoned Bengt. As I expected, I got into his voice mail.

“*Hej*, Bengt,” I said to his voice mail. “Nicklas Laurentzson. I said I would give you a call when I felt it was time to come down to Volvo Cars and have a talk. It’s time. I’m in Trieste. You know why. I will be staying here for several days to get some separation from what’s happening back at the plant. I’ll phone you again when I have my return travel booked. I hope your offer is still open.”

The breakfast food had been cleared and the tables were being set for lunch. I realized that I had overstayed my welcome and left the room with

apologies to the staff. At the reception I asked if either of the young women behind the desk could direct me to a sport fishing store. They looked puzzled, as if I had asked where I could buy a moose steak. One of the women then disappeared behind the divider. Enrico accompanied her when she returned.

“You want to go deep sea fishing?” he asked.

“No, I want to find a river or stream and fish for trout,” I replied, certain that this would bring more blank stares. Enrico did not look like a fly fisherman. But, as they say, looks can be deceiving.

“There used to be a good place called Kozulic’s on *Via Machiavelli*. Unfortunately, it has been turned into a combination video shop and costume store. There is another place just behind the Savoia Hotel on the corner to the right looking at it from the sea. You know where the Savoia is, don’t you? I’m sure they will be able to give you all the information you need, arrange for the license, sell you the flies and even recommend a place to stay. It’s mainly a store for sea fishing, but they should know about fly fishing.”

“Do you fly fish?” I asked.

“No,” he said with a laugh. “My family depends on me coming home with dinner. I had a friend who used to fish with flies, but he moved to Slovenia and I have never heard from him since. He bought his equipment at the shop behind Savoia. If you want I can look up the name of the store, phone them and tell him you will be coming.”

“Yes, thank you. That would be very kind of you.” I felt guilty about my judgemental attitude. I am going to have to stop pre-judging people, I thought.

I walked the two kilometres from the NH Hotel to the Savoia, first

crossing over to the sea side of *Corsa Cavour*, named after Italy's first prime minister. My business contact in Trieste, Vincenzo, explained to me one evening over dinner at the White Elephant restaurant, which sits on the main street of the city running along the waterfront that changes name from *Corso Cavour* to *Riva 3 Novembre*, that there was at least one street in most Italian towns named after Cavour and all the others involved in forming the united Italy back in the middle of the 1800s. Vincenzo was from Naples. He explained that his city was once the capital of an independent kingdom that included everything south of Rome as well as Sicily. I didn't remember this from my history lessons. His former country was invaded in 1860 by Garibaldi, who was sent by Cavour and the King of Piedmont. The Kingdom of Naples was conquered by the Kingdom of Piedmont and forced to become part of Italy, but the people from this region have never forgotten the humiliation, said Vincenzo. Although no city could escape the fact that streets had to be dedicated to the so-called heroes of the *Risorgimento*, as Vincenzo explained that the unification is called, these men have been relegated to a peripheral area of the city, and *Via Cavour* is a tiny stub of a dead-end street connected to an avenue named after Piedmont's then-king, Umberto. "It's like a stunted penis," joked Vincenzo.

There was no wind. The sky was free of clouds except for a few small wisps of white. I stopped in front of the big open space to take a photo. My map said it was the *Piazza Unità d'Italia*, Unity of Italy Square. It was cool enough for a sweater, but warm enough to be out without a coat, and I had wrapped my windbreaker around my waste. The air had a special freshness that was more like home and less like other cities on the 'continent'. What a difference from the periods when the *Bora* winds rush down from the mountains in the northeast, sweep through the city and skim across the waters in the bay. I shivered instinctively. As I walked, I read my e-mails, *facebook* and *twitter* entries and sent replies. 'In Italy. Going fishing.'



Enrico was right. *Submarine*, the name of the store, was mainly for sea fishing, which is natural given its setting right on the Adriatic. There was no one in sight when I entered the store, so I wandered around looking at the gear they were selling. I should ask for Rosso Grosso, Enrico had told me. There was a small counter with a few fly reels, trout flies, inexpensive fly boxes, knotless tapered leaders and small selection of fly tying materials.

“*Buongiorno*. Can I help you, sir?” a voice said behind me. I turned to see a large man with a full head of curly, red hair that continued down around his ears and cheeks forming a massive beard down to the middle of his barrel chest. His light blue eyes squinted behind thick spectacles and his oversized eyebrows hung over the tops of the lenses like awnings. He wore a t-shirt that bulged through an open fishing vest with an image of a man surrounded by hundreds of big, bright spinning lures and flies and other fishing paraphernalia and the caption: *So many lures; so little time*. His name must be ‘Big Red’, I thought. *Rosso Grosso*.

“*Bona giorna*,” I replied in my less than perfect Italian. “Are you *Rosso Grosso*?”

“Yes. Call me *Rosso*. You must be the fellow from the hotel.”

“I’m the one. I’m Nicklas. I was hoping you could help me find a place to fly fish that is close by, in Italy, not in Slovenia. I’ve been to Slovenia and it was great, but I would like to fish in a river that is in this region. I don’t know if it is possible, if there are trout or grayling, and I was hoping you could help me.”

“*Si, si,*” he replied, enthusiastically. “I talked to Enrico. He said you would be coming over. I’ve put some material and a map together. Here, have a look. How about fishing in Percoto where Ernest Hemingway caught trout? There is a river there, the *Torrente Torre*. It flows into the *Isonzo*.”

None of these names meant anything to me. Ernest Hemingway was someone I had heard about. He was a famous American author, as I remembered. I had never read his major works, but a fishing friend had once given me a copy of a collection of his short stories. One of the stories was about a young boy who was fishing on a small stream near his home. It was a summer day. His mother had made him sandwiches and sent him off with “Have fun, and be careful.” I don’t remember what the main ingredient was in the sandwiches, but there were onions in it. The boy had caught grasshoppers and worms to use as bait, the equivalents of dry and wet flies. He threaded a hook carefully through a grasshopper so that he did not kill it and set the living lure afloat at the end his line. He stripped line from the casting reel so that there was no drag from the current pulling on the doomed, flailing creature. The line passed noiselessly through the guides of the metal rod that had been a gift from his grandfather. The lure was irresistible to the large, hungry trout lurching in the deepest holes on that stream. One after the other they succumbed to the tempting struggles of the hapless ‘hoppers’. What I remember most was the picture that Hemingway painted with words of the young boy eating his sandwich. As he brought the sandwich up to his mouth to take a bite I could smell the lingering aroma on

his fingers of the worms and the fish slime and blood from the hooks he had removed from their mouths and guts, all mingling with the onions.

“I suppose if it was good enough for ‘Ernie’ it should be good enough for me, right?” I quipped.

Big Red gave a large laugh that sounded like it had come from the bottom of a well. “I’ll take that as a ‘Yes’. Do you need any equipment?”

“I need a pair of waders, size 44 shoe with a belt, and I’ll need a net. I have the rod, reel, leaders, flies and clippers.”

“O.K. I’ll put those together. Do you have a car?”

I shook my head ‘No’.

“O.K. We’ll organize that. How many days do you want to fish? Three would give you enough time to learn the water and enjoy the surroundings. You can go up today if you like, or you can start tomorrow. It’s early enough so you could go right to the water and get in an afternoon of fishing before you check into the hotel. I can get you both the national fishing license and the license for Friuli-Venezia Giulia, which will be good for a year. Before you go on the water you will need to stop by the hotel in Percoto to pick up your permit for the river. I will phone them so that they will have it ready.”

“Thank you, *Rosso*. Three days would be fine. If you can arrange for a car I would be happy to drive up today and come back on Sunday. I have maps on my phone so I should be able to find my way.”

Within an hour I had checked out of the hotel, packed the Fiat 500 rental car that *Rosso* had rented for me, and was driving over the steep and high ridge that formed the northern boundary of the city. The *Bora* came over this ridge twice every year to plague the citizens of Trieste. I had experienced it once, in late January of this year. I decided to take a short

walk after breakfast one morning. I had looked out of my window that faced onto the main street toward the sea. It looked clear. When I stepped out of the hotel I felt the chill, but it was not until I passed the corner that I was nearly blown over by the wind. Snow was falling, but the flakes could not attach themselves to the ground. The wind came in bursts, strong enough to stop me in my tracks. After fifteen minutes I gave up and returned to the hotel. The receptionist on duty that morning just looked at me, smiled and shook her head. “*Bora*,” she said.

I drove to the hotel, picked up my permit without checking in and then went straight to the river. *Rosso*’s directions had been perfect. I found the turnoff, and my phone map showed the river a few kilometres from the main road. A black 1983 Saab 900 Turbo was parked in the small clearing at the end of the gravel road leading to the stream. I felt an anxious turning of my stomach, the same turning I always felt when I saw a Saab 900. I parked my rental into a spot as far away from the Saab as I could get it so that the photos I was about to take of this classic beauty would not be ruined by even a reflection of the Fiat. It was a love-hate relationship I had with this model. The smooth ebony paint finish on the Saab’s surface was unblemished. I could see that it was the original paint job, not a refurbishment. Sky and trees reflected like in a mirror when I set my eye close to the surface and at an angle. There was not a hint of fuzziness or ripples that are evident after a body shop treatment. Its interior with light tan leather seats was showroom-perfect. The 900 Turbo models, especially black and silver, were very popular in The States on both of the coasts where most Saabs were sold.



1983 Saab 900 Turbo

Pappa's last car was a Saab 1981 900S, bright red with five doors. I remember when he brought it home. My sister Carolina and I inspected every centimetre of that car. He was so proud of it, his first car that was less than two years old when he bought it from his best friend who ran the Saab dealership in Kungsbacka. Mamma loved driving it too when she wasn't driving her much newer cars. They drove the Saab for fifteen more years until 1998 when they came back home together from a movie late on a February evening and someone used the Saab with my parents in it as his suicide weapon. He crossed into their lane and hit them head on. The two cars melted into one. The police said he must have been driving at least 140 km/hr. Everyone died instantly.

Carolina was already living in an apartment in Göteborg with two other students. I was at home studying for my exams when the doorbell rang. There were two policemen standing outside. They told me what had happened and drove me to the hospital. Mamma had said to Pappa that they should leave me on my own so I could concentrate on my studies. I wanted to get the best grades so I could be more certain to be selected by Chalmers. My first thought was that it was my fault they were dead. That thought has never left me.

As I took the photos, I remembered the last time I drove a Saab 900. It was a week before the accident, when I took my driver's license test. Pappa

and I drove to the Vägverket office in Göteborg. I had passed the theory test a month before on my second try, and had completed the ice driving part a few months before that. Pappa looked up from the newspaper he was reading when I came back inside the office and knew immediately that I had passed. My grin was wider than the door. We took off the 'Driver in Training' sign from the back of the Saab and I drove us home. Mamma was waiting with my favourite cake, pound cake sliced into two layers and then filled in the middle and on top with whipped cream, strawberries, bananas and blueberries.

With tears in my eyes now, I got my rod rigged up and walked to the stream. Within a few minutes I was standing on a bank looking over what had been described to me by the tackle shop owner as the main pool. The stream was no more than ten-to-twelve meters wide. At the head and tail of the pool were small riffles caused by a short drop in the water's elevation. Between these two riffles the surface of the stream was normally smooth as glass. Now there were three perceptible lines on the water caused by current being forced around and through the legs of the Saab-owner. I took it for granted that he was the owner of the car since there was only one car and only one fisherman. Maybe he walked here and the real Saab owner was up- or downstream. I decided that until I saw another fisherman, he would be Mr. Saab-owner, and that name would have to suffice for him until we met—and would forever be his name if we did not.

He stood quite still, with his rod cradled in his left hand across his chest and the small fly attached to his leader dangling just above the water. He wore chest-high, dark brown waders, a light brown Orvis fishing vest and a Tattersall shirt, probably also Orvis or Chevalier, with sleeves folded up to below his elbows. On his head was a Tyrol hat that sported a long pheasant tail feather stuck in the head band over the left ear. He was looking to his left while his body was pointed straight downstream. I was well behind him

and could not see his face or the front of his body. Minutes passed as I watched him and the place along the opposite bank where his eyes must have been fixed. I saw the almost imperceptible rise of a fish where he had been staring. He must have seen it as well, I thought. A few more minutes passed and the fish rose again. After the third rise, Mr. Saab-owner flicked his rod sharply back to his right, casting the line practically straight up to avoid the trees close to the bank behind him and releasing a dozen meters of line that he obviously had held in his left hand. He put the fly three or four meters above the fish and let the line fall with enough slack to eliminate the possibility of drag on the leader, but not too much so that he would be prevented from eventually setting the hook if the fish took. The fly floated slowly over the exact spot where the fish had risen.

The fish took the imitation with the same slow slurp with which it had captured the naturals. His surprise and anger at being lured was evident in the way he catapulted and dove and tugged during the brief minutes that he was at the end of Mr. Saab-owner's line. Quickly, and without taking the fish out of the water, he netted and released the fish, almost in one smooth motion. It was a lovely Brown, at least two kilos. I had gotten a better view of Mr. Saab-owner when the fish turned and ran upstream and he followed it by rotating his body. He was intent on watching the point where his line disappeared into the water, so he had not seen me. He wore a green bowtie. Horn-rimmed glasses were perched on the top of a classic Roman nose. He was cleanly shaven. Without changing the fly, Mr. Saab-owner returned to same position, rod across his chest, seemingly prepared to wait forever for the next rise, perhaps by the same fish.

Quietly, I rose up from the crouching position I had taken and walked along a narrow trail up river from the main pool. I found what looked like the number two pool on the stream and knelt down on one knee to observe the surface. I was out of sight of the main pool which was around a bend,

blocked from view by a thick stand of trees and tall grass. The stream along this stretch was not more than a meter deep, and it was a good idea to stand or kneel out of the water away from the bank since fish would be found along both of the undercut bank edges. There was little room for a cast, and the river was too narrow in any case. I would have to flip the fly with enough line to let the fly float over a rising fish. This was a technique I had perfected on my home waters, which were perfectly designed for worm fishermen with not the slightest opening for casting a fly. I got it to work there, and I was able to repeat the success here on this little stream. I caught no trophies, but the trout were large enough to offer a good fight.

When I returned to the main pool, Mr. Saab-owner had moved farther out with the water almost up to the top of his waders. I never waded in above my knees. *I don't want to step on the fish*, I told anyone who asked, but the real reason was a total fear of falling in and drowning. I found my old spot and sat down in the grass. As often happened, I didn't realize I was hungry because I was preoccupied with something more interesting than eating. I never left home without my miniature coffee brewer along with *Gevalia* or *Arvid Nordquist Classic* ground coffee, filters and my trusty *Naturkompaniet* thermos. Before I checked out of the hotel in Trieste I had brewed four cups of coffee using the still mineral water from the minibar and filled the thermos. The café just up the street from the NH Hotel had a good selection of sandwiches in little buns and I stocked up with a half dozen of them along with a couple of pastries thrown in for good measure. As I sipped my coffee and ate through half of my sandwich stock, I watched Mr. Saab-owner.

Just then, a dimple appeared along the far bank and Mr. Saab-owner flicked his fly as he had done earlier. The fly fell a few meters short. He released the rest of the line and picked up the fly from the water before it started to drag. This time he let his backcast go straight back upstream and then steered the end of the line across the stream at a forty-five degree angle,

stripping out more line as the fly landed and mending upstream. The small fly bobbed innocently over the spot where we both had seen the fish rise. The fly continued, untouched. He tried a few more casts, repeating the casting exercise. There was no response from the fish. He reeled in his line, placed the fly in a hook keeper and turned. Then, suddenly, he disappeared under the surface of the water with only his hat and the top of his rod visible.

I immediately jumped to my feet, pulled off my waders and rushed to the water. I splashed in until I was up to my knees and then dove toward the rod tip that was still breaking the water. I swam a few meters with fast strokes. The current was slow and I spotted him quickly. His waders had filled with water and he was bobbing near the bottom. His eyes met mine as I approached him. I grabbed the top of his waders with my left hand and began pulling with my right while I frog-kicked as hard as I could. He was small, but the weight of the water in his waders made it difficult to move him. It took a few seconds to reach shallower water so I could stand and get my head above the surface. I gasped for air. I pulled his head above the water as quickly as I could stand. It took all of my strength.

He exhaled a stream of water as soon as his head emerged and then began coughing and gasping. I pulled him ashore and placed him on his stomach, head facing downhill toward the water. My heart was pounding. This was the first time I rescued someone, but I had good training in school and in the army. I stretched his arms out from his shoulders and bent up at the elbow, turned his head to the right side and raised his right leg up perpendicular to his body, all this so that any water that might have entered his lungs would drain. He kept coughing for another minute. I needed to get him warm to avoid him going into shock, but all I had were my own wet clothes. There was still an almost full thermos of hot coffee and I ran over to where I had left it. I was also beginning to feel a chill. I pulled on my waders, both to get a layer of warmth and protect my feet. He had left his windbreaker on

the side of the stream, so I picked it up and put it over him while I poured a cup of coffee. He was sitting now, looking pale but not coughing any longer.

He sipped the coffee. We still had not yet said anything to each other. I broke the silence.

“That was a close call,” I said in English.

“I guess I lost my footing,” he replied in a British accent that was tinged with Italian. “Thank you for saving my life; it was very brave of you.”

“You would have been able to swim out of there if you had been wearing a belt on your waders,” I said, and then felt I had no right to be scolding a man much older than I who had just escaped drowning, even if I was the one who pulled him out. I tried to apologize. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t be lecturing.”

“No. You are perfectly right. I forgot to put it on. I’ve gotten more absent-minded lately, my son tells me. Maybe I didn’t put it on on purpose.” Then he changed the subject. “Where are you from?”

“Sweden. I’m doing a little fishing before returning home. We should get you to your home as soon as possible. Where do you live?”

“I am staying at the hotel in Percoto.”

“So am I. I’ll drive you there.”

“That is very kind of you, but would you mind if we drove my car?” I have quite a lot of expensive equipment in the car.”

I hesitated. I had not driven a Saab 900 since the accident and was not sure that I could. But this was not the time to have a discussion about one of my several phobias.

“Fine,” I answered, and I gathered up the gear on the ground and we started for the parking area. We had walked a few meters when he stopped dead and exclaimed: “My hat! Francesca gave me that hat. She will be very sad if I lose it.”

I returned to the edge of the water and looked downstream. There was no sign of a hat. I ran along the bank to the end of the pool and then I spotted it, floating in a backwater. I grabbed a branch and snagged it. When I returned with it to Mr. Saab-owner, he took it with tearful eyes.

“Grazie. Grazie tanto.”

I took my bag out of the Fiat and transferred it to the Saab. As I slid into the seat and reached down to turn the ignition key, I felt the tears coming to my own eyes. We drove the few kilometers back to Percoto without a word because as soon as we settled into the car, he fell asleep. He woke when we arrived. I rushed into the hotel and explained what had happened and asked for help to get him to the closest hospital. He appeared to be well-known by the people working at the hotel. The person who looked like the manager ran to the car, and I followed. He yelled back to me that he would drive ‘the signor’ to the hospital, and I should wait here. Before he got into the driver’s seat, he asked: “Do you have a bag?”

“Yes, in the back seat,” I replied. He pulled it out and handed it to me. Then he jumped in and they sped away.

I stood there for a few minutes and then went into the hotel. A young man led me up the grand staircase to my first floor room and he placed my bag into the large, heavy oak wardrobe taking up one wall, along with the entrance door, of the spacious, almost double-height space. He then went into the bathroom and started filling the tub with hot water. He came out and motioned to me to take off all of my clothes. He did not speak English, so this conversation took place with a lot of hand movements accompanied

by words I could not understand. I did as I thought I was being told to do. On the opposite wall were two high windows on either side of an oversized French door leading to a balcony that overlooked the garden. The bed, made out of the same oak as the wardrobe, stood majestically along a third wall. The bathroom, with its door on the fourth wall, was larger than most hotel rooms I had stayed in. It had its own window to the garden, letting in abundant light that glistened on the white tile and enamel fixtures.

The young man left with my clothes. I stepped into the tub. My skin began to tingle like it does when you come in from the cold on a winter day when you didn't wear gloves and put your hands under hot water. I soaked for half an hour, at least. I dried off and got into the large, inviting bed and took a nap. The phone rang a few hours later. It was the hotel manager. Mr. Saab-owner was fully recovered and in the hotel dining room. Would I care to join him? I put on the change of clothes I had in my bag, a pair of dark blue Dockers pants and a long-sleeved plaid shirt, and walked downstairs.

When I entered the dining room just a few minutes after eight, the *maitre de* greeted me and took me to Mr. Saab-owner's table. He stood up as I approached.

"*Buonasera, Signore.* Excuse me for not introducing myself when we first met. I am Alessandro Carlotti. I am very pleased to meet a fellow fly fisher, and the person who saved my life."

"*Bono sarah,*" I replied, knowing I had just fractured one of the most beautiful bones in the body of the *lingua Italia*. "My name is Nicklas Laurentzson.

"You must call me 'Sandy'. That is what my American and English friends call me. Do you agree?"

“Yes, of course. Sandy it will be. You are one of the most patient fishermen I have ever had the pleasure to watch, up until the time you disappeared under water. How are you feeling? Did you have a doctor look at you?”

“*Si, Grazie,*” Signore Carlotti—Sandy—replied with a smile. “I have received a completely clean bill of health from a doctor at the local clinic, and a suggestion that I return home immediately and stay out of the water. I told the good doctor that I would take his suggestion under advisement. Thank you for the compliment and for your helpful suggestion that I make a checklist of what I should be wearing when I wade into the water. I sensed that you were there, behind me, but when I am concentrating on a rising fish it is difficult for me to redirect my attention. I had planned to offer you one of my flies, but when I finally turned, I slipped.”

“I walked upstream and fished the deep channel for an hour or so and then returned to the pool where you were so expertly fooling the browns. I did manage to hook a few small ones upstream on a number twelve Pale Blue Dun. Together they would have made a good dinner. I didn’t know that we had that possibility.”

“I kept two on the chance that you would join me this evening. They were safely in my creel on shore. I have taken it for granted that you like to eat fish as much as you like to catch them. Is that the case?”

“Arctic Char is my favourite, then Sea Trout followed by Atlantic Salmon. Once, on a trip to Vancouver, British Columbia, I ate a Pacific Ocean Silver Salmon that I caught. That might be my all-time favourite, but it is not a fish that I can count on catching very often. A fish eaten within the hour after catching it, pan fried in a cast iron skillet over a streamside fire is the biggest treat I can imagine.”

“I agree. Our fish will be more than a few hours out of the water and Brown Trout do not have the same distinctive taste of the red-fleshed salmonoids, but it is quite acceptable when it is prepared as they do here in Percoto. The *porcini* mushrooms are the secret ingredient along with the *San Daniele* ham.”

The waiter arrived and asked if me if I would like a cocktail before our dinner arrived. I asked for a beer. Signore Carlotti smiled and nodded to the waiter as he left.

“There was a time in my life when I considered a cocktail before dinner a bourgeois extravagance. It was a custom of the idle rich—or worse, the idle poor nobility—and not something that should be copied by an aspiring socialist, I declared. A glass or two of wine should satisfy the thirst and the taste, I believed. I do not hold those views any longer. The waiter will bring me an American dry martini that I taught him how to make last evening. I hope you won’t mind.”

“No, I don’t mind at all. My uncle, who lives in America, drinks martinis. He made one for me on a fishing trip I took with him to Canada some years ago. I must admit, it tasted like medicine and it gave me a headache.”

“It’s all in the gin one uses and the amount of vermouth that is added. My favourite is Bombay Gin. If you look up the recipe for a very dry martini you will find that it calls for two parts gin and one part vermouth. This is a waste of vermouth and a sin against the gin. A true martini should taste of the expensive gin, not the relatively inexpensive vermouth. My trick is to use a little spray bottle to place a thin layer of vermouth on the inside of the glass with two small pushes on the sprayer and then to pour in the pure gin which has been shaken in an ice tumbler with an ice filter on it into the glass.

The waiter arrived with my beer, already poured into a glass, so I could not see its country of origin. It didn't matter since I couldn't tell a good beer from a bad one and rarely had more than two. He placed a martini glass in front of Signore Carlotti. The glass was frosted, so it had been chilled and it contained two olives. He then took a glass vile from a small silver bowl containing crushed ice and poured the transparent liquid into the martini glass. Half of the vile's contents remained, and the waiter replaced the vile in the bowl and set it down on the table. Then he placed down on the table a plate with thin slices of ham. "*San Daniele*," he said, indicating that this was the local product in case I might mistakenly assume it was its more famous cousin from the Parma region, *prosciutto*. I certainly couldn't tell one from the other. They both looked like they had more fat than ham, and the only time I tried it—one or the other—the fat found its way between all of my teeth. The waiter added two bowls of olives, one with the black variety and the other with the green, which I decided I would concentrate on.

"To your health, Mr. Laurentzson. *Salute!*"

"As we say in Sweden, *skål*, Signore Carlotti!"

"The glass vile and silver ice bowl are mine. I learned how to make the perfect martini on a trip to Boston, Massachusetts forty-three years ago. I was there as a guest lecturer at Harvard University's School of Architecture. The Dean of the School at the time, Jose Luis Sert, was a friend of mine and he thought inviting me to speak would be a good way for us to get together. He booked me into the Ritz Hotel, and it was there that I drank my first martini, served in exactly the same way as this martini before you. I went to the bar and asked the bartender to teach me how to make it, and he did. He gave me the tumbler, the vile and ice bowl as a gift."

He was clearly enjoying his martini more than I was enjoying my beer when I blurted out something that was on my mind since he introduced himself.

“Sandy, may I ask if you are any relation to the famous Italian composer of the same name?”

“Well, I do have a famous relative in my past, but it is not that one. You are referring to the Sicilian Alessandro Scarlatti or one of his sons. Alessandro was a Baroque composer who founded the Neapolitan school of opera. He died in 1725. Sicily and Southern Italy were the same country back then, and Napoli was its capital. Alessandro’s two sons, Domenico and Pietro Filippo were also well-known composers. Maybe it is his Swedish connection that makes him familiar to you?”

“My apologies for mixing up your names,” I replied, a bit sheepishly. “My friend Sofia is the opera fan. She goes to the Göteborg Opera every month. Once she took me to a performance composed by Scarlatti. I think she may have mentioned something about him being a favourite of our Queen Christina.”

“Yes, indeed he was. Christina met him in Roma when she was living there, after her abdication. She made him her choirmaster. I think that it is so amusing that she continued to act like she was still a queen even though she had relinquished the throne to her brother, Karl X Gustav, the ‘Warrior King’. My great great grandfather was named Alessandro Carlotti, spelled with an ‘o’, rather than an ‘a’. He was born in Garda, Verona in the beginning of the 19th century. He was a noble and landowner and became one of the first senators of the new Italian government when it was formed in 1861. His son, Andrea, my great grandfather, was an ambassador. Gradually, the family became less political, and the title of *marchesi* that was granted to my great great grandfather eventually disappeared into

another branch of the family than mine. If I may make a personal statement, a woman who likes opera is surely someone very special. Is she one of many girlfriends or is she the only one?"

"She is the only one, but she is not my girlfriend any more, just a friend. We might still be living together if I were someone who deserved her." I surprised myself with my openness and honesty with this complete stranger, but there was something about him that I both liked and trusted. "Her name is Sofia Dahlberg. Everyone calls her Sofi."

"Does this little fishing trip have something to do with Sofia?"

"No. This is a short vacation to recharge my batteries before I have to go back to Sweden and find a new job. My company is the one that made your car, and it is not doing so well. Maybe you heard?"

"You work for Saab! What a shame that a company that has made such wonderful cars is now on the brink of collapse. General Motors bought a money-losing company and proceeded to do everything they could to make it fall even further in the deep well of ruin. Another American company almost succeeded in doing the same with Volvo, but they pulled out before it was too late to save it. Yes, I know quite a bit about your company. Cars are one of my four passions."

"A second one of them must be fishing. What are the other two, if I may ask?"

"Yes, fishing is one of them. My vocation and another hobby are the other two: architecture and cooking. The one love in my life, my dear wife, Francesca, may God have mercy on her soul, was not always sure which of the four came first. She had no doubt that my love for her came before my passions. She passed away just one year ago."

“I am sorry.” I started to say something stupid about his remark that his wife would be very sad if he lost his hat, but I caught myself.

“Thank you. We were married for just over fifty years. We met at university in Bologna. I was studying architecture and she was studying law. As soon as I saw her I knew that I wanted to spend the rest of my life with her. Happily for me, she felt the same way. We were very good friends for all of those years. She also had interests beyond the home and her profession, including horse riding and hunting. She rode with her childhood friends and hunted with her brothers and their father as long as he was able. I brought home the fish and she brought home the pheasants. We cooked together, but it was clear from the start that I had a greater interest in the culinary arts. She said that my food arrangements were architectonic; they reminded her of buildings and their floor plans.”

He smiled as he talked. It felt like he was talking more to his wife than about her. His eyes drifted upward. He did not seem sad.

“Are you taking a vacation from your work, from your architecture office?”

“My old office is in good hands. My son and his wife are now in charge. It is wonderful to see how such close collaboration can create architecture that is both functional and beautiful. Jacopo, my son, has an excellent sense of structure and materials. Annamaria, his wife, is a master of plan and form. They took over exactly two years ago when I decided that it was time to devote the rest of my days to my cars, fishing and cooking and my love. Since Francesca died I am down to my three passions, and this trip is combining all of them.”

“How long will you be away?”

“As long as it takes. This trip is now my life. I will be driving my six cars, slowly fishing the fresh waters of my country, sampling its foods and reflecting on what we have made of our cities and towns. I have placed my cars in strategic spots and will exchange them as often as I get to them. I suppose this sounds eccentric, but the thought came to me one day in January when I sat in our large house and wondered how I would be spending the rest of my days without Francesca and my work. Jacopo and Annamaria were living in one part of the house and they needed the space more than I with their one boy, my grandson Alessandro, and another child on the way. Now I have just my library and bedroom for those times when I return to visit. Of course, I am free to use the kitchen as much as I like, and they don’t seem to mind the meals I prepare for us when I am there. I designed the kitchen, and it is one of my better creations, if I may say so without sounding too boastful.”

Incredible, I thought. Here is a man who is doing what I always thought I wanted to do, fishing every day. How old could he be, seventy, maybe seventy-five? He looked like he was in good health, except for a hip or knee problem that I noticed when we were walking to the car. I wondered what the cause of his wife’s death was, but I did not want to ask. *As long as it takes* sounded a little ominous, like he was not planning to live to the end. But maybe it was a positive statement. Maybe he was not planning to leave the trip until he had fished and eaten in every worthy place in the country. That could take a very long time. I chose an easy subject to continue the conversation.

“You have six cars?” What are the other five?”

“Only one of them is a sports car of sorts, and the rest are non-exotic classics. With the exception of the Saab parked outside, they are all Volvos. I always chose my cars to function as both basic transportation and pack

horses for my fishing expeditions, and Volvos seemed to fit the bill quite nicely. I bought them all as new and have cared for them like children. Each one is now strategically placed around the country, ready to take over the job of carrying me and my fishing gear from river to stream to hotel. There is a black 1960 PV210 in Torino and a red 1973 1800ES Sport in Bologna. The 1800ES is not quite basic transportation, but as a hatchback it carries quite a load. There is a two-tone orange and white 1953 PV445 Duett in Benevento, a white 1967 145 in Sicilia, and a red 1962 P120 estate in Sardegna.”

“So the idea is that you will fish a region, stay in places where the food is exceptional, drive to the next region, change cars, and repeat the exercise. Have I gotten it right?”

“In principle, yes. The one additional and important point is that I will do it all slowly: slowly fish the waters; slowly sample the regions’ delicacies; slowly record my thoughts on the state of the communities; and, slowly drive from place to place. I won’t be in a hurry to finish, because when the trip is finished it will be all over.”

At that point I experienced a strange sensation: I was worried about him having another accident. He really should not be fishing on his own. Many people told me that I should fish with a partner or make sure that others were fishing at the same time just in case an accident like the one Mr. Carlotti had occurs.

“Your trip sounds like the experience of a lifetime, but should you really be doing this on your own? Don’t you have a friend or relative to accompany you?”

“No one who would be willing or able to fish with me the whole time, although I do plan to meet fishing friends along the way. You said that you had planned your trip as a short vacation before travelling back to Sweden to

find a new job,” he said, interrupting my thoughts. “Are you in a very big hurry to return? Why don’t accompany me on my curious journey for a short while and you can keep your eye out for me?”

I knew nothing about him except his name, the make of the car he was driving and the fact that he was an accomplished fly fisher. What kind of travel companion would he be? Would he be able to put up with me and my own quirky habits?

“Sofi says that among my many other personality flaws, I am not an easy person to travel with,” I quipped, testing his seriousness.

“You will have your own accommodations, so it does not matter to me if you snore,” he said, and then let out a genuine laugh. “I am not as capricious as it might seem, inviting a complete stranger to join me. I had the idea of asking you when I invited you to join me for dinner, but I would not have done so unless I was certain you would both enjoy and appreciate at least the fishing part. I am absolutely certain you will appreciate the driving part since it appears that you have cars registered in your DNA and my cars are all of the Scandinavian variety. The slow eating part will be something new, I believe. By your choice of drink and the way you ate the bread and olives and left the *prosciutto*, I believe you eat to live, rather than the other way around. But I sense that you are a person who likes to learn new things and through a region’s food you can learn everything about a people. I will cover all of the costs, so you won’t have to dig into your reserves.”

Disarmed and convinced, but still hesitant, I said, “That is very generous of you. I guess I can afford to take a few weeks off before I would need to start bringing in money for the rent. But I couldn’t think of letting you pay for me.”

“Money is not a problem for me, and it would make things much easier and save a lot of time for more important things. I have arranged for all the hotel bills to be sent to my accountant. So let’s agree on that point. Yes?”

There was no use arguing, so I agreed.

“We can drive back together to Trieste on Sunday to return your rental car. Then we can pick up some additional clothes for you so you will be prepared for different weather and water conditions. I have plenty of extra equipment. How does that sound?”

“It sounds perfect. I’m still not sure I should be doing this at such an uncertain point in my life, but it feels like it is the right thing to do. Where had you planned to go from here?”

While we were talking, the waiter had returned to fill my new friend’s glass with the remainder of the martini mixture that had been chilling in its bed of ice. I was still nursing my beer, which was now fairly tasteless. I didn’t really enjoy beer or wine or any type of alcohol except the *snaps* with herring on the holidays. The empty dish for the ham and bowls for the olives were cleared. Before he could answer my question, the first course arrived.

“The first course is *fettuccini alle castagne* with a sauce made from *porcini* mushrooms sautéed in butter and reduced with cream,” explained the waiter. The portions were neither large nor small, and they were served in colourful bowls that looked like they were specially made for this first course. There were pieces of chestnut sprinkled over the top. “The chestnuts are slowly roasted and then ground into a flour that produces rich and hearty tasting. I have chosen a local wine, a *Friuliano* from Colli Orientali del Friuli.”

“*Grazie*, Roberto,” said Sandy. “*Colli* means ‘hill’. There are two hills on either side of the Judrio River that produce the best quality wines in the

region. The other one is called simply *Collio*. As you go further south, toward the Adriatic, more sparkling wines are produced. There are good red wines here as well, but the whites are the pearls.”

As we started in on the *fettuccine* my new friend returned to the itinerary.

“Unless you have another plan, we could fish the Isonzo River tomorrow, the stretch north of Gorizia. It is famous for its marble trout, and it also has grayling. The next day, after we drop your car off and get you fitted up with waders and some extra clothes that you might need for the cooler weather in the mountains, we will drive through Veneto in the Region of Venice and Padova and then to Trentino Alto-Adige. It is claimed that Veneto is one of the best regions in Italy for fly fishing. We shall see. The Piave River in Alto-Adige is a jewel, also with both marble trout and grayling. It is my ‘home’ river.”

Sandy did eat very slowly. He wound the *fettuccine* on his fork. He did not use a spoon as I had seen guests doing in the NH Hotel dining room. There were no spoons on the table. I thought of asking for one since I either had too much or too little on my fork after a turning exercise.

“I never have gotten the hang of eating strings of pasta.”

“I am not very good with chopsticks. It’s not something you do naturally. Eastern Asians eat with chopsticks like we eat with forks and knives and spoons. The Germans need to have training wheels in the form of large spoons to form the *spaghetti* or *fettuccine* in rings around the fork. It’s an unnecessary accessory. The trick is to use the side of the plate and to pick a few strands of the *fettuccine* rather than placing the fork in the middle and winding all of the strings on it. Try it.”

It worked! Such a small detail made all the difference. I slowly worked my way around the edge, pulling the strands toward it. I had a special feeling of accomplishment when I was finished.

Roberto returned with two small bowls of soup. “*Jota Ricca*,” he announced. I had eaten Italian vegetable soup many times before, always minestrone, but there was something unique about this bowl. It looked like cabbage. “What’s in it?” I asked.

“Sauerkraut,” said Sandy. “It’s a specialty of Friuli-Venezia Giulia. You can guess that it comes originally from the time when this region was part of Austria-Hungary. It used to be simply sauerkraut cooked in a broth made from boiling pork. It has become less frugal now that people have more money to spend on their food. The main ingredients are lard, garlic, flour, a piece of smoked pork, bay leaves, barley, a type of cranberry bean called *borlotti* and sauerkraut. I make a version using potatoes rather than the barley and I cook *salsicia* with the sauerkraut before adding them to the mixture. It’s best made the day before and then warmed up before eating.”

I took a spoonful, blew on it to cool it off and placed it into my mouth. I was transposed to my *mormor*’s kitchen. “I don’t need anything else for dinner.”

“Save a little room for the trout.”

The main course was the trout that Sandy had caught that day, one for each of us. Both fish were brought in on a large platter with roasted, quartered potatoes surrounding the fish. *Trote al Prosciutto e Salvia* is what Roberto called it. The trout had been filled with sautéed mushrooms, crushed chestnuts and sage, wrapped in thin slices of the *San Daniele* ham, and then grilled over hot embers until the ham had crispened and the flesh had cooked through. A dish of grilled *zucchini*, *melanzani*, *cippolini* and *aglio* were served as side accompaniments. All of this was explained by

Roberto, principally for my benefit since I am certain that Sandy had either already been into the kitchen to review the menu, or had given them his recipes. He translated the ingredients to squash, eggplant, onions and garlic.

“The trick is how far from the coals to place the fish so that the ham and fish cook at the right temperature. They should be finished at the same time. A master chef has fed many pigs before he can make the perfect dish for a guest. Cooking over coals is the most difficult way to make a meal, but it is the way that our ancestors prepared their food for thousands of years. It is a matter of relearning a skill that has been mostly forgotten.”

I watched how he first unwrapped the fish from the ham and then separated the fish from the bones. I knew how to eat fish; most Swedes do. He simply knew how to do it better. You make a slit down the back of the fish, make a cut across the front of the tail and another one just behind the gill, and then pass the knife from head to tail, lifting the fillet from the bones. He ate slowly, and I instinctively slowed down as well.

“Did you have music lessons as a child?” Sandy asked suddenly.

“My mother tried to convince me to take piano lessons when I was ten. I said I would think about learning how to play the drums, so the exercise stopped there. My older sister, Carolina, is the one who became the cultured one in the family. I was too busy with video games, football and ice hockey.”

“Was your father a sportsman?”

“He wasn’t so much a player as a watcher. He worked in a bank so his hours were very fixed and he didn’t travel. He took me to all the practices and watched every game I ever played. Carolina was more interested in ballet, music and her studies, and she did most things on her own. Our mother was a nurse and always worked different shifts, so it was difficult for

her to be very involved in either of our activities. Both of our parents were very concerned that we went to university. There was never any doubt about that. I wanted to be a computer engineer. My sister wanted to be a college professor and teach sociology. We both got our wishes.”

“Do you still play football and hockey?”

“I haven’t played very often during the past five or so years. My work has involved a lot of travel and it makes for unpredictable hours. When I’m not working and the waters aren’t frozen over, I’m fishing. There are too few hours in the day, I’ve found.”

“How about reading? Are you a regular reader?”

“I can’t remember the last time I read a book. All of my news comes from my phone and tablet computer. Am I disqualifying myself from your trip by my lack of culture?”

“No, no, not at all,” he said, and he held up his hands in an open gesture. “I am just interested in learning more about you. There was a time in history, not that long ago, when an educated man was expected to have a broad set of interests. It was taken for granted that he was an accomplished rider and hunter and had mastered one sport, had a real appreciation for art and music, could dance, sing and recite poetry and plays, and was versed in both the classics and contemporary literature.”

“There must have been fewer distractions for kids during that time in history.”

“You mean that watching TV, playing video games and talking on the phone are the distractions from playing sports and getting educated? There were probably other diversions, like chasing after young girls. It was only the boys who were from a wealthy or reasonably well-to-do family who

were educated. For the rest, the poor, it was only work. How did you become good at video games?”

“Practice. It took a lot of time to master each game.”

“Think if you spent that time reading about a period in history, like the time of Napoleon.”

Dessert arrived before I had to answer that question. “The *dolce* is *stucolo de pomi e cotto*” said the waiter. He explained that it was a type of strudel filled with apples and nuts.

“All of the foods in this region are influenced by the Austrian heritage and the proximity of Slovenia,” explained Sandy. “The deserts in particular are imports from the East, and we are grateful for them.”

“I don’t suppose I could have a little ice cream to go with it?” I asked sheepishly.

The waiter looked at Sandy. The expression on his face was one of curious wonder. ‘Ice cream with *strucolo*!!’ said the expression.

“I’ll try that as well,” Sandy replied, and he winked at me. “I guess we should make it vanilla, don’t you think, to keep the flavour of the *strucolo* from being overwhelmed.”

“Yes, vanilla would be perfect.”

There were times when I actually reflected on why I had become so engaged in sitting with my Playstation for hours and hours. I sat in the room when we went on vacation rather than joining the family on the beach or visiting museums. Dinner was a distraction that either had to be avoided or dispatched in the smallest amount of time. *It will make me a better fighter pilot*, I had said to my mother. *Do you really want to be a fighter pilot?* she had asked. *Maybe an astronaut*, I would answer. They never insisted that I stop, as long as I was getting good grades in my courses. We never had any

homework, and the tests were so easy, always based on the work we did in class. I was bored in school. At least the video games were challenging—until I mastered them.

“Dad said I should spend the time practicing my sports. Mom thought I could do more around the house. I honestly haven’t found the need to learn more about history. It just seems to be full of wars and disasters.”

“Yes, it’s a wonder humankind have gotten as far as we have,” he mused. “You said your mother ‘was’ a nurse. Are your parents retired?”

“No. They died in a car crash just before I was finished with gymnasium.”

“I am sorry,” he said, and his face showed true compassion. “I truly am sorry.”

“I am too. I miss them very much.”

&

Chapter Two

Apprehensive

The next day, before we left for the river, I phoned Sofi.

“Hej, Nicklas.”

“Hej, Sofi.”

“Where are you?”

“I’m in a small hotel just north of Trieste. I drove up yesterday in a rental car and planned to fish until tomorrow and then come home.” I paused.

“Have you changed your mind? Is the fishing that good?”

“The fishing was very good yesterday. I had company on the river, an older gentleman, an Italian, who owns an ’83 Saab and five vintage Volvos. He was an architect before he retired. His wife was a lawyer before she died last year. He likes opera. I told him that you liked opera as well. He has decided to travel around Italy and fish. As I was watching him, he tripped and went under. His waders filled with water and I had to rescue him.”

“Nicklas!” Sofi exclaimed, and I had to move my phone away from my ear when she screamed my name. “Are you all right? Is he all right?”

“He’s fine and I’m fine. My first-aid training came in handy. He asked me to join him for as long as I liked, and I said I would. It’s better for both of us not to fish alone.”

“So will we ever see you again?” she joked, seeming to be clearly relieved, but there was still a nervousness in the tone of her voice. She always used ‘we’. It was as if she felt that using ‘I’ would make it too

personal and frighten me away. Sassy was always there to help us make things easier.

“I told him I would have to get back and start earning a living again, but I could think about spending a couple of weeks. He said he would pay all of the expenses.”

“That sounds a bit impetuous on his part.” The nervous tone had deepened. “What is he like?”

“He seems genuine.” I could feel Sofi’s bewilderment. The truth sounded like a complete fabrication. I knew I had to calm down and talk rationally, otherwise I would just cause Sofi to worry. “Maybe he is a little eccentric. He wears a bowtie when he fishes, if you can believe that. I thought they only did that in England. He is a very good fly fisher. His plan is to visit places where the food is exceptional for the region. That’s part of the reason for the trip. If I can play amateur psychologist for a moment, it seems the main reason is to let his son and daughter-in-law take over his architecture business and his home without feeling that he is constantly in the way. So he has come up with this idea for a prolonged fishing trip. Then I showed up and I guess he thinks it would be better to not fish alone.”

There was silence on the line. Then Sofi said, “Will you have enough *Kalle’s* and *Gevalia* for two weeks? Shall I send you down an emergency package? Better yet, maybe we should carry them down to meet your new fishing partner.”

“You are the world’s best friend, Sofi. I’ve got enough rations for a week. When they run out I will come home. If things get weird I will just pack up and leave. But I don’t think they will. So please don’t worry. I have a feeling that one day you will meet this Mr. Carlotti and----.”

“His name is not ‘Carlotti’ is it?” she laughed, not letting me finish my sentence. “He is a car nut with a name that matches.”

“I hadn’t thought of that. Yes, it’s funny. He probably gets kidded a lot by his American friends. I was going to say that I think you will like him. He asked me to call him ‘Sandy’.”

We chatted for a little while longer and then said our good-byes. I never liked hanging up the phone when I talked with Sofi. I felt better after talking to her than before, and that was especially true after this call. I decided that I would wait for several days before I phoned again so I would have a better idea of how the trip was going and whether I would last the two weeks I had signed up for or head home sooner.

Sandy was in the breakfast room when I came down. He was reading the newspaper with a large café latte in his hand and a croissant, split in half with butter and jam on each half, sitting on a plate in front of him. Not a bite had yet been taken. He looked up and smiled when I approached his table. “*Buongiorno*, Nicklas. I hope you have slept well.”

“*Bon jorno*, Sandy.” Was I getting any better with these simple phrases, I thought. Probably not.

“How do you say ‘good morning’ in Swedish?”

“*Go’morgon*.” It is the same two words as in English: *god*—which is pronounced ‘goo’—for good, and *morgon* for morning.

“And for the rest of the day?”

“*God dag* for ‘good day’, *god kväll* for ‘good evening’ and *god natt* for ‘good night’.”

“Do you usually eat breakfast?”

“When I travel I try to eat the same breakfast as I have every day in Sweden. It’s a hard boiled egg with Swedish caviar and tea with honey and milk.” I showed him my tube of *Kalle’s* caviar, took off the cap and stretched it in his direction.

“That sounds very healthy,” he said as he took the tube of caviar from my hand and held the open top close to his nose. It wrinkled. “It smells like what fish eggs are supposed to smell like,” he said as he handed the tube back to me. *Farbror Micke* used to like to tell the story of what friends would always say when opened his refrigerator. “*Hey, Mike. Do you keep your toothpaste in the fridge?*”

“I guess this is not in the same class as Beluga from the mighty sturgeon, but it gets the job done,” Sandy added. “Breakfasts in the Italian regions are basically the same, but the differences are what make them interesting for the traveller. Most hotels will have hard boiled eggs on the buffet. If they don’t, the staff will be happy to prepare one for you. I guess you will have to bring your own caviar from home. I do remember now seeing caviar in a tube when I have been in Sweden. Tea and honey are always available. Have a look at the table here. You will see cheeses and cold meats, like salami and ham and sausages. You will also see different types of breads and sweets. These are what change from region to region, and sometimes from town to town. They also change with the seasons, of course, with traditional breads for Christmas and Easter. The Easter bread in this region is called *prezniz*, which is a rolled puff pastry with dried fruits. The roll is curled loosely around itself in a spiral before it is baked.”

“Maybe I should try what you are having, just this once.” He smiled when I said this and nodded. I made a pass along the breakfast table and gathered up a few croissants, butter, jam, different cheeses and cold meats. For good measure I added a container of yogurt and assorted fruits. I

returned to pour myself a glass of orange juice and a big cup filled with only hot water.

“That’s a little bit more than what I am having,” laughed Sandy, “It should tide you over until lunch.”

It wasn’t the first time I had broken my breakfast routine. Whenever I travelled to Great Britain or the United States, I always had the local fat- and carbohydrate-rich diet the first day. In the US, I usually sampled the entire table, from pancakes to omelettes, waffles to sausage links. In Britain I didn’t leave out a single ingredient from the standard English Breakfast, including the baked beans and fried tomatoes. I went to Tunisia once to visit one of our hardware supplier’s assembly plants. I stayed there for three days and I had no choice but to eat what was served at the hotel for breakfast. The customs agents had confiscated my *Kalle’s* as well as my coffee. It was mostly salad ingredients, lots of different types of olives and dates and other fruits. There were honey-drenched pastries as well. I was really happy to get home. The foods I was now eating were much lighter and a lot healthier than the Tunisian fare.

“Is this what Italians eat every morning?” He nodded in the affirmative. I understood that he was not as talkative at breakfast as he was at dinner. Maybe martinis have a way of priming the conversation pump while they are being drunk and blocking the pump up the day after. Somehow I finished my breakfast before he finished his, even though his croissant was half eaten when I arrived. I went up to the room to get ready for the day.

I had little gear to pack, so that part of my preparations went quickly. My clothes and waders were hanging in the wardrobe when I returned from dinner the evening before. I brewed my coffee and filled the thermos. I went downstairs and returned to the breakfast room where I picked up the lunch basket the hotel had prepared for us. I made it a practice to never take

food from the breakfast table. I considered it a form of stealing. The one and only time Sofi and I travelled outside of Sweden we stayed at a hotel in Iceland. We had decided that it offered the best of all possible worlds: fishing for me and horseback riding for her. The breakfast room was filled with other tourists from different parts of the world, and many of them were busy producing sandwiches and stuffing them along with fruit and other portable food into the many varieties of bags they carried with them. Sofi was very irritated. I had never seen her like that before. We talked about it after we had left the room. I told her that I had seen people doing this before but had never thought about it. She wanted to talk to the manager and ask if this type of behaviour was sanctioned by the hotel. We agreed to do it together. When we did, the manager just shook her head and said that it was a problem they have been struggling with for many years. It could of course be solved by removing the buffet breakfast and offering only *a la carte*, but that would require more personnel and end up costing more. I suggested they put up signs saying that the hotel would be happy to provide lunch baskets for a small fee, or even include them as part of the cost of the room. She thought that was a great suggestion. We have not been back to that hotel or to Iceland. I wondered if they took our suggestion.

We met at the agreed time in the lobby. He was dressed as he had been the day before, except that the bowtie was a different colour and pattern, and the Tattersal shirt had blue and green stripes rather than blue and brown. As we walked out of the hotel together I noticed that he had a distinctive limp. He had stayed downstairs in the dining room the evening before, after I had retired, just as he had lingered at the breakfast table, and I thought his stuttered walking to the car the day before was the result of his episode of near drowning. He noticed that I had noticed.

“Infernal arthritis. My doctors say I could fix the problem with a double hip replacement, but I have always had an aversion to putting myself under

the surgeon's knife. I take an anti-inflammatory drug each day, so I have only a slight amount of pain. It's getting worse, and eventually I will either have to have the operation or increase the dosage of pain killer."

We were now in the car and exiting from the hotel parking lot. We agreed to drive by the place where I had parked my car the day before just to check that all was well and then pick it up on the way back from the day's fishing. We did that and then continued on to the Isonzo River. His seat was very far forward so that his stomach was close to the steering wheel. His gear shifting was noticeably uneven. I wondered if I should suggest that I drive. No, I thought, I would wait until he offered. It's his car.

"Is your hip problem the reason why you stand so still when you fish? Is it difficult to move?"

"Actually, no. I have always fished in that manner when I am casting dry flies to rising fish. I learned how to fish as a young boy by watching a heron, the Great Blue kind. Have you ever seen a Great Blue Heron fish?"

"I've seen heron, but I don't think I have ever seen one catch a fish."

"You probably did not wait long enough. They stand very still and wait for a fish to swim under them. They use the sun and the shore vegetation to increase their invisibility to their prey. When the right fish is in the right position, they strike down like lightening, extending their long necks that they keep in a tight s-curve until they deliver the death blow. The technique is similar to a coiled snake."

"Your no-false-cast cast is like a lightening bolt. Where did you learn to do that? Does it come from another fish-eating bird?"

"Even better," he laughed. "It comes from the best fly line caster I have ever seen, maybe the best one who has ever lived. Her name is Joan Wulff. She cast a line an amazing one hundred sixty-one feet in a tournament in

1951, beating an all-male field. She was the wife of Lee Wulff, who was better known for writing and catching salmon than for his casting technique. He also gave his name to one of salmon fishing's most productive flies, the Royal Wulff, which is a variation of the Royal Coachman. The Royal Wulff is tied with white deer hair for the wing instead of hackle. Lee died in a plane crash in 1991 piloting his own plane. Joan is still alive and is in her early eighties. They both have made a lasting impression on many fly fishers of my generation."

"I guess I should do more reading," I said limply.

"I have read all of their books and articles, but I learned the casting technique directly from Mrs. Wulff. It was on one of my first salmon fishing trips to North America. A classmate and friend of mine from architecture school, Ugo Tisento, went to New York City after graduation. He said he wanted to broaden his experience, and America was in the midst of a building boom. He managed to get a job at one of the best architectural firms in the country named Skidmore Owings and Merrill. He never returned to Italy. He did very well. He could have started his own firm, but he knew that he would have to devote far more time to his job and he would probably have to give up his only passion besides his work. It was one that he and I shared: fishing. He retired a few years ago as a senior associate, having turned down on many occasions the opportunity to become a partner. He cooked up a scheme to have me serve as a critic of a graduate design studio at Yale School of Architecture where he had become a guest lecturer. The school paid for my travel and the stipend paid for me to spend a week with him on the Grand Caspédia River on the Gaspé Peninsula in Quebec, Canada. That's where I met the Wulffs. Her maiden name was Salvato, the daughter of Italian immigrants. She spoke a very passable Italian and we got on famously. I think Lee really cared for his wife because he was so willing

to share her company with others. They made a great couple, even though she was so much shorter than he.”

We were driving through a small town just as he was reaching the best part of his story. I was interested in learning about the trick of his casting, what he had learned from Joan Salvato Wulff. My casting was a skill that I had tried to improve, but I never really found the motivation to do so. I caught fish, oftentimes when others I fished alongside went home without even a tug on their lines. My philosophy had always been that if I needed to make a very long cast in order to reach a fish, and I could not wade safely out to get closer, the fish deserved to be left in peace. And I never waded in water above my crotch. The thought of falling over, being swept downstream in a heavy current, my waders filling up with water and me being dragged down to the bottom frightened the hell out of me. I thought about what happened yesterday and shivers went up my spine. Sandy brought me back from my dark thoughts.

“Shall we stop for a coffee? This is Udine, a very beautiful town. It’s a short detour from the road to Gorizia and the river, but it will be worth the time to experience it, I promise. I’ve sent a message along to the fish in the river that we might be arriving a bit later than expected this morning. They wrote back and said they will wait for us.”

He definitely has an odd sense of humour, I thought, and I gave a small laugh. “Do you promise to finish your story of how Joan Wulff cast such a long line?”

“Long and perfectly on target. Yes, I promise to finish the story.”

“I usually have my first cup of coffee on the banks of the river I am going to fish,” I offered, but he was already parking the car. “Do you think they will mind if I bring in my own coffee. I haven’t acquired a taste for your Italian coffee, even though it is advertised as the ‘best in the world’.

“I agree with you, wholeheartedly! Your coffee in Sweden is much better, and you get to enjoy it for more than the few seconds it takes for an Italian *espresso* to disappear. Do you have enough for both of us?”

“You continue to surprise me, Sandy. This is the first time that a non-Swede has said to me that he has tasted Swedish coffee, let alone admitted that he actually likes it. I’ve got enough for a couple of cups each.”

“You have your coffee in common with the French, but this is not surprising given your royal family.”

“I thought they were German,” I replied, then caught myself with a pull from the back of my brain that yelled: ‘Bernadotte, dummy!’ “Oh yes, our king has French ancestors.”

He smiled. “You are lucky. Your ambassadors could have chosen a new king from England instead of France and you would be drinking tea and eating custard tarts instead of rich coffee and your wonderful *wienerbröd*. I’ve had a special interest in *wienerbröd* ever since I tasted it during my first visit to Stockholm.”

“I’m a cinnamon bun man myself. *Kanelbulle*, we call them. My mom used to make them for us. She tried making *wienerbröd* once and gave up half way through. It was a Saturday morning in the middle of December. I was six or seven years old. Mamma was free the entire weekend, which was unusual with her work. Pappa was with his Lions Club selling Christmas trees in the center of the town where we lived. It was my sister’s idea to make *wienerbröd*. She had a weak spot for it, still does, although she remains as slim as ever. Mamma admitted that she had never made it before, but said she was willing to give it a try. She took out her old cookbook and found a recipe. She had everything but the yeast. ‘*No matter,*’ she had said. ‘*We can do without it.*’ As it turned out, we couldn’t. The dough was unworkable and the project was abandoned. She got us dressed and took us

down to the *konditori* across from where pappa was selling Christmas trees, where we got to pick our favourite pastry. I chose a *kanelbulle*, as usual, and Carolina picked a figure eight *wienerbröd* with cream filling in one section and strawberry jam in the other with a narrow stream of chocolate along the edge and powdered sugar sprinkled over the entire composition. It's still her favourite. That reminds me, I need to phone her."

We were walking in the central plaza, the *Piazza della Libertá*, when he changed the subject from Swedish pastry to architecture. "This is one of the most beautiful examples of architectural design anywhere in the world," he exclaimed.

"I admit that it has a nice feel to it--and I'm no expert on architecture--but I've never even heard of this town. Is it a personal favourite or is it the world's best kept architectural secret?"

"A little bit of both. It has a special place in my heart because this is where Francesca and I spent the first night of our honeymoon before we continued to Austria. On the other hand, we came here because it was one of my favourite places."

"What should I be seeing?" I asked unenthusiastically. I never understood what the fuss was about architecture. Sofi had an architect friend who talked about nothing else than his projects, his clients, the contractors who were messing up his designs, the people who didn't know how to use the spaces he had designed for them, the politicians who made laws that ended up in his buildings having to be compromised for one reason or another.

"The buildings cannot be separated from the Piazza. Place the buildings somewhere else and they make little or no sense. This is true of all the great public spaces, large and small, from *Piazza San Marco* in Venezia to this humble but magnificent square in Udine. Udine was part of the City State of

Venezia, and this city hall, called the *Palazzo del Comune*, bears a strong resemblance to the *Palazzo Ducale* in Venezia. Have you seen it, in Venice?”

“I’ve never been to Venice,” I answered, and if I had been there I wouldn’t have known the ‘Palazzo Dookalley’ from any other building, and wouldn’t be sure why I should. “I’ve never been much interested in buildings.”

“Neither have I, but I have always been interested in architecture.”

“What’s the difference? I thought architects designed buildings.”

“There is ‘building’ and then there is ‘architecture’. Building consists of erecting structures that are purely utilitarian, which can exist anywhere to serve a similar purpose. Putting up a backyard shed or a prefabricated garage are examples of building. Architecture attempts to create structures that are harmonious with the climate, culture and context into which they are inserted. Architecture is a combination of art and science. The science lies in designing a structure that can economically support its weight without requiring extraordinary engineering efforts, that can keep the heat in during the winter and out during the summer, and that does not place an inordinate burden on either the services or natural resources required to carry out the activities that take place inside the structure. An architect is a person who translates the purpose of a structure—the very reason it is being constructed and why it is being financed—into its three-dimensional form. As in all professions, there are some very good and some very bad architects. Most are in the middle and do a minimum amount of harm while advancing only slightly either the art or the science.”

He was in his element now. He was clearly enjoying giving this lecture. It seemed rehearsed, like he had given it many times before, but there was passion and conviction in his presentation. I let him continue.

“Good architecture encloses space, both interior and exterior. It creates places that are both comfortable and comforting. Well-designed places have natural functions, like sitting or walking or studying or praying. Poorly designed spaces force people who have to use them to try to understand what they should be doing in them. You have a public space in the middle of Stockholm that has a fountain in the middle of a roundabout and a submerged plaza, Sergels Plaza I think it’s called.”

“It’s called *Sergels Torg*,” I offered. “Yes, I know the place.”

“The submerged part is a covered circulation path along one edge, leading from the underground transport to shops, and it is open to the sky on the opposite side framed by a building called the People’s House.

“*Folkets hus*,” I interjected.

“Yes. There are no cafes or places for sitting, except on a steep stairway at one side. It is also usually filled with people selling, buying and using drugs. When I was there I felt like I was in the Roman Coliseum and I was about to be attacked by a gladiator and then fed to the lions. All the designers of that place had to do to see a wonderful example of public space was walk over to Stockholm’s Old Town, rather than trying to invent something themselves and failing. There are many famous architects today who don’t care at all about climate, culture or context. These ‘starchitects’ have a building in their head and they keep putting different functions into it all over the world. Tell me, Nicklas, what is your favourite place?”

“I can show you,” I answered, and I pulled out my iPad and touched the screen. The screen saver appeared. “This is my mother’s parent’s farmhouse in the south of Sweden.” I touched an icon and a three-dimensional birds-eye view appeared. The two-storey house formed one side of a structure with connected barn, stable and chicken coop forming the three other sides around an inner courtyard. I moved my finger around the screen and the

composition turned to show all of its surfaces, inside and outside the courtyard. I moved my finger down and I landed on the ground. I moved my finger slowly toward the house and the view led up the stairs to a wide veranda that extended the length of the house. I led him across the veranda, through the front door and into the house. I showed Sandy each room on the ground floor, the large parlour room along one side, the kitchen and pantries along the side facing the courtyard, and the dining room and sitting room along the other side. Each room had its own distinctive tile stove, even the kitchen. Then I led him up the stairs to the second floor where most of the bedrooms were placed along either side of a central hall extending to the eave on each side of house. Finally, I led him up a steep stair to the attic where my bedroom was located.

“This is my favourite room because it has a view into the courtyard and also out to the front of the house and beyond into the fields. I would sit up late into the summer evenings and watch the deer and moose appear from the edges of the forest. Sometimes I would even see herds of wild boar. In the mornings the room would be filled with the sounds of birds singing and roosters crowing and cows mooing and horses baying. I would make believe that they were composing songs during the nights and practicing them on us during the early morning hours.”

“Marvelous! Bravo! What a spectacular tool. I have seen this done before, but never as well as you have demonstrated. Did you do that yourself, or did you have help from an architect friend?”

“I had help from the real estate firm that sold the house when both my grandparents died. I kept hoping that no one would make a bid on it and we would have to keep it, but that was both impractical and unfair. No one, including me, wanted to move there and become a farmer. Now it belongs to another family.”

“Why is it still so special for you?”

“I feel good every time I think of it. There are no bad memories from the summers I spent there. I was up among the birds in the treetops. The sloping ceilings gave the room the feeling of a large tent. The walls along both of the stairways leading up to my room were covered in family photographs with new ones constantly being added. I felt safe up there.” I thought about what I had just said, about being safe in my room in my grandparents’ attic.

“You see, you do know good architecture when you see it. Now let’s find a place where we can enjoy your good, Swedish coffee.”

We crossed the square and approached a building that was mostly open on the first floor above the ground. It had horizontal bands of stone, alternating between pink and white and the top floor was supported by pointed arches springing from columns. There were stairs leading up to the elevated plaza.

“We can sit on the stairs and watch the people in the plaza,” suggested Sandy. “This is the Town Hall, the *Loggia del Lionello*. When you finally do visit Venezia you will see the similarities between the architecture here and there.”

Sandy produced two porcelain mugs from the Hardy shoulder bag he was carrying. They were decorated with leaping salmon. He saw my smile and returned it with a raise of his eyebrows that said ‘*Did you expect us to drink out of the same cover from your thermos?*’ The coffee was still hot and it went down smoothly. Every time I drink it outside of Sweden it takes me back to Ljungblads Konditori in Alingsås or Ahlströms Konditori in Göteborg.

“It tastes just like I remember it. You are an expert coffee brewer, Nicklas. All we need is some *wienerbröd*. Maybe this will do as a substitute.” Out from his bag he produced a small plastic bag and a plate. He took from the bag crispy-looking, powder sugar-covered edibles shaped like bows. “They’re called *crostoli*. It means ‘crispy’. These are of the Trieste variety, but you can find them up and down the country in various shapes and sizes. It’s a simple flour, sugar, milk and egg dough with a bit of rum and lemon added for flavour. They are fried in oil like many of our pastries and then covered with powdered sugar.”

“They had them at the hotel in Trieste. I tried one and then had to restrain myself from eating them all.”

We had converted the stairs to the town hall into our café, sipping whole cups of foreign looking and smelling coffee while eating their local delicacy. We attracted the attention of an amused group of citizens who lingered only long enough to exchange a *buongiorno* and then pass by.

“I think it’s time to get our waders wet,” said Sandy as he finished the last sip of coffee left in his cup. “The fish will be wondering what has happened to us.”

Sandy placed the cups and plate in the plastic *crostoli* sack and packed them back into his shoulder bag. The clock on the tower was approaching eleven. We walked to the car as quickly as Sandy’s hip would allow and drove out of town back to the main road leading toward Gorizia. It took us about forty-five minutes to reach the river. We didn’t drive into the town but skirted it toward the north. Sandy said that it was not in very good shape at the moment. Developments on the edge of the town were sapping the strength out of businesses in the center. We would have a look on our way back to the hotel, he said. He had organized our licenses the evening before at the hotel. It seemed that he had all the information he needed at his

fingertips or he had the most extensive network of contacts among Italy's sport fishing community.

"This will be a different experience from the one you had yesterday, Nicklas," he said as we drove slowly along a dirt road leading to the river. "The Isonzo has many different moods because it holds the souls of millions of men who died fighting on its banks and drowned in its currents."

"Let me see. I do remember something from my history lessons about the Great War and Italy having many casualties. That's all I can recall."

"Nearly three quarters of a million young men wearing the uniforms of a still very new Italy died within a hundred or so kilometres of this river. Our enemy during that war, Austria-Hungary, slaughtered more of us than we did them, but they lost more men in total in combat against all of its combined enemies. The one exception to our failures in this war was the Battle at the Piave River north of Venice, which was the last offensive of the Austria-Hungary forces. It was in June, 1918, and the Germans had moved all of their troops further west. The Austrians crossed the Piave and attacked us, but after eight days of bloody fighting and the loss of one hundred fifty thousand soldiers, they retreated back across the river. Four months later, at the Battle of Vittorio Veneto in this same region, the Italians won another and final victory. As with all wars, nothing of significance was achieved for the common man on either side. I think it's time to fish."

We parked the Saab in an area behind a barn on a farm bordering the river. The lot looked like it had been made for people coming to the river to fish. Ours was the only car there. We got into our waders, rigged up our rods and walked to the river. When we emerged from the wood, I saw that an island divided the river into two smaller streams on either side which then joined again at the island's end into a long pool of around a hundred meters. The pool ended in a rapid.

“It looks like perfect water for dry flies,” I said. There were smooth stretches of water following dimples that indicated a submerged rock. As the season progressed and the feeder streams dried out, the rocks would be high and dry and the fish would be stacked up in the deep holes praying to their gods for rain.

“The graylings will take them. I would like to raise up one of the river’s marble trout. They stay down near the bottom and pick off the nymphs like these.” He held a small net in his hand. It contained debris he had loosened with his wading staff that he had scooped up in the net. Small and large nymphs in various stages of development shared the net with bits of gravel and weed. “I’ve been trying a technique the Czechs and Poles have developed. It involves fishing a pair or three of weighted nymphs. It feels awkward at first, casting three heavy flies. I have decided to use only two, one heavier than the other. It took some time to get used to fishing blind, but my confidence in the technique rose after I caught a few very nice fish.”

“I read about it in our fly fishing magazine, *FLUGFISKE I NORDEN*. It’s not for me. I have a thing about wading in deep water.” Getting out in the middle of the river and fishing a short line with the flies on the bottom is what Czech Nymphing is all about, I had read. No more than a meter of fly line should be out over the tip of the rod. The leader should not be longer than the length of the rod. You cast straight upstream or very slightly to one side or the other. At the slightest sign of the leader stopping, you need to lift the rod. No hesitating! If you do, the fish will be gone. Some fishermen use strike indicators, but with the leader only a few meters in front of you, it seems like a bit of overkill.

“It took me a quite a long time to get used to wading in water that lapped over the top of my waders,” laughed Sandy, “and I did not feel at all safe until I had a few spills and floated out into the current holding my rod in one

hand and trying to paddle with my other. Those times I was wearing my wading belt.”

“That’s exactly what I mean. Why take a chance that you will survive a spill? I don’t think it’s worth it.”

“This is a good place to try the technique without the scary part,” completely ignoring my protests. “The water’s flowing at a pace, but not too fast. There are some stones for the fish to lie behind, but enough sand on the bottom to keep your footing. Why not give it a try? As an added incentive, I have brought along an extra piece of gear. Put this on.”

Sandy handed me a collar life jacket. So here was a man twice my age and almost half my size daring me to conquer a phobia, and providing me with a fail-safe system to help me along. What do I do? I shrugged my shoulders and began to tie on the extra tippet for the dropper. He handed me two mayfly nymphs in different shades of olive. One was a size 14 and the other a 12, both barbless. Both were weighted. I tied on the heavier one on the ten centimetre long dropper tippet and the other at the end of the leader. I waded out carefully using the wading staff that Sandy handed me. He was right about the bottom being mostly sand. My heart rate picked up as I felt the water rising above my waist and then up to the bottom of my rib cage. This was as far as I was going. I turned slightly upstream keeping my right foot behind my left and I let the wading staff float behind me on the tether that was attached to my wader belt. I pulled out a few metres of line and cast the rig upstream. It was a slow moving current so there was plenty of time for the flies to sink to the bottom. The line moved toward me and then past me. It all seemed to happen too quickly for any fish to strike. I repeated the action a few more times. Then, suddenly, the line stopped and I raised the rod tip. A fish exploded through the surface. It was a marble trout, at least a kilo.

Instinctively, I began moving back toward the shoreline. The fish headed downstream and I turned to follow him with my rod. My Loop reel was set to medium drag but the fish was using the current to strip off line. *The leader should hold*, I thought, and I notched up the drag a few clicks, my arms high above my head. The fish stopped, jumped and then started moving back toward me as quickly as he had swum away. With barbless hooks, it is essential to keep the line taught. I raised the rod higher and reeled in as fast as I could, the whole time continuing to move toward the shore. I was in water up to my knees when I stumbled over a stone and fell. It was one of those slow motion falls. I managed to turn my body in such a way that the rod arm was on the opposite side of the entry into the water. My right hand found the bottom as my feet automatically curled up under me in order to gain footing again. I was up in a few seconds, but that was all it took for my trophy marble trout to gain his own footing and self release from the nymph that was connecting us through leader and line for a wonderful period of time.

Sandy was smiling as I walked toward him on shore. “It worked!” I exclaimed. “I think I’ve had my fill of Czech Nymphing, although it wasn’t as bad as I thought it would be. I’m still not sure I would want to do that in faster water or on a rockier bottom.”

“You’re still alive.”

“It was a good fish. Too bad we didn’t get it to the net. That’s one of the downsides to barbless.”

“The advantages far outweigh the disadvantages. I have many not-so-fond memories of using the leader method of removing hooks that have dug themselves into my flesh. Do you see this little scar on my cheek? That’s from my first Spey casting lesson. My backward pull was too close to my body and when I snapped the rod forward to whip the fly out of the water, it

caught me right below my right eye. The hook went in too deeply to try to take it out without the help of a surgeon. It was quite a little operation.”

Sandy got back his wading staff and his two flies. I asked him if his hip was up to keeping him erect in the deep water. He said that it was easier on his hip to be supported by the water than standing in water only up to his knees. He moved slowly but steadily out to the middle of the river. I watched him repeat the short cast I had made. He had a fish on immediately. He didn’t move from his spot but played the fish from where he was standing. After a few long runs and a couple of jumps, the fish came to the net. He released it, checked his flies and had another fish on in his next cast.

We had agreed to meet in two hours on the bank where I was still standing. I wasn’t sure I wanted to let him out of my sight in case he did get into trouble, so I walked downstream where I could keep one eye on him and another on my fly. The graylings weren’t too picky about which dry fly I presented to them as long as it was brown or olive. I managed to coax up one that was close to half a kilo. Graylings are fine fighting fish and beautiful to watch. At least half of them self-released somersaulting out of the water, and the rest had the fly drop out of their lip as they entered the net.

At the appointed time, we converged on the bank. Sandy was already unpacking our lunch basket when I arrived. The small rolls, slices of salami and ham and wedges of cheese were spread out on a checkered cloth.

“You looked like you found the key to fishing paradise,” I joked.

“Every fish in the hole had to have a go at my flies at least a couple of times. On one cast I had two fish on, one on each fly. How was the dry fly fishing?”

“Fun. You know, I’m surprised we’re alone here. With fishing this good someone else must surely know about it. Back home if you come to a river

and don't see any other fishermen, you assume there are no fish and go on to the next spot.”

“That's not the case in *Italia*. There is a lot of very good water that is rarely fished. Italians are too busy doing other things, and our neighbours do not think of Italy as being a place where they can find good trout fishing. That's fine by those of us who do like to fish, especially with a fly. I've experienced something in Sweden which we don't see here very often. You have rivers and streams that are owned by clubs or private persons or groups. Access to these waters, which are well stocked, is limited to members or to those who pay high fees. The public waters can be shared with livestock and are subjected to farm runoff. One early summer day I fished a small river called Rolfsån, south of Göteborg, with a club member. It is known for having large salmon, but few fish are caught each year. After fishing the club water and not seeing any salmon, we walked up to the public water. I found a pool at the top of the river that looked like a likely spot where salmon might hold. After a few casts I heard some rustling behind me and turned to see a herd of beef cattle moving into the water and a few of the calves balancing along the narrow edge of the pool. Suddenly, one of the calves fell into the water. As he struggled to climb out of the water by clawing against the clay bank, he pulled down enough clay to colour the entire river. He eventually swam into shallower water, but the fishing was ruined for the rest of the day.”

“I've fished that same river many times and saw one salmon show. I gave up on it many years ago, but not because of the cattle. I never thought of the cattle as being a nuisance. I grew up with sharing the water with livestock. They keep the grass cut.” He was right about the private waters. There were a growing number of artificial camps that were made for sight fishing with dry flies and which guaranteed that there were fish under the surface, even though they might be difficult to catch. We had many waters

that were ruined by farm runoff and the infernal dams that produced infinitesimal amounts of electricity but spoiled the spawning runs for salmon and sea trout. It angered me, but I did nothing about it except to sign petitions in the sporting goods stores I shopped at and to become a member of the Swedish sport fishing association. Those sandwiches look good,” I said, feeling I needed to get onto a lighter subject. “I can see that it is the local ham, but what are the cheeses?”

“They are the same cheese, just different ages. The cheese is *Montasio* and is specific to Friuli-Venezia Giulia. It is made with cow’s milk from this region and no other. The lighter cheese is aged two to four months. It has a mild taste. The middle cheese has been aged for five to ten months. It has a richer taste and is more firm than the young cheese. The oldest, which is more granular and crumbles to the touch, is aged over eighteen months. It has a sharper taste.”

“Every meal is a feast in Italy, I am finding out.” It wasn’t meant as a compliment, just a statement of fact. Sandy smiled and bit into his *San Danieli* sandwich with gusto.

We saw no reason to fool with the successful formula we had found, so when we finished our brief but ample repast, we returned to our stations. Sandy continued to hook trout and I continued to catch grayling. Another few hours passed and we both felt that we had had our fill of hooking, landing and releasing fish for the day. We walked back to the Saab, removed our waders, took apart our rods and left them out of their cases to dry. Sandy drove us back to where I had left my car. It was a quiet ride with neither one of us feeling the need to summarize the day’s events or describe one of our special moments. I nearly fell asleep a few times. When we reached my car, I followed him back to the hotel. We agreed to meet for

dinner at nine. Sandy said he would be down a bit earlier to have his evening drink if I cared to join him, otherwise we would meet at our table.

After a long shower, I lounged around in my room in my underwear. I took out a small notebook from my travel bag. From a very early age I had been keeping a record of my fishing excursions. I used small, spiral bound notebooks, small enough to fit in my shirt pocket, in which I wrote down the date, place I had fished, whether I had company, the weather and water conditions, whether I caught fish and the flies I had used. I rarely gave a day more than a page. One of the drawers in my fly tying bench was filled with the little notebooks. I wrote down this day's and yesterday's notes as well since I had actually forgotten to record yesterday. I flipped back through the pages. It was October of the previous year when I had last fished. How had that happened, I wondered? In most years I fished right up to the first snow and then drove over to Vättern, Sweden's second largest lake that holds a good stock of landlocked salmon, for a day of very cold, but usually rewarding fishing from its rocky east coast. It had been a busy time for me with the company struggling for its existence and all of the engineers doing their best to help it survive. Any time I had over, which was very little, I spent with Sofi and Sassy, or with Carolina and her sambo Rikard and their young daughter, Anna Britt.

Phone Carolina! I reminded myself suddenly. I quickly dialled her number.

"Hej Caro."

"Hej Nicke. Where are you?"

She always started our phone conversations with that question. She had to visualize where I was, and if she didn't like what she saw she would order me to immediately return home. I repeated what I had told Sofi that morning, leaving out the detail about the car we were driving and saving

Sandy from drowning. She seemed satisfied that I wasn't getting into any trouble.

"Easter is in less than a month. Will you be coming home to spend it with us?"

"I guess I'll just have to see how the fishing is going or if I get a call from Lasse telling me that the company found a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow and we have to start working again."

"Call me when you know for sure. Anna Britt keeps asking for you."

"Tell my niece that I will see her soon."

"What shall I tell Benny?" That was my twenty-year-old VW Golf.

"Tell him he will have to be satisfied having my sister driving him until his *husse* gets back. How is he doing?"

"Drives like a charm. I think it's time for you to buy a real car and donate this toy to your big sis."

"Be careful what you wish for," I said, and then we said our good-byes.

I came down just before nine. *How can people eat so late?* I asked myself. Sandy was just finishing up his martini in the lounge and rose up as I came in. We walked together to our table and sat in the same places we had taken the evening before. Roberto appeared in a few minutes to tell us what was on the menu this evening. Whether Sandy had told him to describe the entire recipe for each serving or he had decided that it would be useless to give me just the name of the dish, I received the full explanation of the ingredients and how the dish was made.

"We start with the antipasto, *sardoni in savor*. The sardines are first dipped in flour and fried in vegetable oil. White onions, thinly sliced, are fried separately. The sardines and onions are placed in a baking dish in

alternating layers with the last layer being onions. The dish is placed in the refrigerator and served the next day, so it is an *antipasto freddo*.

“For the *piatto primo* we are serving a *baccalà mantecato* with *polenta*. *Baccalà* is dried and salted cod. Preparation starts the day before by placing the dried cod in cold water to let it gain its consistency. When it has been rinsed the following day, the flesh is separated from the skin and bones and broken into small pieces and placed in a pot. It is covered with cold water and heated to a boil. As soon as the water boils the pot is removed from the heat so that it cools. The fish is drained and placed in a bowl with a couple of cloves of garlic and salt. The fish is whisked while a helper dribbles in oil. The mixture achieves a smooth consistency as more oil is added. The final step is to stir it with a wooden spoon. In Venezia, they add cream. We leave the cream out. Black pepper is added when it is served.

“The *piatto secondo* is *prosciutto cotto in crosta di pane*, ham baked in a crust of breadcrumbs. This is served with *patate in tecia*. This is truly a Trieste region specialty. The potatoes are boiled and then peeled. In a frying pan, onions and bacon are fried in lard. Then the boiled potatoes are added to the frying pan and pressed with a fork into large pieces. The ingredients continue to fry until a golden crust is formed on the pan side and a sort of pancake is formed. It is turned over once to brown the top side and served.”

“Is there anything that you would rather not try?” asked Sandy.

“I’m not sure about the cod dish, but I’ll give it a taste.”

“It’s one of my favourites,” said Sandy. Roberto smiled with one of those smiles that is a combination of pride and true satisfaction. “We look forward to your wine choices, Roberto.”

When Roberto had left, I blurted out something that I had wanted to say before I waded in over my waist this day: “I almost drowned when I was ten.”

“I thought your reluctance to stand up to your chest in running water might have had more behind it than you being less foolhardy than most of your fly fishing brethren. Do you want to tell me what happened?”

“I was fishing with a few of my friends along a riverbank not far from where we lived. It was springtime, the water was high and still cold from the snow runoff, and the bank where we fished had been undercut by the iceout. I was standing on the edge of the bank when it gave way. I fell in and was quickly swept out into deep water. My first thought was to try to swim back toward shore, but the more I tried the harder it became. I panicked and began to gulp down water. I was certain I was going to die. All I could think about was how disappointed *pappa* was going to be in me for having been so careless. Then I felt myself being lifted out of the water. Someone had put their arm around my chest and pulled me into a boat. I was coughing up water and gasping for air, but I was alive. It was the old man who fished this part of the river every day, sitting alone smoking his pipe and drifting a line. We had never seen him catch a single fish, but now he had landed something bigger than any fish swimming in the river. It was as if he had been waiting for that one day to come along so that he could be useful, and his time had come.”

“That’s the type of experience that is difficult to forget.”

“I guess I never have forgotten it.” Roberto arrived with our first course and we moved on to other topics. “You never did tell me the Joan Wulff secret to casting.”

“It was so wonderful to watch her because her technique was so effortless and effective. She told us how she had first been taught to cast with her

upper arm held tightly against her side, just moving her forearm and wrist. By keeping the upper arm fixed in position, it is more difficult to push the tip of the rod down toward the ground on the backcast.” He demonstrated this with his table knife in his right hand and his elbow glued to his side. “It was like eliminating one variable in the casting equation. The instructor could focus on the position of the wrist at the start and end of the backcast and the movement of the arm. The wrist starts bent down with the forearm parallel to the ground, so that the rod is in line with the forearm. The forearm is raised quickly and the wrist snapped back. The forearm should be vertical at the end of the backcast and the wrist straight, not bent back. That makes the rod stop at approximately forty-five degrees. When the line has straightened out behind, the motion is reversed.

“She said that her instructor used to offer an incentive to the pupils by giving them a dollar bill to hold under their arm. If they could cast through a session without the bill dropping, they got to keep it. After she mastered this technique, she found that its main limitation was that it was difficult to cast a long line, and that was what she really wanted to do. So one day she let the dollar drop and she raised her upper arm to include it in the cast. Instead of swinging the pendulum from the elbow, she swung it from her shoulder, keeping the elbow locked. It’s like the motion that is used when a professional carpenter swings a hammer. The wrist does exactly the same thing, bend down at the start and end of the cast, and lock straight up at the end of the backcast. I’ve seen competition casters and guides take this one step further using a completely straight arm with the elbow locked. This increases the length of the pendulum, adding more force to the backcast and pulling out more line.”

“When I think about my casting, I see it combining all three versions with the wrist always in the wrong position. I am neither an accurate nor a

distance caster. When you explain the correct technique it just sounds logical. I guess I should practice.”

“*Signora* Wulff practices every day. It’s like a golfer who knows that everything depends on being able to swing the club in the same way on every hole. It has to be automatic. What do you think of the *sardoni in savor*?”

“I like it. It tastes a bit like our *Jönsons frestelse*. I’m not a cook, but I know that our dish contains potatoes, sardines and milk. It’s one we eat at *Jul*, Christmas, and *Midsommar* in June. Have you decided where you will be fishing after this?”

“Hopefully, you will be coming along. The next river is the *Piave* in Veneto. It has both trout and grayling. There are other excellent rivers in the northern parts of Veneto, Lombardia, and Piemonte, as well as in Trentino-Alto Adige and Aosta, but it is still early in the season and the rivers can be high and still too cold to be productive. I thought we could drive down to Bologna after fishing the *Piave*, switch over to the Volvo 1800ES and fish Umbria, the Marches, Toscana, Lazio and Abruzzo. What do you think?”

“I guess it’s time to make up my mind about whether I am following along for a few more weeks or heading back to Sweden to start looking for a new job. Are you sure you don’t mind backtracking to Trieste? I could drive back myself and then take a train and meet you somewhere.” We both knew that if I drove back to Trieste on my own my next stop would be the airport and then Sweden. He didn’t answer, but smiled with his mouth closed. He let me break the silence. “How can I pass up the chance to tour Italy in a red Volvo 1800ES. What time should we be on the road?”

&

Chapter Three

Insecure

We were packed and in our cars just before nine on Saturday morning. There was no point in leaving too early because nothing would be open when we arrived in Trieste. The thermos was full with the coffee I had just brewed. We had agreed to have our coffee break in Trieste. I followed Sandy in my rental car. I decided that if I was going to follow along on his trip I definitely had to ask him if I could drive; it was painful to move at his normal speed. He took the back roads rather than the *Autostrada*. We stopped briefly at the war memorial at Redipuglia. It looked like a staircase for giants. I read the plaque on which it stated that the remains of over one hundred thousand soldiers were buried on the terraces leading up to the top of the memorial. Two thirds of the buried were unknown.



“Mussolini ordered this monument to be built,” mused Sandy. “Work started in 1935 and was completed three years later. It was among the world’s largest war memorials ever to be built when it was finished, and it helped to close one of the country’s worst political wounds, the humiliating

treaty ending the Great War. The monument was dutifully cared for by the Italian government until 1999 when it was passed to the Province of Gorizia. They do their best to maintain it, keep the grass clipped and the trash bins emptied. I have relatives who are here, and my family has asked for permission to remove their remains so that they can be buried in a place where they can rest peacefully with other members of their family. Our requests have been ignored so far, but we will not give up.”

We walked around the grounds for a short while longer and then were back on the road. It seemed that history was closer to Italians than to us Swedes, I thought. We learn about the kings and their many wars, but they were so long ago. For the Italians and other Europeans, everything seems so much closer in time. We were in a graveyard from a war that was fought almost one hundred years ago and he was talking like it happened yesterday. He seemed to know more about Sweden’s history and culture and history than I did, I thought. I had always felt that studying history was for politicians. Why did I need to know who won or lost a war that took place a dozen centuries ago? What difference does it make to me today? The more we dwell on our history, the more reasons we have for hating one another because it seems like all we did in the past was kill each other. But Sandy had not said a single bad thing about the Austrians or Hungarians or the Germans.

The Adriatic appeared after we had passed Monfalcone. We were high above it at this point and it stretched far into the horizon to the south. We began a long—and slow—descent into Trieste along the winding coastal road. I decided to call Sofi. She would have been up for several hours, even on a Saturday morning. She was probably meeting her friends at *Ahlströms Konditori*. Saturday morning was her time off from work and chores, and she usually started it with coffee and one of *Ahlströms* special pastries. It had been one of our favourite places to visit on the weekend when we were

at university. I clipped on my Bluetooth earphone and said ‘*Ring Sofi*’ as I followed Sandy’s Saab at a snail’s pace. The phone rang a half dozen times before it went over to automatic messaging. “*Hi. I am not able to answer my phone at the moment, but if you leave your name, number, the time you have called and a brief message, I will return your call as soon as I can.*”

Strange, I thought. Sofi usually has her phone on even when she should have turned it off. I left a message. “*Hej Sofi. It’s me. I am on my way in to Trieste to turn in my car and get a few extra supplies for the next week or so of fishing. Give me a call when you can. Hej då.*” I wondered where she could be. It was ten o’clock in the morning. She was an early riser, so she could not still be asleep. The phone rang.

“*God morgon.* You called at one of those times when it is impossible to answer the phone. I’m getting ready to go to *Ahlströms.*”

“*Hej, Sofi,*” I replied cheerfully. Why was I worried when she didn’t answer right away? “I hope I didn’t make you rush before you were finished.”

“Very funny. Where are you now?”

“I’m in my Fiat rental car driving behind the world’s slowest driver. But the view over the Adriatic is spectacular, so that’s a consolation. We are close to Trieste.”

“How was the fishing yesterday? How was Mr. Carlotti feeling after his awful experience the day before?”

“The fishing was some of the best I have ever had, and Sandy seems to be fully recovered. I’ll give him credit for two things: he knows where to find fish, and he knows how to catch them.”

“Have you learned anything more about him?”

“Only that he seems to know a lot about history and food, in addition to fishing and architecture. When we talk I feel like I slept through a lot of my classes on my way to my computer science degree. He likes Swedish coffee and he even knows what *wienerbröd* is.”

“Are you having any second thoughts about taking him up on his offer?”

“No. He is an interesting person who likes to talk, eat and fish, in that order. The fishing part is great, so far, and that’s what’s most important to me. I think it’s not the most important for him. It’s like the fishing gets him to different parts of the country so he can enjoy the food, but he catches fish as well. The next stop is the area north of Venice. What I have been eating the last two days is nothing like any Italian food I have ever experienced. It’s going to be interesting to see what they do in Venice or wherever we are going close to Venice. You were there once, weren’t you? What do you remember?”

“I had a dish that was totally black. It was *bläckfisk*, what the Italians call *calamaro*, squid in English. They used the liquid inside the squid, which is black, to make a sauce that coloured everything black. Besides the squid there was a sort of corn meal porridge, called *polenta*. It was also totally black. It tasted quite good, but I kept thinking I was eating Dracula food.”

“I’m beginning to think I should just ask for a plate of spaghetti with ketchup. But I have to admit that I enjoy learning about what I’m eating.”

“What did you say his name is?”

“Alessandro. He asked me to call him ‘Sandy’.”

“Ask Sandy to give you an address where I can send you a supply of coffee and *Kalle*’s. You will need to have more of both, won’t you?”

“Coffee, yes, maybe I can do without the *Kalle*’s. I’ve been trying the different breakfast food. It turns out there’s quite a variety that I never even noticed.” We were quiet for awhile and then I said, “Sofi, I know it’s only been two days since I have been on this little adventure, but I was thinking that I have never really travelled for pleasure, just business, except our Iceland trip and that was really fun. It’s not because I didn’t want to, but because I never thought about it. Did you want to travel when we were together?”

“We didn’t have much money back then. Our Iceland trip was great. Maybe this will be the start of a new hobby, Nicklas. Maybe you will get the travel bug.”

We had arrived to the area around the Trieste train station and would soon be at the sporting goods store. Sofi and I said our good-byes and I followed Sandy along the *Via Cavour*. I had walked there on Thursday but I didn’t remember noticing anything special. Now I did. The planners of Trieste had missed a great opportunity, I thought, to make a walk along their water’s edge an enjoyable experience. It was one long parking lot from the sidewalk to the water. Old buildings, mostly ferry terminals in various stages of dismantling, non-use and renovation, interrupted the view out over the northernmost waters of the Adriatic. Maybe it was different before the era of the car. I would have to investigate that some day.

Sandy drove right up to the entrance of the store and parked. I set my rental behind him. We were clearly blocking traffic, but Sandy said it would take only a few minutes. Rosso Grosso was waiting for us.

“*Buongiorno, Signor Carlotti,*” boomed Rosso.

“*Buongiorno, Rosso,*” replied Sandy. “*Come stai?*”

“*Bene, grazie, molto bene. E tu?*”

“*Primo*. Is everything ready?”

“*Si, Si*. It’s all here in the bag. How was the car?” he asked, turning to me.

“Just like a Maserati, but a little smaller,” I joked. Rosso could not control his laughter. He repeated it in Italian for other customers in the store and the place turned into a comedy house with Rosso as the stand-up comic and I as his straight man. Even Sandy was in stitches. With Rosso still laughing, Sandy settled the bill, I turned over the keys to the Fiat and we left with the new gear. Sandy said that he knew a place where we could enjoy our coffee and get a little something to go with it. We got into the Saab and Sandy drove along the *Via Cavour* back out of town toward the direction from which we came. The three-or-so kilometres of the old port with its high, stucco walls separating the road from the sea finally ended and a park began. On the right side of the street there was a pastry store with a parking spot right in front, as if Sandy had called ahead and reserved it. We got out, bought some cookies that Sandy said tasted of almonds, and little jam-filled tarts called *crostatini*. We walked across the street to a park where there were benches and tables. There were older men sitting on the benches and women talking while keeping one eye on their children playing in the park. We settled into a park bench with a view on one side toward the Adriatic and to the other side back to the bakery. I poured the coffee and Sandy opened up the bag with the tarts and cookies.

“How did you decide to become an automotive engineer?”

“I had destroyed so many cars playing my video games as a kid I decided to try to find ways to keep them from crashing. Growing up where I did, just south of Göteborg in a town called Åsa in Kungälv *kommun*, the automotive industry was all around us. Actually, I never thought about doing anything else after my parents died in the car crash. Maybe I could

make cars safe enough so that people would never have to die in them. I went to college to study engineering, did my work-study program at Volvo and then got an offer to work in Saab's advanced engineering department. That's it. How about you? How did you decide to become an architect?"

"From the time I was a little boy I said I wanted to be an engineer who builds bridges. I was fascinated by bridges for some reason, more so than buildings. Then, on a visit to an exhibition in Torino with my family I saw some of the buildings designed by our famous structural engineer, Pier Luigi Nervi, and I decided that I wanted to be a structural engineer. For a brief period in my early teens I was convinced I would become a priest. All Italian boys are told to look into their heart to find a calling. I kept looking and all I kept seeing were bridges and buildings and pretty girls."

We had a good laugh over this. None of my friends had become a priest, and since we did not go to church I never talked to one. At the end of every school year all the students went to the church where there was a ceremony. My parents did not believe in God and thought the school should not be mixing in religion, but they never tried to keep me or my sister from taking part in those activities. So I did know what the inside of a church looked like and what priests were supposed to do to earn their salaries. My mother's parents wanted to have a church funeral when my mother and father died, but *Morbror Micke* convinced them that they should respect their daughter's wish to be cremated and not to have a burial. My grandparents decided to have a memorial in the churchyard behind the church they attended, and I went there with them when I visited, but we never met a priest during any of those visits. Sandy continued his story.

"When I was fifteen or so, our school had the practice of finding us jobs for a few weeks during our summer break in the places where we might eventually work, at no pay of course. I worked in the office of a structural

engineer who was designing bridges and tunnels for the new *Autostrada*. During the three weeks I was there, cleaning up and running errands, I never saw anyone come into the office who did not work there, and the engineers and their draftsmen sat at their desks the whole time drawing and calculating and having meetings with each other.

“I talked to my teacher about this after our vacation was over. I told him I thought the engineers would be out where their bridges and tunnels and roads were being built meeting with the people who built them rather than being in their offices the whole time. ‘If you want to design structures and meet people as well, then it’s an architect you want to be, not an engineer,’ he said. “I began reading about architects and during the next vacation period my teacher arranged for me to spend time in an architect’s office. It was a medium-sized office with one owner, half a dozen associates and a few dozen draftsmen—yes, all men. The owner, who was a good friend of mine for the rest of his life, spent time with me and told me about what architects did. It was not all design and client meetings. There was a lot of business and selling and financial planning. He told me that if I finished my studies I could come back to his office to do an apprenticeship, and that’s exactly what I did. I worked with him for three years and then went to a larger office in Milano where Francesca was on a special clerking assignment for a judge. We were there for two years and then we came back to Verona where I started my own practice. That’s my story.”

“That’s a lot longer than mine. It sounds like you gave your career much more thought than I did. Are you happy with your choice? Did you ever think you should have become something else?”

“Many times,” he said with a laugh. “When I think about making more money I am sure I should have been a hedge fund salesman; when I think about having more time for the family I feel I should have been a

shoemaker; when I think about being famous I am certain I should have been a chemist and discovered a new element so I would win the Nobel Prize. Then I think about what I really have enjoyed about practicing my profession, the fun part, and it outweighs all of the more difficult and routine tasks that need to be done as well. None of us are destined to be anything, even if our father or mother is a king or queen. You, Nicklas, could have been the prime minister of your country, and I could have become a shoemaker, if that is what we really wanted to do.”

I poured another cup of coffee for each of us and took another cookie. They were tasty. One of my favourite *kakor* is a cookie made with cardamom, a spice that is almost as common in our pastries as cinnamon. It is also shaped, like these Trieste versions, as a half moon.

“Maybe it’s a good time to change careers. He surprised me with this statement. I did not think that I had said anything to cause him to believe I wasn’t just as committed to my profession as he had been to his.

“I like what I do and I plan on continuing to do it when I get back to Sweden,” I retorted with a degree of irritation in my voice. I had made some progress on designing better safety into cars, but I was far from finished.

“My apologies if I have offended you, my young friend. That was not my intention. It does happen that opportunities arise that we do not expect that cause us to make a slight change of course or a full one-hundred-eighty-degree turn in our professional lives. It is usually completely unexpected and totally unplanned. It often starts with losing the job that you have had at a time when others doing the same thing have also lost their jobs. Competition for positions increases as there are fewer positions open for the job you were doing. Some people hold out until they get one of those positions; others move to another part of the country or the world to find the same job; still others decide to move on to something else. Let’s just

imagine that you wanted to stay exactly where you are today but all of the automotive engineering jobs just vanished. What would you do?”

“I don’t know. I have never thought of it. Maybe I would become a fishing guide.”

“You see, you do have an idea. I think you would make a great fishing guide. You have shown good skills at both fishing and at listening to the babblings of an old man who claims to be interested in catching fish but who lives to get back for cocktail hour and dinner. In my experience with guides, the best ones are good listeners.”

It was my turn to laugh. “I think I would be a terrible guide because I enjoy fishing too much myself to stand by and watch someone else make clumsy attempts at raising fish, and I hate the idea of tying other people’s flies on to their leaders. I promise to give the idea of a new career some serious thought while I am perfecting my fly presentation skills on the waters we will be visiting during the coming days.”

We finished our coffee and returned to the car. “Would you like to drive?” asked Sandy. “It must be painful for you to move at my slow speed?” he replied, feigning a hurt look.

“No. Well, yes,” I stammered.

“You would like to drive?”

“Yes, I would like to drive.”

“You can get us close to Venice then I will take over. Just stay off the *Autostrada* and hold your speed to the limit,” ordered Sandy with a large dose of good humour. “I’ll be the navigator.”

He didn’t look over and I stared straight ahead. “Here we go,” I said. I hadn’t felt closer to pappa both today and yesterday when driving the Saab since that day when he shared my joy at receiving my driver’s license.

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The Saab handled like a dream. Sandy had taken good care of it, both inside and out. There is nothing like the sound of a 900 Turbo getting up to speed or slowing down. It is somewhere between the sound of a thousand bees swarming and the growl of a tiger. It took all of my energy and will power to hold the car under the speed limits. We returned via Monfalcone and then followed the SS14 through the small towns and villages on the northern coast of the Adriatic as we headed toward Venezia. We passed the Trieste airport, then drove through Pieris, Cervignano del Friuli and San Giorgio di Nogaro. An hour after we left Trieste we were in Portogruaro.

“Doesn’t ‘port’ mean the same thing as in English, a harbour?”

“*Porto* does mean ‘port’, just like in English, and this city was founded as a port back in the middle of the twelfth century even though it is quite a long way to the sea. Fishermen asked permission from The Church, which administered the land, to open a port. At the time, all of Italy, except for the Papal States in the central section and a sliver of the northern and eastern Adriatic that was part of the City State of Venice, was under the control of the Holy Roman Empire. The fishermen were not asking to buy the land, just to set up a port where their boats could have a safe harbour.”

“I guess there wasn’t much fly fishing back then.”

“There wasn’t much fishing that didn’t have as its major purpose to bring home fish. People didn’t have any leisure time on their hands except to go to church, which was compulsory. The idea of fishing with equipment that put the prey on equal footing to the predator and guaranteed that they would not be beaten over the head with a club probably never entered the heads of

fishermen who had all they could do to keep themselves and their families alive.”

“I read an article a few years ago that compared barbless hooks and catch-and-release fishing to hunting with rubber bullets. Keeping fish was never high on my priority list since I was not that fond of eating them until recently.”

“Have you ever hunted?”

“Not seriously. No one in our family hunted except *morfar*, my mother’s father. He took me with him on the annual moose hunt a few times when I was young. I’m not sure how he convinced my mother—or my father—to let me go. I remember it was cold and there was not a lot of action. It was mostly waiting until someone spotted a moose. The first time I went, one of the men killed a bull. The next time no moose were seen. I remember the butchering of the moose. My grandfather wanted to make sure I saw the whole thing, but I couldn’t stand seeing all the blood. Do you hunt?”

“No. I’m afraid I will shoot one of the other hunters or myself. I was never in the military. Something or other was always wrong with me and I was rejected for service. So I never learned how to properly handle a gun. Once I was visiting a friend in his fishing and hunting lodge in Toscana. We had been out fishing all day and when we came back we had a few drinks. While he was fixing dinner, I picked up his 22-calibre rifle that was standing in the corner, just to examine it. I laid it across my lap and it went off. The bullet landed in the corner of a window sash. My friend rushed in expecting to see me lying in a pool of blood. He was more relieved than angry that I had been so careless, but then he probably thought that having a loaded gun without the safety on was one of the more stupid things he had done. I have not picked up a gun since then. I suppose you did your military service?”

“Yes. When I turned eighteen there was still money in the Swedish budget to pay for all boys to spend time in the army, or *Lumpan*, as it is called in Sweden. I was stationed up in the north where the mosquitoes, *myggor*, are as big as horse flies and the small *knott*, gnats, make life miserable from May until the middle of August. I learned how to handle a gun and do other things that soldiers are expected to do. The best part was camping. I wasn’t in the Scouts and our family was not big on being out in the woods sleeping in tents. Whenever I had a few hours free from military duties I would be out in the small ponds with my fly rod trying to coax up one of the char or brook trout. The *sammi*, or Laplanders, who keep the reindeer, take very good care of the land that has been their home for many generations.”

Sandy instructed me to turn north at Portogruaro on to route A28.

“Where are we headed?” Sofi is going to send us a re-supply of coffee and she asked me to give her an address.”

“I will give you the address of the hotel in Gubbio where we will be staying at the end of this week. We are going now to a farm in the Dolomites near Belluno. It’s a little over an hour north of here. It is one of the now many farms in Italy that specializes in agricultural and gastronomical tourism. The farm is owned by a distant cousin of Francesa. They became good friends when they were growing up. We are the godparents to their daughter, their only child. We often went there to take long walks together on the gentle mountain trails. In the summer months there are many people who come from America and Great Britain to experience what is called ‘Slow Food.’ At the moment they have no guests.”

“Sofi once suggested we take a vacation in Italy and stay at a place where they ate slow food, but she could not get me interested. What is ‘slow food’ anyway? Is it food that takes a lot of chewing?”

Sandy laughed. “It’s the opposite of ‘fast food’, the stuff you find in chains of all kinds all over the world. It’s not-snacks. It is food that begs for careful preparation, long cooking and gracious eating accompanied by good conversation.”

“It sounds very old fashioned. Who has time for all of that these days?”

“You’d be surprised. There are many places in the world where families spend a large part of every day preparing and eating their meals. I suppose I could have taken on a few more architectural commissions if I was not so stubborn about cooking our dinner every evening. Francesca was able to spend a bit more time at her law office, but usually she was home before I was finished cooking and we sat down as a family to eat together every evening. On Sundays, except for the hot summer months, we always had a full dinner with at least five courses, often with other members of our families coming to our home. In June and July, before we went to our cottage in the Dolomites not very far from where we will be spending the next few days, I made smaller meals that did not require long hours of cooking, or we went out together to our local restaurants.”

“All of this sounds so strange to me. It was rare that we all sat down together and ate dinner, even during the holidays. We ate our main meal at lunchtime in cafeterias and restaurants. School lunches are free. Workers received coupons, called *lunchkuponger*, which were subsidized by the employers. I wouldn’t describe what we ate each day as gourmet, and we had a limited time to eat it, but it seemed to be healthy enough.”

“When I was at the KTH for that critique I mentioned to you, we went to a local restaurant for lunch. It was Thursday and I suppose you can guess what we had.”

“Ärtsoppa med fläsk och pannkakor med sylt och grädde, Pea soup with ham followed by pancakes served with jam and whipped cream. It’s still one of my favourite meals. I wish I could find it on other days except Thursday, but that wouldn’t be following tradition.”

”I liked it as well. That is slow food if you make it from scratch, which was the only way it could be made before conservation and refrigeration. And even children can taste the difference between a properly cooked and seasoned dish and one that has been put together with no care for how it will taste.”

“So will we be cooking our own slow food on the farm?”

“Cooking and fishing, if we are going to do both well, may not go together. But if you would like to take a day to see for yourself what it is like, I would be happy to show you.”

“Let’s see how the fishing is on the first day. We had eaten two dinners together at that point. They were both enjoyable, I had to admit. Still, I was uncomfortable with having to sit so long in one place and watch while my dinner companion seemed to think about every bite of food he took. I had vacuumed up the items on my plate practically before he had even gotten started, and still I felt like I had slowed down.

The A28 ended in Conegliano, where it connected to the A27. As we drove into the city I had a feeling that I was in for another lesson in Italian urban planning and architecture. This place seemed to have all the right ingredients for a town that would make Sandy’s Top Ten list, although I wasn’t yet very sure what those ingredients were.

“Time for a little lunch? I know just the place where you can get that plain ham and cheese sandwich you have been longing for.”

“Actually, I’m not so fond of the Italian ham I have tasted, ‘sandanelly’ and ‘proskeyoutow’. I guess I pronounced them incorrectly.”

“‘San-dan-yell-eh’ and ‘pro-shoo-toh’,” corrected Sandy, “but I got the idea.”

“They’re too stringy. When you bite into a sandwich you end up getting the whole piece of meat. Besides, there is no such thing as a plain ham and cheese sandwich in Italy,” I proclaimed with a laugh. “It’s always a ‘forgotcha’ or ‘chewbacka’ or ‘paganeeny’ or some other name.”

“Your command of Italian dialect is terrific. Bravo!” Sandy exclaimed as he clapped his hands and laughed. “Just for the record, the words are *focaccia*, *ciabatta* and *panini*. Niccoló Paganini was one of our best violinists and composers, a genius, but we did not name a bread in his honor. We bake the ingredients into a *focaccia*, so it’s not really a sandwich. It’s more like a pizza. *Ciabatta* is bread, something like a simple sourdough bread, with no added ingredients. It’s only when we stuff it that it becomes a sandwich. *Pane* is bread in Italian. *Panini* is the plural of *panino*, and it is the word for a small bread roll that is not sliced. Sliced bread is called *tramezzino*. A toasted sandwich made with sliced bread is called a *tosto*, and with *prosciutto cotto*, which is cooked ham, it bears a very strong resemblance to the ham you would get in your ham and cheese sandwich. *Prosciutto crudo* is cured ham, either air- or salt-cured or smoked, or both. We also have *bruschetta*, which are the Italian equivalent of your open-faced sandwiches in Sweden.”

“*Smörgåsar*,” I interjected.

“Yes, those, and then we have *crostini*, or ‘little toasts’. These are usually served as *antipasti* with different toppings.”

“Just as I said, it’s hard to get a plain ham and cheese sandwich in Italy.”

“When we get down to Umbria you will taste the delightful *porchetta*, and I am sure you will enjoy the *mortadella* in Emilia-Romagna.”

“A slice of pizza would do me just fine.”

Sandy guided me along the *Via Resistenza*, *Viale Giacomo Matteotti*, the *Via Carlo Rosselli*, *Piazzale San Martino*, *Via XI Febbraio* to the *Corso Vittorio Emanuele II*. *Matteotti*, explained Sandy, was a Socialist politician from an area south of Venezia.

“He accused the Fascists and Mussolini of fraud in the 1924 elections, and was relentless of his criticism of the government and especially Mussolini. He was murdered in June of that year after the publication of his book The Fascisti Exposed. His murderers were never brought to justice, and most accept that it was at the hands of Mussolini’s loyalists. His death caused loud protests by the opposition. Mussolini decided that no opposition was better than one that was critical and established his dictatorship in 1925. Carlo Rosselli was also an anti-Fascist who was also assassinated. He was born into a wealthy Italian Jewish family from Toscana. He was killed by French Fascists in France, probably on orders from Mussolini. Oddly, with all of the reminders of Italy’s heroes around its unification and its anti-Fascist activities, the 11th of February commemorates the formation of the Vatican State in 1929. This was one of Mussolini’s grand achievements.”

We arrived at the place where Sandy said there would be good and simple sandwiches. We parked across the street so that we could see the car from where we would be sitting. It was a little place right across the street

from a fountain. *Neptunus* was sitting on a large seashell straddling two horses. Water was pouring out of the horses' nostrils.

"It's the *Fontana dei Cavalli*, the 'Horses Fountain'," explained Sandy. "It is from the period when this part of Italy belonged to the Austrian Hungarian Empire. There is nothing distinguishing about it except its placement as a pivotal point along a spectacular connector."

I was hungry, but I understood that the food would have to wait until Sandy explained to me what he meant by a 'spectacular connector'.

"Look toward the end of the street," he instructed. "What do you see?"

I did as he said. What did I see? All the buildings were almost the same height. I saw the tops of the buildings forming a nearly smooth line against the sky on both sides of the street. The lines curved around to the right and joined at the end. Should I see something else, I wondered. All the buildings had arched arcades covering the sidewalk and the arches butted right up against the street. I told this to Sandy.

"These buildings were built at different times by different builders and for different owners, and yet, they followed a set of basic rules. They are all built right up to the road with an arcade along the ground floor. They are all approximately the same height, so that the silhouette they form against the sky is uniform. The composition draws the eye forward for those who are in the street. For those who are walking along the street, the eye is drawn to what is very near, in the shops or the people along the path."

"I have to admit, it is more interesting than looking down a straight street. Why couldn't the architects or city planners in Sweden do things like this? It seems pretty simple and straightforward and the results definitely are pleasing. Even I can see that."

“It’s not the architects or city planners who make good design possible. It is the land owners and developers, the ones with the money. A book by an American architect named Edmund Bacon helped me to form my thoughts on urban design. He showed how Rome was transformed from a city of monumental buildings to a one that moved the eye, the body and the mind through the city. It was the visionary pope, Sixtus V, who conceived of the idea that beauty was not in the manipulation of mass but in the articulation of experience along an axis of movement through space. Bacon theorized, I believe correctly, that it was the development of perspective drawing in the first half of the fifteenth century that was the breakthrough in thinking about spatial design. An architect communicates through drawing, even if the drawings are only rough sketches. Builders use these drawings to execute the work. If you can’t draw it, they can’t build it. Michelangelo and other architects realized the vision of Sixtus. He was pope for only five years, from 1585 to 1590, but he has left his mark on the city and made it even greater through his interventions.”

Lecture over, we crossed the street from the fountain to a small café along the arcade. All of the usual Italian breads were there. A *focaccia* with sun dried tomatoes and anchovies was as close as I was going to get to a pizza, and that is what I ordered along with a bottle of sparkling water. Sandy asked for a *ciabatta* with *San Daniele* ham and *asiago* cheese. He explained that *asiago* cheese is made from cow’s milk and has different textures depending on its age. The new cheese is soft and the aged cheese is crumbly, like aged *parmigiano*. When it is in the middle, aged between nine and eighteen months, it can be sliced and added to sandwiches. It has a sharp taste, he explained and he asked the counter person to cut an extra slice for me to taste.

“*Buono.*” It was good. Maybe not as tasty as my favourite Swedish cheese, *Grevéost*, but still good. We ate our lunch quietly. As usual, I was

finished with mine before Sandy had even made a dent in his, but he didn't seem pressured to speed up and I was getting used to the routine. I looked around the café, at the furniture and wall hangings. Something caught my eye. It looked like a Swedish flag as part of a town coat of arms, what we call *kommunvapen*. There was one crown above the shield with the Swedish flag and two branches beneath. I recalled that the Swedish royal coat of arms has a single crown above a shield, but the shield is not the Swedish flag. If I remembered correctly, it is a shield with three crowns on it.

"I wonder if this town has any connection to Sweden," I commented to Sandy. "Its coat of arms includes a Swedish flag."

"The coat of arms of Vittorio Veneto looks the same except it has a flag with alternating red and blue background and a white cross. It reminds one of a Norwegian flag. I honestly do not know if there is any connection with Scandinavia. It might be worthwhile doing some research. Of course this region was controlled by the *Longobardi* for many centuries, and these people came from Scandinavia. I don't know if there were flags back then. I don't think so."

"Our flag with its current colours was made official in 1906," I declared with a feeling of pride that I was able to dig this piece of information out of my memory bank. "The blue flag with the yellow cross dates from the 1500s and Gustav Wasa."

"It sounds like you were paying attention in history classes afterall, Nicklas," he said, and we both laughed. "I'll take over the driving from here. We'll take the small roads to the farm and it will be easier to drive than giving directions. You can enjoy the scenery. There will be a lot of it to enjoy during the short drive."

Sandy guided the Saab through the narrow streets until we were heading north on route SP635 toward San Pietro di Feletto. The *fiume Monticano*

was to the east of us as we drove until we passed Corbanese. Sandy said that he used to fish there but he gradually gave up after too many fishless excursions. We were reaching the base of the mountain range when we turned west for a short while to Tovenà and then north again, still following the SP635 road marking. It was more of a path than a road, with hairpin curves. I wished I was driving, but Sandy seemed to be very experienced in manoeuvring the car on these winding roads. When we came to Trichiana, SP635 disappeared and we turned east on SP1 toward Belluno. As we entered the city I saw its coat of arms. It looked identical to Conegliano's with the addition of two red dragons on the top of two blue fields facing the yellow vertical part of the cross. I was going to have to look into this one day. We came to Cadola and then turned north onto SS51.

Our destination was a farm in the vicinity of Castello Lavazzo. We drove off the main road to the west after passing through Castel Lavazzo and followed a well maintained gravel road that ended in a large and well-placed farm with gently rolling fields close to the main house and outbuildings. The mountains, still capped with snow, rose in the background. The air had grown decidedly chillier than it had been in Conegliano. Sandy drove the car into the large courtyard formed by the house and barns. It was completely paved with smooth cobblestones. We parked the car next to a new model, forest green Land Rover Freelander. Beside it was an older model, navy blue Range Rover and next to that a Ferrari-red Land Rover Defender with a coat of arms containing a grayling and some words in Latin: *Thymallus Thymallus* above and *Dominae Profusum* below. As we emerged from the Saab we were greeted by three medium-sized, shaggy-haired dogs that were obviously on friendly terms with Sandy. He reached into his pocket and distributed treats that delighted the canines.

“*Zio Alessandro!*” a voice cried out from the entrance door to the house, and a young woman appeared. She ran toward Sandy and joined the dogs in giving him the warmest greeting any man would welcome.

“*Raffaella, mia preziosa, è sempre così meraviglioso vederti!*” exclaimed Sandy as he hugged her and accepted her kisses. “Raffaella, this is my fishing partner, Nicklas Laurentzson. He is Swedish, as you might guess. Nicklas, this is Raffaella Cadore. She is my *figlioccia*, my goddaughter.”

She released Sandy and extended her hand to me. She was beautiful; not drop dead beautiful like a Penelope Cruz or Selma Hayak, but tending in that direction, with dark brown hair and very dark brown eyes on a frame that was in the neighbourhood of 172 centimetres tall. She was trim, not thin, and it was clear that there was a figure worth seeing beneath the shooting pants, quilt jacket and Wellington boots she was wearing. I said something like ‘It is a pleasure to meet you,’ half in Swedish and half in English. She shook my hand firmly, like women shake hands in Sweden.

“Welcome to our home,” she said warmly. “I hope you will enjoy your stay and that we will find some fish together.”

The expression on my face was readable by both Sandy and Raffaella. “We?” I said.

“Raffaella will be our guide, won’t you?” interjected Sandy.

“Of course!”

“No one knows the waters around here better than my *figlioccia* does, and she is a much better fly fisher than her *padrino*.”

“You have taught me all I know about fishing, *Zio*,” she laughed, “and you also taught me to be modest about my accomplishments as you are about yours.”

Raffaella’s mother and father joined the welcoming committee.

“Michele, Gabriella, I am pleased to introduce my friend Nicklas Laurentzson, my fishing companion.”

“You are most welcome to our home, Nicklas,” said Michele. “We look forward to your stay with us. It also pleases us to see that our Alessandro has found a good companion for his fishing expedition. Raffaella was ready to take a leave of absence from her work to make sure that her *padrino* did not take too many risks to catch a little fish.”

“Nicklas has not signed on for the entire voyage,” interjected Sandy. “He is free to hop off at any port, but I hope that our fishing during the next few days will convince him that we have much to offer a fly fisher here in Italy.”

At that moment I had what could only be called an ‘out of body experience’. I was looking at the scene from above. The three shaggy dogs, which Sandy later explained were *Bergamasco* sheep dogs, typical for this region in the Dolomites, were running in circles around the five of us. I kept looking at Raffaella, trying to think of her in waders, fishing in water up to her chest. The image faded and I saw Sofi standing in the water staring up at me. Raffaella’s brought me back down to earth.

“Would you like to take a walk with the dogs and let *Zio* Alessandro and my parents have some time on their own?”

“Yes. Sure,” I replied as she began walking toward the back of the house. A path led out through a field toward a wood climbing up a hill.

“It is difficult to leave when I come for visits like this,” she said as we walked. “I live and work in Milano. When I was growing up I could not wait until I would go to university and then find a job in the city. Now, I cannot wait to come back here every chance I have. I miss my parents. I miss Elena and her daughter Anna—you will meet them soon—and I miss my dogs. I miss the mountains and the clean, fresh air. And I miss the fishing.”

“What are your dogs’ names?”

“Peter, Paul and Mary,” she answered and laughed out loud. “My parents were at university in Bologna together with *Zio* Alessandro and *Zia* Francesca, and together they formed the Italian College Folk Song Association. My parents have one of the largest collections of records of American folk song singers from the early 60s, and *Peter Paul and Mary* were their favourites. They had a singing group they called *The Wayfarers*. *Zio* played the guitar and *babbo* played the banjo. I have home movies of them if you would like to see them.”

“Yes, that would be fun. My parents had a few of their records and I used to listen to them. I can see Sandy—he asked me to call him Sandy, probably because he couldn’t bear to hear his real name butchered by my awful pronunciation—I can see Sandy with a beard and long hair belting out ‘If I had a Hammer’. What was Francesca like?”

“She was beautiful, both inside and outside. I was much closer to her than my real aunts, probably because she and *mamma* were such good friends. She always encouraged me to study and become a professional, as she was. My parents did as well. *Mamma* is still practicing medicine in the local clinic. *Babbo* is retired now, but he was a mechanical engineer. He had his own practice and often worked together with *Zio* Alessandro. I studied structural engineering but gradually became more interested in managing building projects and am now a registered clerk of the works for new building projects. It is always so much fun to come to the first meeting with the builders and to see their reaction when they realize that a woman will be managing their work.”

Not just any woman, I thought, but a knock-out. I smiled and nodded. “It’s not so unusual in Sweden these days to have a woman as a boss at the

middle and even upper management levels, and I often see women working on building sites.”

She changed the subject. “What do you do when you are not fishing?”

“Right now I’m sort of unemployed. I think I still have a job working as an electrical engineer for the car company, Saab, but I’m not sure the company is still in business.”

“Are you certain you did not reply to an announcement that *Zio Alessandro* put in the newspapers for a fishing companion who is interested in cars?” said Raffaella jokingly. “It sounds too perfect.”

“It was a totally random meeting, I can assure you. My boss called me and told me to take some time off while things got sorted out with the company’s finances. I was given the name of a river in Percoto and I went there. Sandy was fishing and I was watching him. After I rescued him from drowning and he asked me to...”

“Zio was drowning!” exclaimed Raffaella. “You had to rescue him?”

I realized as soon as the words came out that I should not have mentioned it. I should have let Sandy tell them himself. *What an idiot I am*, I thought.

“He tripped as he was turning to come in and fell back into the stream. I was able to get to him quickly and pull him to shore. He has had an examination by a doctor and he seems to be in perfect health. I should not have mentioned it unless he brought it up. I apologize.”

“How fortunate you were there,” she said, seeming to be relieved, then irritated. “He is so careless sometimes and wades in too deep.”

“That’s what I was thinking when I saw him. I don’t wade over my knees due to a fear of doing exactly what Sandy did.” I thought I wouldn’t mention my Czech nymph fishing the day before lest she start to wonder if her Godfather has a death wish for himself and his fellow fishers. But then I

thought about what a bad liar I have always been and knew my untruthfulness would come back and bite me. “Well, I never did wade over my knees until yesterday when Sandy got me to try his Czech nymphing technique and I waded up to my waist.”

She just shook her head and gave a short laugh. “He’s hopeless.”

We walked along without saying anything for a while, then I said: “I didn’t know anything about fishing in Italy, let alone believe that there were rivers that actually hold fish.”

“It’s our little secret,” said Raffaella with a smile, seeming to have recovered from my upsetting news. “We send all the fly fishers over to Slovenia, and the fish from Slovenia come over here.”

“There is one thing I was wondering about. Does Sandy’s son, Jacopo, fish?”

“Oh no,” replied Raffaella, somewhat seriously. “He was never one to engage in his parents’ hobbies, neither fishing nor hunting. He has been interested in only one thing since a very early age and that is architecture. He was gifted as an artist and he began drawing his own designs before he was in his teens. There was never any question about what he would study and what he would spend his life doing. I think *Zio* is both happy and proud of what Jacopo has accomplished, but I also think that he has missed his companionship doing the other things he enjoys, like fishing, driving his cars and most of all cooking.”

“Is he the reason you became a fly fisher?”

“Yes, mostly. *Pappa* was a less serious fisher than *Zio*, but they both encouraged me. *Pappa* is more of a hunter, but I never was able to become interested in guns and shooting. *Zia* Francesca was a real hunter. *Pappa* would sometimes join *Zia* and her family on their big hunts, and if he was

truly lucky he would come back with a part of the kill. Our cook, Elena, is in her glory when she can prepare fresh game.”

“It sounds like your families spent a lot of time together when you were growing up. Are you and Jacopo good friends?” After I said this I wished I had not. We had just met and I was asking very personal questions. But there was unconsciously something behind the question that I wanted to know and this was a way of getting to that piece of information.

“For Jacopo, I was like his little sister even though he is only three years older than I am. I had different feelings. I grew up thinking that one day we would be married. I don’t know why I kept those feelings. We were so different in all ways. Annamaria is a perfect wife for him. They both live and breathe their work. Their minds are always thinking the same thoughts.”

I wanted to ask whether someone else filled the gap left by Jacopo. I think she sensed that I was heading toward that question when she asked the same question of me in an indirect way.

“It must feel liberating to be able to just take some days or weeks or months off to go fishing and not have to be concerned about work or family or obligations. How do you manage that?”

“I don’t have any plants to water or pets to feed or newspapers piling up inside my door. All of my bills are paid automatically. I’m so useless in relationships that I’ve given up trying. I’m either working or fishing. I lived with someone, Sofi, for five years, but that was five years ago. She is still my best friend. What about you? ”

“*Pappa* and *Zio* are hard acts to follow,” she said with a short laugh, “and I held out hopes for Jacopo until the day he got married. No, there’s no one sharing my dreams or my bed.”

We had made a large circle through the wood and pastures, past a small pond and were now approaching the house. The dogs had run ahead and had disappeared around the front of the house. The house was both magnificent and modest at the same time. It was made of timber that was stained a dark brown, almost black, with two full stories and a high terracotta tile Mansard roof, the kind with a double pitch so that the attic is almost full height throughout its width. The windows were large and multi-paned with the trim painted white and mullions painted red umber. The main entrance, placed squarely in the centre of the house, consisted of two full-sized doors that were painted the same red colour as the window mullions.

“I hope you have a good appetite,” said Raffaella suddenly. She must have learned the art of quickly changing subjects from Sandy. “Elena had plenty of warning that you and *Zio* were coming and she has a wonderful meal planned for us. Tomorrow we will be spending the day and early evening on the *Piave*. I look forward to fishing with you.”

We entered through the main door and came into a well-proportioned oval shaped anteroom. Raffaella removed her boots and I did likewise. It was natural for me to take off my shoes when coming inside, but I did not know that the Italians did the same. Raffaella explained that it has been a tradition in their family, and she understood that it is expected in the Scandinavian countries to remove one’s shoes when entering your own or anyone else’s home. There was a row of slippers and a special shelf labelled ‘For guests’. I picked a pair that were in my foot size range and put them on. My bag was in the hall. I picked it up and we went through into the main hall, which was also oval shaped but much larger than the anteroom. Sandy, Michele and Gabriella were standing in the middle of the hall. Raffaella rushed over to Sandy, wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him on his cheeks several times. Then she stepped back and said: “Zio, you must

stop taking chances when you are fishing, and wear your wading belt and the life vest I gave you.”

Michele and Gabriella looked perplexed. Sandy gave a shortened and less dramatic version of what had happened. “I must admit that I was thinking about meeting Francesca when I saw the fourth Guardian Angel coming toward me,” said Sandy. “Nicklas’s real first name is *Phanuel*.” They all laughed; I was the only one who did not get the joke.

There was a curved stair along one wall. Raffaella put her arm around my free arm and showed me up to my room, which was on the third floor. “*Phanuel* is the name of the fourth Guardian Angel,” explained Raffaella as we ascended the stair. “If you and your parents have the names of the other three, you know little details like that.”

My room was more like a suite than a room, with windows on both sides. Out of one side there was the view toward the mountains, and out of the other side a view into the inner courtyard. It felt familiar.

“Please help yourself to whatever is in the fridge or in the bowls on the tables. We’ll start to gather in the living room in about an hour, so take your time and come down when you are ready. No need to change into anything other than what you have on,” she said as she left.

What just happened? I asked myself after she had gone. It had been so long since I had let myself be attracted to a woman that I had forgotten how it felt. Did Sandy plan this? They obviously all expected me. They seemed relieved that their friend had a companion who could get him out of trouble. I decided to call Sofi, but when I took out my phone there was no coverage. I sat there for a good while before deciding that I should wash up and get ready for dinner.

They were all there in the living room chattering away in Italian when I arrived. It was a large room on one side of the entrance hall. A stone fireplace was blazing and they were sitting on chairs and sofas arranged around the fire. Above the fireplace hung a large, framed family portrait of Michele, Gabriella and Raffaella, with Gabriella sitting and with Raffaella standing on one side and Michele on the other side of her. They were dressed in clothes that reminded me of the traditional *Svenska dräkten*. The photo looked like it had been taken recently. An empty, well-worn but majestic leather armchair was next to the fire. Michele motioned me toward the chair with his hand holding a bottle of something that looked like champagne and then poured the bubbly mixture into a glass that was on the table next to my designated chair. Raffaella had changed out of her walking attire into a simple, below-the-knee-length dress with short sleeves that looked like it was made of linen, at least it had the earthy greyish tone of that material. Under the dress she wore a white cotton jersey with long sleeves that covered her arms and framed the base of her neck. Her skin was naturally dark, and even after months of winter, she retained hints of hours spent in the out of doors. Her dark brown hair had been pulled back and twisted behind her head when we met earlier; it was now flowing loosely down to her shoulders. I realized that I was staring at her when Michele snapped me out of my trance with a toast: “*Salute* to our guests and their good luck on the *Piave* tomorrow.”

“The clothes you are wearing in the photograph, are they traditional for this region?” I asked.

“Yes,” replied Michele. “They are one good reason not to eat too much because they cost so much to replace if you can’t fit in them anymore.”

The subject then turned to food.

“I am certain that Raffaella has told you that we are all in for a special treat this evening,” said Gabriella. “Our housekeeper, Elena, is a master of local cooking. Raffaella was out during the weekend to add the fish ingredients.”

“So far, all of the meals I have experienced with Sandy have been an adventure, and I am certain that this one will be as well. We do have exotic foods in Sweden, but I have never been very good at trying dishes that I haven’t already eaten. I grew up eating sausages, meatballs and spaghetti with ketchup as the topping, the Swedish version of corned beef hash, called *pytt i panna*, cheese sandwiches, hard boiled eggs with our supermarket version of caviar and, of course, fish sticks. As an adult I have learned to eat steak, chicken, most fish and a few vegetables. I have tried more new dishes in the past three days than I have done in my entire life. I’m still breathing, and, I must say, I am really beginning to enjoy it.”

“We’ll start you off easily with the trout Raffaella caught from our pond,” said Gabriella. “Let’s go into the dining room, shall we?”

We went through a double door into a room with a peaked ceiling extending up two stories. In the middle of the room was a round cooking grill a metre in diameter and a metre in height surrounded by a table-height counter with a section cut out. Gabriella said it was called a *fogher*. “Normally, it is in the kitchen, is much smaller and in a nook with a low ceiling. Michele’s grandfather decided that he would make the *fogher* the center of his grand dining room. Of course, there is a smaller one in the kitchen where we have our meals most days, but we use this dining room whenever we have guests.”

It was obviously Elena who was standing next to the grill in the cut-out. She greeted us warmly. She seemed to be about the same age as Raffaella. She had a muscular build and was very well proportioned. She wore a white

apron that covered the front of her light blue dress from her neck to just below her knees. Her face was flushed from the heat of the grill, and her broad smile revealed glistening white teeth. In one hand she held a long fork with a wooden handle. Over the grill was a copper hood with a chimney pipe, also in copper, extending up to and through the peak of the ceiling. Positioned at the counter were ladder-back chairs furnished with seat and backrest cushions covered in tapestry fabric. Around this combination cooking and dining table were arrangements of lounge chairs and sofas with tables. The mahogany-stained wide board wooden floor was covered with different sizes and colours of Persian rugs. Windows stretching from the floor to the start of the sloping ceiling alternated with panelled wall surfaces that contained landscape paintings with fishing and hunting scenes. A large stuffed brown trout filled one panel, and the head of a seven point red deer, what we could call a *kronhjort*, filled another. From the middle of each of the four sloping ceilings hung large banners that looked similar to the city coats of arms we had seen on the drive up here. It was obvious that this room was designed for serious eating.

We sat together on two sides of the grill with enough elbow room as seemed necessary. There was room for at least twelve around the *fogher*. The fire in the grill had burned down to coals. A dozen small trout were resting in a large serving platter while a dozen more were waiting for being readied for the fire. The trout had been gutted and the heads were left on. Elena was rubbing them dry inside and out to remove all remaining slime and blood. She placed a bay leaf and sprinkled salt and pepper in the cavity of each fish, placed them on the platter and drizzled a bit of olive oil over them, coating them completely. When all the fish had been prepared, she placed them over the grill. She used a sprig of rosemary to baste them with oil from the platter.

“When the backbones of the trout turn from pink to white, the fish are done,” offered Gabriella. “The skins should be crispy.” Elena placed the fish on a serving dish that was ringed with lemon wedges, waved the olive oil bottle over them and added a light sprinkling of salt.

“The wine is a Sauvignon *Bianco dei Berici*,” said Michele as he filled our glasses over our shoulders as the plate of trout was passed from Elena to Gabriella and then to each of us.

A bowl of what looked like rice and peas was passed behind the fish. “This is *risi e bisi*, rice and peas, our regional dish,” said Michele. “In the south, the first tomatoes are rushed to market and they fetch the highest prices for the entire season. In Veneto, it is the early peas that are the specialty. The peas must be young, fresh and tender, so this dish is only eaten in the spring. Raffaella found the peas in her local market. Her vegetable vendor promised her they came from the lagoon between Chioggia and Burano, where the best ones are grown. You have a fork and a spoon to eat it with. You can use either one or both.”

It had a consistency of cooked rice that had not quite finished absorbing all of the liquid, but the rice was perfectly cooked. “I can tell there are more ingredients than just rice and peas,” I said as I took my first bite. “It has a wonderful taste.”

“Onions, peas, diced ham and the rice are sautéed in butter in a large casserole,” continued Gabriella. “When the rice turns opaque, chicken stock that has been simmering is added in stages, letting the rice absorb the liquid before adding more, stirring the whole time. When the rice and peas are tender, stir in more butter and *parmigiano* cheese.”

When the first course was finished, the plates and utensils were cleared by a young girl who appeared from the kitchen. Anna was introduced as Elena’s daughter. “I am pleased to meet you,” she said to me in a beautifully

accented English, while blushing from head to toe. Anna brought out another set of bowls and set them beside her mother. She distributed soup spoons, knives and forks to each of us. She returned to the kitchen and came back with a large glass serving dish with what looked very much like eel.

“Is it eel?” I asked. “We call it *ål*.”

“Yes,” said Gabriella, “it is *Anguilla Marinata*, or marinated eel. The eel pieces are brushed with lemon juice, dipped in flour and fried in oil for five minutes or so. Then they are placed in a baking dish and covered with a marinade made of onions, garlic, thyme, bay leaves, peppercorns and salt that have been sautéed, with vinegar added at the end. The hot marinade is poured over the eel and then left to cool to room temperature. The dish is covered with a linen towel and put into the refrigerator for twenty-four hours. What do you think, Nicklas?”

“I think that this is the best eel I have ever tasted.” I meant it. This was one dish I was going to have to learn how to make. “How do you say it again?”

“*Anguilla Marinata*,” answered Gabriella. “I will make sure that you have the recipe before you leave.”

As we finished our portions of eel, Elena poured the soup into colourful bowls. “*Sopa caoda*,” said Sandy. “This is my favourite: pigeon soup. It is the Veneto version of French onion soup with bread and the pigeon livers as the secret ingredients.”

We moved to a red wine. Michele explained that it was wine from the Trentino-Alto Adige region. It was made with the local *Teroldego Rotoliano* grape. *Teroldego* gets its name, said Michele, from the cultivation technique. The vines are trained to grow on a system of *tirelle*, trellises made of wire. There was something special about combining the taste of the wine with the

taste of the soup, something that did not happen when each one was put into the mouth separately. Each of the ingredients was distinctly present: the onions, celery, carrots, pigeon pieces and the small bits of liver. Even the bread and cheese could be picked out and savoured.

When the soup bowls were removed we took a pause and sipped our wine. I had been the centre of conversation since we gathered prior to the start of dinner, and now they were speaking to each other in Italian, seemingly all at one time. The warmth of the *fogher* and the effect of the wine gave us all a healthy looking blush to our complexions. There was no question that with such good looking parents, Raffaella was bound to be a beauty. Neither of them was tall in stature—Raffaella was taller than either of her parents—but they were both very fit and well proportioned. They carried themselves elegantly. Gabriella had blond hair and blue-grey eyes. Raffaella had her voice, her mouth and her high cheekbones. Michele had darker skin, dark brown eyes and chestnut coloured hair that had greyed on the sides but was still mostly free of white on the top. I suddenly thought of *pappa* and *mamma*. They were so different from Raffaella's parents, and so different from each other: tall and short; thin and thick; quiet and talkative; sober and joyful. I don't look like either of them, I thought, but I act like both of them at different times. I tried, but I couldn't remember sitting together with them over a meal and having the kind of friendly conversation that Raffaella was having with her parents and Godfather. Maybe it would have happened once I was older. Yes, I was too young for conversation when they died.

"Have you ever heard of the Elephant Platter, Nicklas?" asked Sandy.

"No. Don't tell me you eat elephant meat here!" That produced a big laugh from everyone. I even heard Anna giggling in the kitchen.

“It’s a dish served at a hotel that is not far from here, in Bressanone, called the *Hotel Elefante*,” continued Sandy. “The King of Portugal in the middle of the 16th century, John III, decided to send a special gift to Emperor Maximilian of Austria: an elephant named Solomon. Where and how King John got the elephant is lost to history, but it was making its way overland in the late autumn to Vienna. Its handlers were planning on taking it through the Brenner Pass when they found the pass to be blocked by an early snow. They had no choice but to camp through the winter. They chose an inn called Heberge Hohen Feld. When winter ended and the pass was opened, Solomon and his entourage continued their journey, but the elephant’s stay gave the hotel’s owner an idea for a new name and a new attraction, a dinner fit for an elephant.

“The Elephant Platter is actually three platters. The first is a tray of appetizers, including sardines, tuna, hard-boiled eggs with mayonnaise, *prosciutto*, salami, sausages, cold vegetables and salads. The second platter is a meter long and it is piled with meat and vegetables that vary with the seasons. As a rule, there are at least six different kinds of meat and twelve different vegetable dishes. The meat can include grilled steaks, pork chops, lamb chops, grilled liver; the vegetables are different types of cooked potatoes, rice, sauerkraut, spaghetti, spinach, anything. The third platter contains a mind dazzling array of cheeses, stewed fruits, cakes and fresh fruit. The hotel cooks won’t serve it to fewer than four guests. There is a legend that once they served it to a single person who ate every bit of food on all three platters. ‘He died afterward’, the first part of the legend says. ‘Everybody dies afterward,’ replied the hotel owner, ‘in his case, it was long afterwards. Hardening of the arteries.’”

“Is that the next course,” I asked, “an Elephant Platter?”

“*Fegato alla Veneziana* is next,” replied Gabriella with a laugh. “It is sautéed calf’s liver with onions. It will be served with Elena’s special *polenta*. The secret ingredients in this dish are sage and white wine vinegar. I hope you eat liver.”

“I was not a very good eater when I was growing up, but calves liver was always one dish that I really liked. My father’s mother, *farmor*, used to make it for me when I visited.”

The liver dish had more pepper than I was used to, and the sage gave it a different taste as well. But liver is liver, and there is not much you can do to hide the texture and flavour. You either like it or you don’t, and I do. The white *polenta* reminded me of *grôt*, our hot breakfast cereal. Gabriella said that it was made from white maize, rather than the yellow, which is why it is white rather than the yellow that is normally attributed to *polenta*.

Anna appeared magically and cleared the plates. She returned with a large platter of fruit and cheese while Elena set out new wine glasses. Michele disappeared into the next room and reappeared with a bottle of white wine. “This is *Pusterla Valle d’Oro*. It is one of the finest wines of the region around Venezia. We are so very lucky in Veneto to have our own excellent wines as well as some of the best wines in the world produced in Trentino-Alto Adige and Friuli-Venezia Giulia.”

Here was my chance. “Why do these regions have multiple names, and why does Friuli-Venezia Giulia have Venezia when Venezia the city is in a different region called Veneto?”

“You have done well to remember the names, Nicklas,” replied Michele. “Many of us who live in this part of Italia have trouble doing so. There is a hyphen between Friuli and Venezia Giulia, which gives a hint to the origins, as well as between Trentino and Alto Adige. Friuli is the ancient home of the *Castellieri* people who lived in an area between the mountains on the

north, the river *Tagliamento* on the west, the Adriatic on the south, and the river *Isonzo* on the east. The Romans arrived in the 4th century B.C. In the 2nd century B.C. they founded a city they named *Aquileia* along the *Natisone* river which became the capital of the region. The name 'Friuli' comes from the Roman *Forum Iulii*, which means 'forum market of Julius'. Over the years it was fought over by the Huns, Lombards, Franks, Austrians, French and Italians. Friuli became part of the Venetian city state in 1420. Trieste was not part of Friuli, but it was part of what became known at the end of the 1800s as *Venezia Giulia*. That name, which combines a reference to the Julian Alps and *Venezia*, was invented by the new state of Italia to give it an Italian identity to counter its Austrian-Hungarian past. The part containing Trieste and Gorizia became united with Italia after the last war, but it was not finally incorporated into Italia until 1963.

"Trentino is an Italian-speaking area, while most people in Alto Adige speak German. Alto Adige translates into *Südtirol* in German, or South Tirol in English. Both of these regions were part of the Holy Roman Empire and then the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. Trentino was awarded to *Italia* after the Great War and Alto Adige we took in return for war debts in 1919.

"That's the simple answer. The complete one is much, much more complex. Will that do for the moment?"

"Yes. Thank you. It all makes sense now I think." It seemed that every Italian person had an encyclopaedic knowledge of their region and country. We sat for a little while longer eating bits of cheese and fruit and finishing the bottle of wine. Then we moved to some comfortable chairs. Elena had brought in a large tray laden with fine China cups, saucers, dessert plates, milk pitcher and sugar bowl. Spoons, forks, napkins and a truncated cone-shaped cake topped with icing filled out the rest of the tray.

“This is *pandoro*, our traditional cake,” said Gabriella. “It is made with flour, sugar, eggs, butter and yeast and flavoured with vanilla. It’s golden colour, and therefore its name, is from the eggs, and its principal flavour is vanilla. I hope you will enjoy it, Nicklas. It is a house favourite.”

It was really delicious. I ate small bites. My feeling that I had already eaten too much passed long ago. The coffee was not the thick, bitter espresso I tried to avoid at all cost. It was smoother, more like Swedish coffee, but somehow sweeter. They were all interested in Sweden and wanted to know the Swedish view on the European Union, the likelihood of Sweden joining the European Monetary Union, whether the Social Democrats would ever gain the type of following they had when Olof Palme was prime minister. I gave them my opinions, but I could not back up my views with solid arguments. Michele seemed to be especially well versed in political topics and knew the names of all the Swedish politicians. We reached a consensus that Sweden would continue to stay in the EU but out of the EMU, and that the Social Democrats would gradually merge with the Environmental Party. Farther than that we would not come on this evening. Sandy offered to guide me back upstairs to my room, and we said goodnight to the Cadore family. I was asleep before my head hit the pillow

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Elena brought up breakfast to my room: a pot of tea, a hard-boiled egg, warm milk, a few *panini*, bread and jam. I had slept in. After all the food and wine I had consumed the evening before I could not face breakfast. After a quick shower, I drank the tea and left the rest. Hopefully I would be forgiven. I left my room carrying my thermos with the coffee I had just brewed. My supply was getting low. I might have two days left at most.

My phoned beeped as I was walking down the stairs. It was an SMS from Bengt.

'Hope the fishing is good in Italy. Knowing you, you are not enjoying the good food or beautiful women.' I'm not living up to my reputation, I thought. *'Good news on the jobs front. We just announced we will be hiring over a thousand new engineers. Call when you are back. We'll talk. Bengt.'*

My Plan B looks solid, I thought. I decided that I would not try to think about anything but the day ahead. Sandy and Raffaella were transferring our fishing gear from the Saab to the red Defender when I came out of the house. Sandy was wearing a three-piece light brown woollen suit with dark brown and red piping. The trousers were plus fours. Long crimson socks covered his legs from below the short trousers down to his well polished light brown wingtip shoes. He had on a white, button-down shirt and a red silk tie with jumping rainbow trout. Raffaella was dressed to go fishing.

"*Godmorgon*, my friend," he said with a laugh. Rather good pronunciation, I thought. "I trust that you slept and are both well fed and well rested for our adventure today. You will need all the energy you can muster for the fishing that Raffaella has planned for us."

"*Buongiorno*, Sandy. *Buongiorno*, Raffaella. Yes, I slept very well with the mountain air filling my room. I drank plenty of water before falling asleep so that my head would be clear this morning. I think it was good judgment that I had only one glass of the *Prosecco*. Is this the Car of the Manor?"

"It's Raffaella's!" replied Sandy with a wide grin.

"It's my Escapemobile. No one would think about stealing it, and any car that hits it only self-destructs. I used to own a Ferrari, but it was a totally impractical form of transport for me. But I liked the colour."

Owning a vehicle like this is going to send a message to any man who might have romantic intentions that he will definitely have competition for the driver's seat, I thought.

"What do the words mean? The fish is obviously a grayling."

"Yes, *Thymallus Thymallus* is 'grayling' in Latin, and *Dominae Profusum* means 'The Lady of the Stream'. I got the name when I was at university and it stuck. I have friends who still call me DP."

I smiled and nodded approvingly, but it was only to myself. Both Sandy and Raffaella were busy with their gear transferring task.

Turning to Sandy, I said, "Before I forget, do you have the address of the hotel where Sofi can send the coffee?"

"Yes. Here it is." He took out a small box from his shoulder bag, a medium-sized canvas Chevalier tackle bag. He opened it, thumbed through it and then handed me an index card on which was written in hand lettering: Park Hotel ai Cappuccini; *Via Tifernate*; 06024 Gubbio; tel 075 9234 (www.parkhotelaicappuccini.it)

"If you're still friends," Raffaella interjected, "you were probably good company when you did come home from fishing or working."

This was a compliment. I didn't know what to do with it so I just let it float in the air. She was as different from Sofi as any woman could be. I sent an e-mail on my BlackBerry Bold to Sofi with the address of the hotel that Sandy had given me, and Sandy and Raffaella finished loading the Defender. We were driving away from the farm on the dirt road with Raffaella at the wheel, Sandy in the passenger's seat and I in the back behind Sandy, when Sandy began his briefing of the activities ahead of us. It seemed that he and Raffaella shared the adventurous in their fishing. I had never been very enthusiastic about night fishing, even though I believe all

the stories about the biggest trout being caught during the darkest hours. Sandy explained that we would fish different parts of the *fiume Piave* in the morning and afternoon, eat dinner at a hotel restaurant close by and then fish into the first hours of darkness.

“You managed to get me to wade up to my waist, and now you’re trying to get me to confront another one of my fishing demons. O.K., if you both promise to provide support at my side I’ll give night fishing a try. Where are we headed first?”

“It is a very short drive, only a few kilometres. We are going to a place on the Piave River that is close to the site of one of northern *Italia*’s worst natural disasters caused by human greed and stupidity,” replied Sandy. “It happened in 1963. A new and very high dam, the Vajont Dam, had just been completed on a tributary to the Piave, the *Torrente Vajont*. The company selling the lake to the Italian energy company filled the lake despite warnings that the earth in the surrounding hills was unstable. The narrow reservoir behind the dam was almost filled when a large rainfall caused a gigantic landslide on the mountains that sloped steeply into the reservoir. A two hundred fifty meter high wave built up on the dam side of the landslide and swept over the top of the dam. It flooded the villages below within seconds. Codissago near Castello Lavazzo, Longarone, Pirago, Rivalta and other villages were destroyed. About two thousand people were killed within minutes, covered by earth and water. The dam has never been put into use after this disaster and is now only a tourist attraction.”

My phone rang. It was Sofi. “*Hej Nicklas.*”

I thought how lucky I was to be able to speak to Sofi in Swedish without anyone understanding what I was saying. “I just sent you a mail.”

“I just received it. How was your evening?”

“If I have too many more like that one I’ll have to buy a whole new wardrobe a few sizes larger. It was too good. There was not one dish that I had ever eaten before, and nothing that is what we in Sweden think of as Italian food.”

“Since you are texting I assume you aren’t driving. Have you let Sandy take the wheel again?”

“No. It’s his goddaughter who’s driving.” There was silence. Why can’t I lie to her? Why do I feel I should lie to her?

“Let me guess. She’s a dark-haired, dark-eyed beauty who is also a fly fisher.” Now I was silent. She was always telling me that I should meet new women. Did I detect a note of jealousy?

“Did you attach a web-cam to my phone? She’s jealous of you as well. It feels great to have two women fighting over me.” There was a pause for a few seconds. “She’s an engineer and a fly fisher. I think you would like her.”

“I don’t need to like her, Nicklas. You do. Do you?”

“I haven’t thought about liking any other woman. I need more practice. If you can’t stop staring at someone does that mean you like them?”

“If she lets you stare at her that means she likes you, so give it a chance.” She changed the subject. “Have you talked to Bengt? If the papers are correct there should be jobs available at Volvo Cars for awhile.”

“He left me an SMS and gave me the news, short and sweet. Maybe it’s timed to take advantage of all the Saab engineers who will be on the street in a short while. Maybe I should find another career.”

“I can’t imagine you working with anything other than cars, except maybe with fish.”

“I’m getting a new perspective on both fish and fishing down here. I can’t put my finger on it yet. I’ve been to two rivers and have both seen and caught plenty of fish. Then I have eaten what I caught or what my fishing partner has caught. And I don’t feel a bit guilty about it.”

“Are you sure you haven’t been using worms?” Sofi nudged.

“You remember the story of my first and last day in Högvadsån in Halland?” I asked rhetorically. I knew that was what she meant. I fished all day and never saw a hint of a salmon. At the end of the day, as I prepared to leave the river, I saw a meat hunter haul up one large fish after another from the bottom of the pool just beneath the dam. He had a gob of worms around a size 4 hook tied to a weighted spinning line. The river keeper was netting the ones that escaped the worm fisher and swam into the wier. He carried them up, one at a time, and placed them in the river above the dam. “No worms, honest, just pure and simple fly fishing.”

“Astra is hiring chemists, mostly consultants, and they are offering good wages. They are almost all right out of school.”

“I don’t know if I could manage starting over. I have a lot invested in triple-E.”

“Concentrate on enjoying yourself for the time being, Nicklas, and maybe try letting yourself get distracted by the Sophia Loren look-alike.”

We talked some more about the weather in Göteborg and the political reaction to what was happening at Saab. I told her I would phone her the next day, we said our usual long good-bye and we hung up together. When it was obvious that I had finished the call, Sandy asked me if everything was all right at home.

“Volvo has announced a major plan to hire new engineers, probably timed to take advantage of all the engineers from Saab who soon will be out of a job.”

“We’re almost there,” announced Raffaella. “It’s time to take off the worldly hat and put on the fishing one.”

Raffaella drove off the main road and onto a narrow, gravel path. I could see the dam. It was still there. The thought that no water was on the other side gave me a strange feeling. We drove along the gravel path further upstream and parked in a small clearing next to the river. I had done some reading about the *Piave* on the Internet after Sandy had told me that it was our next destination. It’s a freestone river with crystal clear water. It starts in the Alps and flows for 220 kilometers before emptying into the Adriatic near Venice. Where we were about to fish, north of Castello Lavazzo, there are large fish, over a kilo, which can be caught on dry flies.

We put on our gear. Raffaella’s waders and boots were good quality, but they also showed signs that she used them often. She wasn’t making any fashion statements when she was fishing. The three of us walked together to the river’s edge and silently admired its beauty. Sandy broke the silence.

“What’s our plan, Raffi?” This must be her fisherman’s handle, I thought. He had not referred to his goddaughter with a nickname the evening before. She read my thoughts.

“*Zio* is the only person who calls me ‘Raffi’, and only when we are alone. So he must trust you as a friend.”

“I am honoured.” I was honoured. Sandy just smiled.

“I suggest that you fish the home pool, *Zio*. Your dry fly technique will work wonders here on the grayling. I will take Nicklas a little further upstream where there is another dry fly pool and then I will continue up

above the broken water and fish wet flies and nymphs. Is that all right with everyone? We should meet back here at noon for lunch. *Zio* has promised to have something good to eat.”

We put up our rods, fastened our reels and threaded our lines through the guides. “Any suggestions on flies?” I asked. Sandy pulled out one of his many fly boxes and handed me a dozen dry flies all in the same pattern and dun colour in sizes 8 to 14.

“These should hold you until lunch. I have prepared them so they will stay up even after a few fish have been caught with them.”

Raffaella and I walked upstream while Sandy walked to the edge of the river and then slowly shuffled out until he was up to his knees. I could see by the wake that was created around his legs that the river was moving more quickly than was apparent by looking at the surface. About one hundred meters upstream from where Sandy was stationed we came to a long, flat piece of water about thirty meters across in the middle narrowing to under twenty at the top and bottom. The far side had a three meter riffle running along almost its entire length.

“This is a very deep pool, between two and four meters,” explained Raffaella. “There is a ledge on the far side where the water is moving more quickly. The grayling usually line up along the seam between the fast and slow water, picking off whatever is edible that is pushed out by the fast water in the slack. There! Did you see that one come up?”

I had seen a nose bob up out of the slower water. It was barely noticeable, something only a trained fly fisher would observe.

“When you have fished the seam and caught all of the graylings, you can come back to the base of the pool and practice your Czech nymphing technique. It will not be so easy because the pool is deep and the water is

clear and is moving quickly, but you can try. We can switch around this afternoon. Try to save a few for me.”

I waded out into the current at the base of the pool. It was shallow, no higher than my knees, and the bottom was an even layer of small stones, but the water was swift. A few steps back toward the river’s edge there was less pressure from current. I steadied myself, planting my feet firmly in the gravel and tied on one of the dry flies Sandy had given me, size #10. With a single back cast, I brought the fly forward to let it land where I had seen the fish nose up a few minutes ago. A grayling came up and took it before it hit the water. The fish took a long run through the middle of the pool, jumping twice, and then it was ready to come to the net. I released it after a quick estimate of its weight, which was around half a kilo. Sandy was right about his fly being ready for a new fight after a couple of false casts to flick the water off its hairs. Two more graylings came to the same fly before it was time to give it a rest and tie on another.

Time disappeared without me taking any notice. It happened before, although not often, when my mind was completely focused on the water, my fly, the movement of my arm and the actions of the fish in front of me. A dozen-or-so fish to the net later, and as many lost at the time of contact or shortly after, I heard a voice behind me. It took me a second or two to bring the voice from a background sound to the front of my consciousness. It was Raffaella. “Come on, Nicklas. You’ve caught most of the fish already and you haven’t even fished the deep pool. Time for lunch.”

“How did you do?” Before my first cast she had moved out of my view.

“There’s one brown on shore for lunch. If *Zio* has one the same size we will have a filling meal. I’ve been watching you for the past half hour. You’re pretty intense when you fish. I get there sometimes as well.”

“I understand there’s a scientific name for it. It’s called being ‘in the flow’ or ‘in the zone’, but I only reach that state when I’m catching fish. Most of the time I am much more relaxed.” She looked at me and smiled and raised her eyebrows. I hadn’t convinced her.

We walked down river toward Sandy. The tea kettle and a large cast iron frying pan with sizzling butter were on the Coleman camp stove. What looked like a two-kilo brown had been cleaned and cut into steaks of three centimetres. Sandy was dipping the steaks first in a plate containing lightly scrambled egg, then into flour, and finally into a crushed almond mix. He placed the first steak into the pan. On a plate next to the stove were little patties that looked like biscuits. The dishes, glasses and cutlery from Sandy’s wicker picnic basket were already laid out on a white tablecloth spread on a teak folding table with three matching stools that had come out of the Defender.

“I see you don’t need my little contribution, *Zio*,” said Raffaella when we arrived in Sandy’s outdoor kitchen.

“We can save it for the house. I could see that Nicklas enjoyed his morning of fishing, but I lost sight of you, my dear. Did you have a good outing?”

“*Si, Zio*,” she answered with a broad smile. “This river, and especially this place, is always kind to me.”

It turned out that the biscuit-looking little patties were made from last evening’s *polenta*. They went into the frying pan for a quick warm up after the fish steaks were done. There is something wonderfully special about the taste of fish that is fresh out of the water, cooked within a few hours after it has been caught, and the biscuit look-a-likes brought me back to Canada. On one of my trips with *Morbror Micke* we went to New Brunswick to the Miramichi River in the middle of the summer. After a one-hour drive along

a dirt road with canoes and provisions for a week, *Morbror Micke*, two of his closest friends, both doctors at the Harvard Medical School hospital, and I arrived at a landing where we met our guides. Two hours or so downriver we came to Moose Call Camp. One of the guides was named Herb. He was short of frame, but he had arms the size of a twenty-pound fresh run salmon. He was the head guide and my guide for the week. Every lunch and every evening Herb made buttermilk biscuits. At least once a day we had fresh salmon, cut into steaks and boiled. Herb said it was poached. I don't know if it was because we were always ready for a robust meal or because Herb's biscuits truly had an extraordinary taste, but I remember those biscuits and the 'poached' salmon as among the best meals I have ever eaten.

"Is there a name for the *polenta* biscuits?"

"*Polenta fritta*," laughed Sandy.

"*Gnocchi*," countered Raffaella. "That means 'dumplings' in Italian."

Sandy placed a fish steak and two *gnocchi* on each plate. The strong aroma of the butter-fried trout filled all of my senses with happiness. We sat around the camp table and using our own personal techniques, removed the flesh from the skin and the bones. Raffaella poured glasses of water from a large bottle that had the house label on it. We were silent for what seemed like a long while as we savoured the fish and the leftover polenta biscuits. This is a meal I will remember for a long time, I thought. We all had a second helping.

"The pool where you fished this morning is where Raffi caught her first big fish. You've seen that fish too. It's on the wall in the dining room."

I looked at Raffaella. She had a very wide smile on her face. "It was the first time *Zio* took me here to fish. I was ten years old. We came here late in the afternoon when I had done my chores helping the guests who were

staying with us over the weekend. *Zio* and *Zia* Francesca had recommended our farm to some of their American friends and they were all staying with us. It was the middle of the summer and the water was much lower than it is now. The ledge where the grayling were lined up this morning was completely exposed.”

Sandy added some details. “When the water is lower, the large trout look for the deepest holes and usually stay down on the bottom until the sun sets. We got here at just the right time to settle into the best spot as the light began to fade.”

“*Zio* tied on a Muddler Minnow and then a wet fly on a dropper,” continued Raffaella. “As the light faded we waited until we heard some large splashes in the middle of the pool. That was when we knew that Bruno was out hunting.”

“Had you caught Bruno before, Sandy?”

“A few times, but he was destined for better things,” Sandy replied with a nod toward Raffaella.

“*Zio* had taught me to keep a tight grip on the rod with both hands when I was fishing with a streamer, and this time it was especially important. Bruno took the fly with such force that I almost fell into the pool. But he had hooked himself very well, the leader was strong and I was determined not to lose him. It was almost completely dark when he finally came to the net. I still remember every second from the time I made my cast until *Zio* hit him with his priest. We weighed him and he was three-and-a-half kilos. *Zio* said, ‘He has had a good life. It’s time for him to make room in the pool for the younger fish.’ We brought him home and the next day *Zio* took him to the local taxidermist. He has been watching over the dining room ever since.”

After lunch, I took care of cleaning the pan and plates while Sandy and Raffaella repacked the Defender. We fished the rest of the afternoon, until around four, Raffaella moving down to the camp pool, Sandy fishing the deep hole that I had left untouched, and I taking over Raffaella's morning spot. I could feel that I was getting better at Czech nymphing. I was getting either bumps or takes on every third cast. My casting arm was definitely tired when I walked back to the parking area. Sandy and Raffaella had already taken down their rods and gotten out of their waders. Sandy was smoking his pipe, sitting on one of the camp stools. When I was ready we climbed into the Defender and Raffaella drove us to the skiing resort town of Cortina d'Ampezzo. This was a special place for me. Ingemar Stenmark won the Giant Slalom here on the day I was born, 11 March 1980.

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The hotel owner greeted us as we entered the lobby of the small hotel in the middle of the village. I was not surprised to learn that he and Sandy had been friends for many years, and actually attended university together. Giorgio had been a lawyer until he retired and had realized his lifelong dream by buying a hotel and running one of the region's best restaurants. I was surprised, however, to see Raffaella's parents sitting in the hotel lounge when we walked in.

"We decided to keep Alessandro company after you two youngsters go back to the river to catch Bruno's grandson," said Michele to my surprised look. When was the last time I was referred to as a 'youngster'? These lifelong friends had raised their children together. Raffaella was still their little girl, and since I was much closer to her age than theirs, I was just a little boy. I smiled inside and out.

"My night fishing days have been getting fewer, Nicklas, and Raffaella's night vision is much better than my own."

“Maybe we should leave Bruno Junior for another time or another fisherman,” I said with a laugh.

“No,” countered Raffaella, “I talked to him this afternoon and he is expecting to meet you *homine ad hominem* after dusk.”

“Huh?”

“Man to man,” offered Sandy.

After washing up, we joined Michele and Gabriella in the lounge. Sandy moved behind the bar, took down the Bombay Gin and Noilly Prat extra dry vermouth from the bar shelf and whipped up his favourite libation for himself, Michele and Giorgio. He poured a Cinzano over ice for Gabriella. I had a beer and Raffaella ordered a large tomato juice. A waiter brought in plates of pasta. On each plate were a half-dozen ravioli.

“It’s *casunzei*, our special ravioli,” said Giorgio. “There are *rossi* and *verdi*. The *casunzei rossi* are filled with a mixture of red beets, potatoes and turnip. They are sprinkled with poppy seeds. The *casunzei verdi* have a filling of spinach and wild onions and are topped with butter and *parmigiano*.”

I finished my plate, definitely a bit too quickly. “These are terrific!” I said as an excuse. Another plate appeared, this time with a dozen little packets. I took it more slowly this time. Redbeets and Italy? I had never put those two ingredients together on a plate. I grew up eating redbeets. When we visited *mormor* and *morfar* on their farm, we ate fresh *rödbetor* every day. I peed red the whole time we were there and for several days after we left.

Raffaella and I climbed into the Defender for the drive to the river. When we had left Cortina d’Ampezzo behind us and were on the winding

road back down to the Piave valley, Raffaella asked, “Does your friend Sofi fish?”

“No. She used to when she was young. When we were growing up, fishing was part of summer for both boys and girls. Water was always close by, either the sea or a lake. Fathers took their children out in boats and put worms or live bait on the hooks of their spinning or casting rods. Eventually, a mackerel or cod in the sea, or a perch or even a pike in a lake, took the bait and would be hauled out of the water to feed the family or the family’s cat. Few girls continued with this form of family entertainment past the age of eight, and most boys gave it up before they reached their teens.”

“Did you ever ask her to go fishing with you?”

I thought for a few seconds. “Yes, once. It was just after we met. I took her to a put-and-take lake where I knew we would catch fish. I tried to show her how to cast. Finally she managed to get the line out a few meters and a large rainbow came up and took the fly. He pulled the rod right out of her hands and I had to jump in after it. I landed the fish; we took it home and ate it for dinner. That was the last time she fished.”

“I was lucky. When *Zio* first took me fishing, Jacopo was there, and that was the main reason that I wanted to go along. Gradually, Jacopo decided he would rather do other things, like sit and draw, and I started to gain interest in fishing for the sport of it. *Zio* gave me books showing women fishing and the interest kept growing. But I have to admit that I enjoy fishing most when I am with *Zio* Alessandro because he is so wonderful to watch and listen to. He sees things in and on and near the water that he has helped me to see, and this knowledge has helped me to become a better fisher. I do not know how I will continue when he is gone.”

“Is he sick? This was a question I had asked myself but did not feel it was one I could ask Sandy or his friends, until Raffaella gave me the opening.

“He is not sick in the sense that he is in pain or in bad health, except for his arthritis, but I think he will not stay with us for very much longer. It is not something he would tell you; he does not think of it himself. Every day for him is a gift and he accepts it willingly. He does not question if there will be another one tomorrow. But he has been very lonely since *Zia* Francesca died, and there is no way to comfort him. Believe me, we have tried. This trip is his way of passing the days, but it will one day end.”

I thought about what Raffaella had just told me. Was she saying that Sandy would take his own life when he felt he had finished his time on earth? We rode in silence for a long while.

“How did Francesca die?” I asked hesitatingly. Raffaella had not yet offered this information, and neither had Sandy. It seemed like it was a subject that should not be brought up, but if I was going to spend as much time with Sandy as it looked like I might, I needed to know.

“It was one year ago. *Zia* Francesca suffered a stroke when she was hunting with her two brothers. They rushed her to the closest hospital, but she went into a coma from which she never awoke. *Zio* was fishing, and he had left his mobile in the car. It was a few hours after they called him that he received the message. When he arrived at the hospital *Zia* was still alive, but she could not open her eyes or speak. *Zio* was by her side until she died one week later. *Zia*’s oldest brother and her father and mother had already passed away when *Zia* died, and the two remaining brothers died of heart attacks since then. *Zia*’s sisters-in-law are all widows now. *Zio* has to fill a role that he was never very comfortable with, being the patriarch in the family.”

We drove without speaking for awhile, then I asked, “Do you have any other fishing partners besides Sandy?”

“I could tell a few stories like yours with Sofi. I’ve taken a trip the past two summers to Iceland with a group of women fly fishing guides from

Denmark. We spend three days on a salmon river and three days on a sea run trout river. I enjoy their company when we are fishing. We stay in touch during the year, mostly to talk about our latest excursion. Otherwise, I fish alone.”

As she parked the Defender, there was still enough light left for us to pull on our waders, tie up our wading boots, rig up our rods and tie on our flies. The sun, which appeared out of the grey sky when we were leaving the river in the afternoon, was resting on the low hills to the west. The spot we would fish had been decided earlier in the day. It was Bruno Junior’s or Bruno III’s lair. We walked to within twenty meters of the water’s edge, far enough away so that our shadows from the last rays of the setting sun did not cast themselves over the pool. We watched the surface, silently, for several minutes. Raffaella broke the silence.

“He’s waiting for you. When the sun sets, we’ll walk in together and then wait until it is dark before making the first cast.”

Chapter Four

Undecided

The morning after my first night-fishing experience I sat at the kitchen table with Sandy and Raffaella eating a hard boiled egg that I had peeled, sliced and carefully placed on a piece of Helena's freshly baked rye bread on which I had squeezed out a generous helping of *Kalle's Caviar*. On my plate were a large wedge of aged *Asiago* cheese, *Asiago Stravecchio*, and a few large links of air-cured sausage that Helena had heated through in a frying pan. The *Asiago Stravecchio* is aged for more than eighteen months, has a hard texture with a taste that is similar to *Parmigiano Reggiano*. I had tried the fresh *Asiago*, called *Asiago Mezzano*, which is aged for three to eight months, and the *Asiago Vecchio*, which is nine to eighteen months in the aging. I decided that I preferred the oldest variety.

"He was even bigger than Bruno, *Zio!*" gushed Raffaella. "He was at least four kilo and jumped a dozen times before we landed him."

"I don't ever remember hooking and landing a larger brown trout," I added. "It felt like one of the sea run trout we catch in the Baltic, or a small salmon."

"You don't have any proof of this story, do you? You didn't take any photos with your specially equipped night vision camera, I suppose?"

Raffaella and I had discussed this and agreed that we would wait until just the right moment to show the photo she took with the camera Sandy was referring to. She had sent it to her iPad which was sitting on the table. She pressed the activate button and the image appeared. I looked at Sandy's expression. It was priceless. He was awestruck. "That would have been

worth giving up my dry martini and the terrific meal we enjoyed last evening,” declared Sandy after he had recovered his breath.

The evening before, after looking through Raffaella’s selection of flies and discussing the pros and cons of each of the patterns and sizes, we narrowed the choice down to a Muddler Minnow and a Black Marabou streamer. “Black works best at night, so I suggest using the Marabou,” Raffaella had said. “Put on a strong leader, at least 2X. Bruno’s offspring will not be leader shy.” I asked her if she thought I should add a dropper, just to sweeten the offer. “No, the simpler the better.”

We had waded in together. I held the wading staff and Raffaella had a firm grip on the belt around my waist, in the middle of my back. It wasn’t fast water, but it was steady. The bottom was a combination of coarse sand, pebbles and larger, round stones. When we got to a point where the water was just above my knees, I stopped and braced my right boot against one of the stones. We didn’t talk. We had agreed on that before we entered the water. We stood there as the last light faded. It was dark. I had never wanted to experience this sensation of standing in fast running water and not being able to see a thing. It was only the thought that I was not alone, that Raffaella was behind me holding me firmly in her grasp that kept me from panicking. Gradually, I began to be able to distinguish forms, separating the sky from the tree line, then the water surface from the shoreline. It was as if someone had turned on an infrared night vision system, like the ones in my video games.

The first splash was less than ten meters away, directly across the river from where we stood. My pulse quickened. A minute later the second and larger splash sounded below the first. *He’s hunting*, I thought. The signal for the first cast was Raffaella releasing her hand from my belt. I had twenty yards of line in my hand. I cast the entire length directly upstream so that

the fly would drift down over the area where the fish was positioned. I kept the rod tip high to keep as much line as possible off the water and minimize drag on the fly. When my rod tip was pointing directly across the river I pulled out a few more arm lengths of line to lengthen the dead drift, mending the line by flipping the rod tip forward. The fly had reached its final drift point and I let it begin to move across stream when the line began screaming out of the reel. The fish must have hit the fly from upstream because there was no tug and short hesitation when it realizes it has made one of life's major mistakes and tries to correct it by giving back the fly.

"Yooohooo!!!" shouted Raffaella. "He's got you." He had me all right. There was nothing I could do but hold on and hope he got tired before he broke the leader or line or pulled the rod out of my hands. My heart pounded and then stopped each time he broke through the water's surface and fell back with a huge splash. He was too far downstream to see his aerial acrobatics, but his air time was in the league with a basketball star competing in a dunking contest. I could feel that he had taken out all the line and was into the backing when suddenly there was a pause. I began reeling in as fast as I could. I didn't feel any resistance. Was he gone? I had gotten all of the backing on the reel before I felt a pull. He was still on. I stopped reeling. He took another run downstream. Another jump. Pause. Reel. Pull. Stop. Run. Pause. Reel. Stop.

"Walk slowly back toward me," I heard Raffaella say. "We'll get him closer to shore where I can net him."

I did as she said, shuffling my feet, using the pressure from Bruno III to keep my balance. He was tiring, but so was I. My left hand ached from holding the rod in position and my right hand had a few bruised knuckles from the sudden spinning of the handle. Was the net big enough for this fish, I wondered. Then I remembered that Raffaella looked comical with a

double-sized trout net hanging on her back. I could see her now, a silhouette against the water. She was watching my leader, which was now out of the water. My rod was doubled over and I strained to get the rod tip higher in order to move the fish closer to the net. There were a few more short runs before he finally gave in. He was netted, photographed and released in a matter of seconds. Raffaella turned on her head lamp while she held him in the current to make sure he was not injured or too weak to swim. I saw him. He was the most beautiful trout I had ever seen. Then he was gone.

“He was bigger than Bruno, *Zio*. He fought longer and harder, but Nicola was his match.”

I had never been hugged by a guide before. I certainly had never been kissed by one either. But after our fish was safely on his way, I received both from Raffaella. “That is for being such a good fly fisher. Now you will be able to fish at night as well.” That’s all she said. We returned to the car and drove back to the farm and all we talked about were the events of the evening and how we would delight Sandy with the story the next morning. When we arrived back at the house the Saab was alone. They had stayed over at the inn. Elena greeted us as we came into the kitchen. She spoke to Raffaella, smiled at me and said *buonanotte*.

Elena had prepared a light meal for us, Raffaella explained. It was on the kitchen *fogher*. Elena grew up in the adjoining province, Trentino-Alto Adige, and she had made her specialties. She hoped that I would enjoy them. There was a dish with little dough balls covered with butter and grated cheese, a bowl of what looked like sauerkraut, our *surkâl*, and a metal plate laden with two different types of sausages. A carafe filled with red wine was on the table adjoining the *fogher*.

“The pasta is called *strangolapreti*, which literally translated means ‘priest chokers. No one knows why they are called that; they just are. They

are made with potato, egg, flour and spinach, the Trentino version of *gnocchi*. What looks like sauerkraut is sauerkraut, just like what they eat in Germany. It's called *crauti*. There is a simple pork sausage called *hauswurst*, and a spicy sausage made from beef and pork combined with pig's blood, walnuts, pine nuts and chestnuts and flavoured with nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves and fennel. It is called *biroldi* and it's always eaten with *crauti*. The wine is from the *Marzemino* grape."

"I guess the difference between a light meal and a regular meal in Italy is the number of courses." Raffaella smiled as she placed a green dumpling into her mouth. She filled our glasses with wine and gave a toast to Bruno the Third: "He must have been the grandson of Bruno."

"This was the most enjoyable day of fishing I have ever experienced," Raffaella said suddenly.

"Same for me. I hope we can do it again sometime."

"I hope so too."

I never know what to say when I should say something, and this time was no exception. I nodded. We continued eating. When we had finished the wine, Raffaella said that I should leave her so that she could clean up before heading to bed. She said that she would be driving down to Venice after breakfast and that she would see us off. I found my room, got into bed and closed my eyes. Images of the trout, Raffaella and Sofi rotated in fast succession. And then it was morning.

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After breakfast, we packed up Sandy's Saab. Elena and Anna brought out a basket with some provisions for our journey to Gubbio. Michele, Gabriella and Raffaella were gathered around the car. Gabriella said that she had put the recipe for *Anguilla Marinata* in the basket, and, yes, it was in

English. I asked the six of them to pose for a photo that I took with my BlackBerry. Then I received hugs and kisses on both cheeks from Gabriella, Raffaella, Elena, Anna and Michele. “We hope you will come back to visit us again, Nicklas,” said Michele. I thanked them for their hospitality and their generosity. I have never been any good at saying good-bye. There is an art to it that I never learned. As I opened the door to the Saab, Raffaella came to me and placed a small package in my hand and quickly stepped back, smiling. “*Arrivederci!*” she said with a large smile. “*Arrivederci,*” I replied, and then laughed, pleased with myself for pronouncing the word almost correctly. Then we drove away with Sandy at the wheel.

“She is a beautiful woman and a great fly fisher.”

“You were like two small children, playing, having fun. Michele, Gabriella, Elena and I felt it, and it was wonderful to watch. Raffaella has not been so obviously happy in many years. You made five good friends, including little Anna, during these past two days.”

“I enjoyed Raffaella’s company, Sandy. I enjoyed everyone’s company. Thank you for sharing your good friends and your goddaughter with me. I hope I will be able to see them all again.”

“You could stay here, marry Raffaella, run the farm and be a fishing guide. That’s my idea. Michele and Gabriella like you very much as well. They told me so.”

Once again, I couldn’t think of any response to what I had just heard. Had Raffaella’s parents really decided that I was the perfect match for their daughter in just two days! I tried to imagine myself as a farmer and fishing guide. No, it didn’t connect with any loose strings dangling in my brain. But I could not deny, even to myself, that I liked Raffaella. In the image shifting that went on the night before as I drifted to sleep, Raffaella was there as much as Sofi. We rode along for quite some time in silence. I

couldn't imagine what Sandy was thinking. My work area at Saab suddenly popped into my mind. What was happening back there? I could phone Lasse. No, it's a little more than a week since I was there and there wouldn't be much to hear. I hope the rest of the team was doing something they enjoyed.

"What was it like to work at Saab?" asked Sandy, as if he had been reading my mind. "I have wondered many times how a company that was making great cars like this one could start making only lemons."

"Do you mean the 9000?" He nodded affirmatively. "It was long before I arrived. I've heard many stories from the old timers, and of course I have read many newspaper articles by the business journalists, but I'm not very good at understanding the business side and even worse at speculating. When I started at Saab I thought I was joining a hockey team. I don't mean that literally, but I thought my group would cooperate like a team. If we worked hard and kept improving our skills, I thought, we would eventually make it to the top. Saab would be the best. But the company kept losing money. Car sales peaked in 2006, but then they started to collapse. Something didn't match up."

"I guess General Motors also thought Saab was a hockey team, so when it wasn't winning, they fired the coach," laughed Sandy.

"I couldn't keep track of the management changes that have been made at the company since I arrived in 1993. We finally got a Swede as the CEO, but he wasn't going to be able to do much unless we found an owner with very deep pockets. Our CEO is now gone."

"It looks like it will be up to the Chinese because the Americans are all bankrupt and the Germans don't need what Saab might offer."

“It’s strange, that a company like Saab could have lasted as long as we did and never make consistent profits, and that we could produce a car as good as the 900 Turbo but never manage to sell enough of them to make a difference. What were the people who were running the company and who owned the majority of shares in the company thinking? What was it that they all knew that we employees didn’t know?”

“It was a sideline, a hobby. I read about it in a book I received from the company that owned Saab, Saab-Scania. It was 1987 and the book was a gift celebrating Saab-Scania’s fiftieth anniversary. I received it because I bought this car we are riding in. Saab-Scania’s main business was building airplanes and then trucks. In 1947, Marcus Wallenberg, who was CEO of the company—you know who he is, yes?—he gave a team the go-ahead to build a car. It was a design marvel, and it was a winner on the rally racing circuit, but it was less than a commercial success. With its two cycle engine that ran on oil and petrol, it was a real stink pot.”

“My mother’s father had one. It seemed more like a toy car than a real one. He used to let me drive it when we visited, sitting in his lap. We would ride up and down the driveway. He enjoyed it most when *mamma* would pretend to be angry with us. He told me he had done the same with her when she was young.”

“Well, it had some enthusiastic fans like your grandfather, but eventually they had to get serious or get out of the business. The 900 was a hit in Saab’s most important market, the US. That was enough to convince Marcus Wallenberg’s son and the other board members who took over after his death to sell one-half of Saab cars to GM in 1989. GM put in \$600 million, and that gave them the option to acquire the rest of the company within ten years, which they exercised, and made Saab Automobile a wholly-owned division in 2000. They spent another \$125 million integrating the company.”

I knew the story of how GM took over Saab. It was still fresh when I arrived four years later. I was involved in the new 900 project which was built on the same platform as the Opel Vectra. It was a success until people understood that it did not have the same quality as a 'real' Saab. Then came the 9-5 and then the 9-3, the renamed version of the 900. We gave up the hatchback models in favour of regular sedans and station wagons. We even started re-badging other GM models with the Saab brand. The Subaru Impreza became a Saab 9-2, and the Chevy Trailblazer was the 9-7. We wondered if the GM management would pay as much to see an Elvis impersonator as they would to see the real thing. These two cars were major disasters. The biggest mistake was not allowing us to build an all-wheel-drive car to compete with the likes of Subaru. And then they were going to move production from Trollhättan to Opel's factory in Rüsselsheim.

"Nicklas," said Sandy, interrupting my musings, "I don't believe you are made for working in companies like Saab or Volvo or any large company. You should find a place where you can succeed or fail on your own terms. You just explained something to me that I guess I always knew but had never found the words to express. Working in an architecture or engineering firm is like being a member of sports team. The best offices have a good player-coach, who is the principal of the firm, and the offices that win the best commissions are the ones with the best combination of businessmen, designers, technical experts and draftsmen. Even the world's greatest hockey player, like your Peter Forsberg, cannot win games on his own. He needs other good players."

"I'm not so sure I like the competition part. When I played sports I enjoyed the practice sessions more than the actual games. I didn't really care very much if we won or lost."

He didn't react to that last statement. Maybe he was trying to figure out what actually made my bells ring. We were passing a sign with VENEZIA, PADOVA and VICENZA on it.

"Could you remind me again where we are headed. It's where Sofi sent the coffee, right?"

"Correct. After a stop in Bologna, where we will exchange cars from the Saab to the '73 1800ES Volvo, we are going to Gubbio, which is a city in the Region of Umbria. It's the first region we are visiting that has only one name. It has two provinces, Perugia and Terni. Gubbio is in Perugia. Perugia is also the name of the capital of the Province. We'll fish in the *Province di Terni*, in the river Nera. We'll drive around Venezia through Padova on our way to our first stop in Bologna. Then we'll drive southeast toward Rimini and along the coast to Fano where we'll turn onto one of the oldest roads on the peninsula, the *via Flaminia*, an ancient Roman road."

"*Gubbio* is a funny name in Swedish," I said with a laugh. "It's close to *gubbe*, which means 'geezer', or an 'old man'."

"*Gubbio* is a 'geezer' of a city, all right," quipped Sandy. "Its Roman name was *Eugubium*, and in pre-Roman times it was *Ikuvium* in Umbrian. Its inhabitants are still called *Eugubini* and not *Gubbiesi* or *Gubbiani* as it should be in plain Italian. But I'll save the history for when we are there. We have a lot to see in the meantime."

We were driving on the A27, passing through Conegliano. A sign read TREVISO 40; VENEZIA 63; PADOVA 92.

"We'll stop for lunch in Padova," said Sandy, perfectly guessing what I had been thinking. "It will be another one hundred kilometres to Bologna. If you don't mind waiting an extra day for your coffee package, we could

spend the night in Bologna and you could experience Italy's richest cuisine from the region of Emilia-Romagna."

"Another one of the multi-name regions."

"The third and last, at least for the time being. It is made up of the former regions that were merged, against their will, following the formation of Italy in 1860, what is called the *Risorgimento* or 'resurgence'. *Emilia* is named after the Roman consul, Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, who was responsible for the building of the *via Æmilia* that connected Roma to the northern provinces. *Romagna* comes from the Latin name *Romània*, which originally meant 'land inhabited by Romans'. Later it became the name of the territory ruled by the Eastern Roman Empire, called the Exarchate of Ravenna, which distinguished it from the rest of Northern Italy which was under the control of the *Longobardi*."

I tried to process all of the information Sandy had just passed over to me. I gave up. I moved to a more mundane subject. Now was my chance to find out what the connection is between the City of Bologna and the American sandwich meat with the same spelling but with a different pronunciation. "Do you know why Americans call *Bologna* 'baloney'? When I was in America fishing with *Morbror Micke*, the guides always packed a snack which they ate at our coffee break on the river bank. They were 'baloney' sandwiches. It looked like our *falukorv* in Sweden. I asked to see what a baloney looked like. The casing had the words 'Hormel Bologna' printed on it, but they pronounced it like it was spelled 'baloney'."

Sandy laughed out loud. "You will see why as soon as we enter the city, but it has to do with the city's speciality, *mortadella*. America's baloney was maybe inspired by Bologna's *mortadella*, but they have little in common other than the general shape. *Mortadella* is made from finely minced, high quality pork. Inside the mix are spread cubes of fat, shelled

pistachio nuts and black pepper grains. The mix is stuffed into casings and then baked in brick ovens. When it is cut into thin slices, the white squares of fat, green pistachios and small grains of pepper, all floating in the pinkish meat are a work of edible art. Baloney is made from scraps of pork, chicken, turkey or beef, it does not have the distinctive pieces of fat, nuts and pepper floating in the slices, and it comes nowhere near to *mortadella* in tastefulness. But maybe I am a little biased. By the way, there are places in Italy where they call *mortadella* ‘bologna’, such as in Milano.”

“I guess I’m in for another taste test. I don’t suppose Italian Boy Scouts take mortadella on their outings and fry it up for breakfast?”

“I will not honour that question with a response, Nicklas.”

We drove for another two hours before we reached Padova. It was noon. We left the *Autostrada della Serenissima*, the E70, and drove along *Viale delle Grazie* and then *Via Venezia*. The road name changed many times until we were on *Corso Milano* and in the middle of the city. We turned left and I caught a glimpse of a very large structure that looked like a church.

“It’s the Basilica of Saint Anthony of Padova, the patron saint of the city.”

“It looks big. Is it old? It looks like several churches combined together.”

“It is big and it is old. It was finished in 1301. An older church where St. Anthony was buried, *Santa Maria Mater Domini*, was on the same site and it was built into the Basilica. I’ve always believed that the design of the Basilica was very much influenced by the idea that the smaller church would become part of the big one so they made it look like the Basilica was an assembly of smaller ones. There is a great deal of symbolism in the design.”

“When I think about the big, blue and yellow IKEA stores and the yellow and black Lidl’s popping up around Göteborg, I don’t get the sense that the

architects of those buildings—if there are architects—think much about symbolism or fitting in with the surroundings or anything other than keeping the rain out and the customers in.”

“Oh yes, there are indeed architects behind those buildings, and there absolutely is symbolism. Instead of inspiring awe in the divine the buildings suggest frugality. What you will find inside these plain walls are functional and inexpensive goods that will serve your needs and not empty your pocketbook. Your Ingvar Kamprad is a genius of marketing as well as of product design. I am sure that if he put his mind to it he would have been able to come up with a more pleasant model for his buildings than a three dimensional replica of a Swedish flag sitting in the middle of a huge parking lot, but from a functional standpoint it works brilliantly. It is, however, becoming dated as more young people set up permanent residence in cities, not in the suburbs, and few of them take their driver’s license than in the past. IKEA and many of its ilk will have to rethink their models before the paradigm shifts.”

Once again I found myself hearing something that I had not heard before or had even thought about. Italy looks different from Sweden. Italians are different from Swedes. Facts. Nothing to discuss; nothing to try to understand. Sandy, and probably many more people like him all over the world, had ideas about why there are differences, what good bits should be used and what bad bits should be discarded.

“Do you think being an architect makes you a better fisherman?”

“I don’t know, but I think that being a fly fisherman made me a more thoughtful architect. When you look closely at a building like this Basilica that took decades to complete, you see small details that you would never find in a new building today. You see how the stones are joined together with grout that has been carefully smoothed by the mason’s hand. You see

how the walls meet the ground in a gradual way, beginning with a plinth that can double as a bench, and then in a blending of stones at the base. Effective fly fishing is ninety percent watching, nine percent fishing and one percent hooking the fish. The best architecture is ninety percent a lifetime of observation, nine percent designing of the building and one percent construction. What is important in both architecture and fishing is to use the 99% to the best effect for the 1%.”

There was a small restaurant close to the Basilica where Sandy was a well-known guest. It was his watering hole on his trips to and from university in Bologna, he said. I guess it was the same type of reunion every time he stopped here with lots of hugging and kissing. He had told me that his last visit was not that long ago, when he dropped off the Volvo in Bologna, but the elderly couple who were the owners, and their two sons and daughter who worked there, acted like Sandy had emigrated to a foreign country a lifetime ago and had just returned.

“Do you like asparagus? The specialty of Padova is risotto with asparagus, *risotto con asparagi*.”

“I’m acquiring a taste for risotto. I’m finding that it is a lot like our pizzas in Sweden. The base is the same and the toppings are endless.”

“I tried a curry pizza when I was in Stockholm on a visit,” laughed Sandy. “It was terrific! You are correct. We do the same thing with our risottos with good results.”

The risotto was served along with the local ham, *prosciutto crudo dolce de Montagnana*. I offered to drive when the wine began arriving. Whether Sandy did or did not know the other guests who were in the restaurant when we entered or who came later I could not decide, but it became one, large party involving everyone.

We were back on the road and heading for Bologna after two hours with me at the wheel. Sandy was quiet except for delivering orders for where and when to turn. I looked over now and then. His eyes were wide open. He looked content.

“I’m going to miss this car,” I said absently.

“Why don’t you drive it back to Sweden?” Sandy replied without a second’s hesitation. “I’m not going to have much use for it, and there’s no one in the family who has expressed the slightest interest in taking it over.”

Here I was again, just like when Sandy asked me to accompany him on the trip and told me he would cover all of the expenses.

“It would be complicated getting it into Sweden,” I replied, needing time to think of what I really wanted and buying that time with a stalling answer. “Besides, without a job, I could not afford it.”

“I’ll sell you the car for one Euro, give you the papers and you’re good to go, as the English say. What’s so complicated about that?”

“I feel like I am taking advantage of your generosity.”

“My dear wife, God rest her soul, used to gather up the clothes we did not use, clean and press them and deliver them to the Red Cross. She did this once a year. The Red Cross sold them for a fraction of the price we paid for them, but every Lira was free money for them, and the Red Cross used that money for a good cause. Who was taking advantage of whom? What is the difference between a car and a paisley tie if the giver does not feel there is a difference? Would you like to have this car? If you would, it is yours. If not, I’m afraid my cousin Giuliano, whom you will meet this evening, will have to find a way of disposing of it. Think about it.”

Sandy's phone rang. "*Pronto!*" Sandy was well organized and he had placed his mobile phone in a holder and set it on hands-free operation. "*Si, Si. Grazie.*" They talked for a little while and then he hung up.

"Change of plans. That was my good friend Manfredo. He is one of the best fly tiers in Italy, maybe the world. His home water is the *Tevere* in Sansepolcro, Toscana. You probably know the river better as the Tiber. It is the one that flows through Roma. Manfredo has just told me that the fishing is exceptionally good right now because of the unusually warm weather. The water temperature is up at summer levels and the fish are active. So instead of going to Bologna and then Gubbio to fish the *Nera*, I suggest we will first fish the *Tevere*. We'll go back up to Bologna after Gubbio to shift cars. Do you mind? I will call my cousin in Bologna "

"I am in your able hands, Sandy. I have already seen and caught more fish on this little expedition than I could have ever dreamed of catching."

"We will take the slow but scenic route."

I gave a small laugh. "The usual, you mean."

"Yes, the usual. Follow the signs for SP95/*Strada statale Roma* leaving the city and then you will see signs for Chioggia."

Once I had negotiated the small city streets and gotten us onto the main road, my mind drifted back to Sandy's offer to buy his car, and that's all I thought about for the next half hour on the drive between Padova and Chioggia. What was I going to do with a mint condition black 1983 Saab Turbo? I couldn't park it on the street, so I would need a garage. That would be expensive if it didn't come with a house. Owning a house would mean snow shovelling and grass cutting and painting and kitchen renovations and less time for everything else, especially fishing. Then, of course, I would not be able to drive it to Carolina's. She would think I had lost my mind driving

the same model car that our parents died in. Sandy had nodded off. His light snoring roused me from my own daydreaming. We were nearing our waypoint.

“I’ll need the next instruction, Mr. Navigator,” I said in a slightly louder voice than would be normal for conversation. It did the trick and Sandy snapped out of his mild stupor. It took him a few seconds to get his bearings.

“Toward Ravenna. We will take the E55 through Ravenna and to Cesena, where the road turns into the E45. That road takes us to Sansepolcro. There is a lot of history and interesting things to see in both of those cities.”

“Can you give me the abridged version?”

“You mean like the *Reader’s Digest* stories? I could, but I’ll just let you enjoy the drive and allow your own eyes to see what they would like to see.” With that, he resumed his nap.

South of Cesena the terrain became hillier. We passed through Mercato Saraceno, Montecastello and Sarsina and then it began getting mountainous. We drove for another thirty-or-so kilometres. Sandy came back to life as we approached a large lake just after a sign announcing that we had entered Arezzo Province, at least that is what I assumed *Provincia de Arezzo* meant.

“This is *Lago di Montedoglio*, an artificial lake created by the Montedoglio Dam. It was finished in 1993 to provide irrigation and drinking water and to generate hydroelectric power. A portion of it collapsed during heavy rainfall. Luckily, the collapse was contained, not like the one in Vajont. The river is fed from the bottom of the dam and that is the reason why the *Tevere* keeps a constant year-round temperature of between 14 and 18 degrees Celcius. Some years ago a fly fishing club called *Mosca Club Altotevere* set out tens of thousands of Apennine Brown Trout and European

Grayling fry and fingerlings. At the time there were no fish in the river. Whatever had been there were wiped out a few years before by cutting off the water supply in order to irrigate the surrounding fields. Today, it is one of the best fly fishing rivers in Italy, perhaps in the world. It is easy to wade because it has a small pebble bottom. It flows through limestone, so it is rich in vegetation like the famous streams in England and eastern America. The upper part, where we will fish, is fly-fishing only and catch-and-release. It is also mostly dry fly fishing with a chance to catch a cousin to Bruno.”

“It sounds like El Dorado,” I said when Sandy had finished.

“It can be. It can also be worse than Dante’s *Inferno* if the fish are not moving. With a little luck we will experience *bello il cielo*, beautiful heaven.”

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It was late in the afternoon when we arrived in Sansepolcro. The town is small, surrounded by farmland. Sandy said that is best known as the birthplace of a famous painter named Piero della Francesca who lived in the 15th century. I drove off the E45 to the left and through the town, following Sandy’s instructions. It turned out to be a detour since the *Podere Violino*, where we would stay, was south of the highway. I took the same road back and then under the E45 toward *Alto Tevere*, passing over the river. Signs led me along the final few kilometres. It looked like a large farmhouse surrounded by fields, pastures and paddocks for horses. There were cattle grazing. I parked the Saab and we walked through the large, wooden door and into the reception area. A fireplace filled one wall. It was too warm for a fire at this time of day, but I could imagine that it would be welcome in the cool, spring evenings. A matronly woman stood behind the reception desk and a stocky man with large, muscular arms stood in front, talking with her.

“Buonasera, *Manfredo*.”

The woman looked up and the man turned around.

“*Buonasera, Professore Carlotti!*” exclaimed the man. “*Benvenuti*. This is your Swedish fishing partner, I guess.”

“Hello. I am Nicklas Laurentzson.”

“*Piacere*. I am Manfredo Ravello. This is Anna. She will check you in and show you to your rooms. I will wait for you down here. It is good to see you again, *Professore*.”

“It is no use telling him to call me Alessandro,” Sandy said, shaking his head and smiling. “He says when I stop wearing a tie when I fish he will call me *Signor Carlotti*.”

We agreed to meet again in half an hour. Anna led us to our rooms. Sandy had a room on the ground floor. I was on the top floor, two flights up. It was a very rustic building with beamed ceilings. Everything looked freshly renovated, but the building was clearly very old. I was given a large corner room with the ceiling sloping in two directions. It was 5.30 p.m. Sofi might be working late or she would already be home. I pushed the dial button since hers was the last number I called. She answered after the first ring.

“*Hej, Sofi*.”

“*Hej, Nicklas*. Where are you now?”

“I’m in the countryside close to a small town in the middle of Italy, south of Florence. It’s an inn called *Podere Violino*. We drove the whole way down from where we fished the last two days. We were supposed to stay overnight in Bologna with Sandy’s cousin, but Sandy got a call from a friend who told him that the best place to fish right now was here. The river is the same one that flows through Rome.”

“The Tiber?”

“Yes, that’s the one, but they call it something different in Italian. We will fish just below a large dam with another name I can’t pronounce. Any news on Saab?”

“Nothing good. Viktor and the government are arguing about who should pay the salaries of the employees. A few Chinese companies have been named as possible buyers, but General Motors has said they wouldn’t allow Saab technology to land in the hands of the Chinese.”

“Sandy asked me if I wanted to buy his Saab, the one we are driving, for one Euro and use it to get back home.”

“Are you sure you are ready to make such a big commitment?” she teased.

“I haven’t given him my answer yet, but how could I pass up such a chance. The car is in mint condition. Why don’t you fly down and we could drive it around together for a while and then take it home?”

There was silence for a few seconds on the other end of the line.

“Just kidding,” I said, although I wasn’t.

“Were you? Really?”

“No,” I replied quickly, “but I shouldn’t say things like that because it makes you feel like you have to explain why it wouldn’t be a good idea.”

“It would be a good idea if it meant that we would be together again, Nicklas. It’s just that I don’t believe that will ever happen.”

I didn’t know what to say, as usual. We were silent for what seemed like a long time, and then I said I would be home soon and we could talk about it. We hung up after our usual good-byes. I sat for a few moments and thought about Sofi and me driving through the Italian countryside in the black 1983

Saab Turbo. I smiled, but it was for the good times we had together in the past.

Manfredo and Sandy were sitting in the lounge when I came downstairs. I was late by a half-hour. Both of them had a martini glass in their right hands, and the glasses were half empty. There was a third man with them. A tall glass with a red liquid was on the table beside his chair. He rose when I arrived.

“This is either a celebration of the good fishing that is to come, or it is a celebration of past fish caught, but whatever it is, it looks like you are enjoying the moment.”

“*Carpe diem!*” exclaimed Manfredo. “You never know what the fishing will be tomorrow, so if you can, fish today.”

“Easy for him to say,” laughed Sandy. “He lives on the best stretch of fly fishing river in the country. On the other hand, if it hadn’t been for his club, there would be no fish to fish. This is my good friend Stefano Palmieri. He will be joining us this evening for dinner and tomorrow for fishing. Manfredo was busy yesterday gathering the troops. I did not know that Stefano would be here, but I am delighted that he is. We have been fishing here together for the past five years.”

“I am pleased to meet you,” I said, offering my hand. “I am Nicklas Laurentzson.”

“We never thought it would be as good as it has become,” interjected Manfredo. “It is the fertility of the land that has made the river such a wonderful place for the fish to grow. The vegetation attracts the insects; the insects feed the fish; the fish get big; and then they take our flies. We put them back; they grow bigger; and they take our flies again. This is what we call a ‘virtuous circle’. Usually, fishing on the upper *Tevere* at this time of

year is very slow. The water temperature is still under the ideal level to get the fish to move. But this year has been unusually warm. The temperature has risen a few degrees above normal, and the fish are hungry after a long period of conserving their energy. I am sure that we will catch fish tomorrow.”

“Speaking of hungry, it’s been a long time since that risotto we had for lunch. Here is something to hold you over before we start dinner, *Crostini di fegato*. The spread on the bread is made with chicken livers, butter, capers, anchovies, onion and broth. Would you like something to drink?”

“Do you have a local beer in Tuscany, Manfredo?”

“It’s an open secret. In the past ten years beer making has exploded in Toscana. I’m a beer lover myself, and what has been happening is like a dream come true. We’ve had *Peroni*, our equivalent to America’s Budweiser. The beers that we are brewing now in the region are full-bodied and full of taste. It’s happening all over Italy. I’ll get you one of my favourites, *Amiata Bastarda Rossa*, brewed from chestnuts.”

“Stefano is an investment advisor,” said Sandy when Manfredo had left to get me a beer. “His family originally came from Napoli but now he is based in Roma.”

“Alessandro tells me that you work in the car industry, for Saab. My company has investments in technology start-ups, including one that sells hardware and services for use in cars. It involves a special way of paying for car insurance. The company is called Circa Mundi S.p.A. It is located in Bologna. Have you heard of it?”

“Sure. I did an evaluation of the company and its product for General Motors and Opel. Circa Mundi proposed that GM and its subsidiaries in Europe offer the service to their customers. I figured that there was no way

for either GM or Circa Mundi to make any money on the hardware and service unless Circa charged a very high price for the hardware in order to give the dealer an adequate margin and have something left over for the national sales company and headquarters, and unless a large amount was charged for services during a minimum of three years. Since neither one of these was a sure thing, GM said no to Circa.”

“So I now meet the person who squashed the egg that the golden goose had laid,” replied Stefano with a laugh. “You were totally right. I have been trying to get the company to change its business concept, but they point to all the customers they have and say they must be doing something right. That something does not include making a profit. Why don’t you come and work for us and lead us toward companies that are right for the car market.”

Just then Manfredo returned with my beer. “It is very kind of you to make that offer,” I replied to Stefano. “I think I still have a job with Saab, but if it turns out that I don’t, I hope I can come back to you.”

“Sure. Here’s my card. Just give me a call.”

“Have you been talking work while I have been on my beer errand?” scolded Manfredo. “Here Nicklas, taste this and see what you think.”

I took the tall glass and swallowed a mouthful. It did not taste like any beer I had ever had, but it was not at all unpleasant. I also felt that it was higher in alcohol than the beers I was used to drinking.

“Not bad at all. Good, actually.”

“*Salute!*” exclaimed Manfredo. “Good fishing to you all for tomorrow.” He finished his martini in a gulp. “I am sure the flies that *Professore Carlotti* has ordered for you that I tied with my own hands will be highly productive. Now I must be getting back to my family, my dinner and then my fly tying bench.”

When we finished our drinks we went into the restaurant. If I expected that we would be on our own I was mistaken. The restaurant was full. It was a small room seating around thirty guests with a brick barrel vault ceiling and whitewashed walls. There was an outside terrace, but it was still a bit too cool to sit out. Sandy had reserved a table for three near the fireplace at one end of the vault.

“Now I am very hungry,” I said.

“Then we are in the right place,” said Sandy. “This is where you get the best steak in all of Italy, maybe all of Europe. You saw the source when we drove in. They are the Tuscan Chiana Valley breed. The Romans prized them, and their meat is still the most tender and flavourful there is.”

“*Bistecca, fagioli e Chianti*,” said Stefano. “Steak, beans and chianti wine.” “These are the region’s specialties. I suggest we start with *pappardelle con la lepre*, one of my favourites.”

“It is a wide pasta with a sauce made from hare,” explained Sandy. “The base of the ragu is peeled tomatoes, red wine and olive oil. In addition to the hare loin there is the hare’s liver and the heart. Rosemary, thyme, bay leaves, fennel, cloves and pepper are the spices. It is cooked slowly for a few hours. The meat is taken out and broken up into small pieces and then cooked some more.”

“The steak is usually cooked *al sangue*: bloody, very rare,” said Stefano. “Do you eat meat rare, Nicklas? You can of course have it cooked medium or even well done, but it should be eaten rare to enjoy the full taste.”

“I guess I’ll have it rare, then.” What else could I say? Whenever I ate steak, which wasn’t very often, I always asked for it well done. When I was growing up, *mamma* made sure that everything was cooked to death. I just continued the habit.

“The meat is marinated for six hours in a mixture of olive oil, vinegar, parsley, garlic and oregano. You will love it,” assured Sandy. “*Patate al forno, verdure grigliate* and *sformato di stagione* with the steak?”

Meat and potatoes and vegetables that I could recognize—I could not have asked for more. The *sformato* was layers of cheese, a white sauce and vegetables, like a quiche, but without everything being mixed together. It was very tasty. It took a few bites to get used to the consistency of rare steak, but then it was absolutely great. We finished up with a cake made with dark chocolate and chopped almonds.

“It’s *Torta Tenerina con cioccolato fondente e Mandorle tritate*,” explained Sandy. “The secret ingredient here in this restaurant is the addition of chopped almonds. It’s not in the normal recipe.”

We met over breakfast the next morning. I had learned that rising early and getting on the river at first light was not something that was done in Italy. There were hard boiled eggs on the buffet table, but my *Kalle’s Caviar* was finished. I took some corn flakes and yogurt, a slice of bread and cheese and I made my cup of tea with honey. Our guide, Lucca, came in. He was warmly greeted by Sandy and Stefano. It seemed that he had been guiding here as long as they had been fishing. I was introduced to him by Sandy. He seemed to be a man of a few words. We finished our breakfasts, went back to our rooms to put on our fishing clothes and met again around the Saab. It was agreed that Sandy and Lucca would drive down to the river and Stefano and I would walk. It was only a few hundred meters to the river, but we needed to get the gear down there and driving was a lot easier on Sandy’s hips.

“I thought about your offer,” I said casually to Stefano as we passed through the gate to the hotel and onto the road. “I never believed I would

have to move away from the Swedish automobile center on Sweden's west coast in order to find work."

"There was a big ship-building industry in Göteborg at one time. I worked in shipping insurance during one period in my business career in case you wonder why I know this and how I know how to pronounce '*Göteborg*'. Industries, cities and even countries have their time in the sun, and then they are overshadowed by other industries, cities and countries. You may have to move if you want to stay in the same field."

"I don't really feel like I have any special ties to the place except for the work."

"What's your goal with work?"

"I want to see my ideas come to life. We are working on a system that prevents cars from crashing head-on into each other. It's based on my university master's thesis. You don't work for money in Sweden. You come into a company at a grade based on age, education and experience and collective bargaining takes care of the rest."

"What do you do when you aren't working?"

"I fish, mostly, but my work takes most of my time. I also visit with my ex-girlfriend and my sister and her family, in that order."

"My wife and I married when we were both in our mid-thirties. We had both worked hard in our careers. She was an accountant and I was an actuarial in an insurance company. We met at a party given by a mutual friend. Up to the time that we met, I worked and fished. After we met and then married, I fished much less and even worked less. I discovered that I really enjoyed doing things with my wife, Giulietta."

"I guess she doesn't share your love of fishing."

“No, not in the least, but she seems to really enjoy it when I come home from an expedition like this and tell her about the people I met and the nature I saw. We come here to this hotel together on some weekends just for the food and the fresh air, and I show her where I fish.”

“It sounds like you have a good balance in your life,” I said, and I meant it.

“It could always be better, but we do our best to enjoy life’s simple pleasures.”

We had arrived at the parking area. Sandy was already suited and rigged up.

“I’ll take *Signore Carlotti* up to the head of the pool,” said Lucca. “*Signore Palmieri*, you will fish the middle stretch. I think you know where to start. The *Mini Chernobyl*, size 18 should work well here. I will come back and show *Signore Lorenzo* the water. *È chiaro?*”

“*Si*,” answered Stefano.

“*Si*,” I answered, and Lucca smiled. I understood that I would forever be ‘*Signore Lorenzo*’ to Lucca, so there was no point correcting him.

“Do you have a nine foot 3X leader, *Signore Lorenzo?*” Lucca asked me.

I said I did.

“Put it on and tie on a sixty centimetre 4X tippet. Here’s the fly we’re going to use. It’s all ready to go. We are going after the big one.”

It was a sedge pattern, about a size 12.

I watched Stefano walk into the water. The river was fairly wide and extremely clear. Bushes and trees were growing right up to the edge of the water and hanging over it. There was no question about where to fish. The fish were rising to pick up the insects that were falling out of the bushes into

their feeding paths. The fly Lucca had recommended was a simple black, foam-bodied fly with synthetic black upright wings. Its main advantage would be its ability to stay afloat after many attempts to get it under the bushes. Another advantage—and now I understood why our boxes had so many flies—is that there was not a lot of time and money invested in tying them so when we snapped them off in the bushes it would not be a major loss. Stefano waded out far enough to make the casting a bit easier, but not so far as to spook the fish. I was certain he could see the fish he was casting to. He used a side-arm cast to keep the fly low to the water and get it under the bushes.

After a dozen tries with the first fly, he hooked up with a branch and had to break it off. He tied on another tippet and a duplicate of the fly he had been using and went back to the same location. A few more casts and he had hooked his first fish. His rod bent in two. It was a large fish! I looked upstream to see if Lucca was watching. Sandy was standing with Lucca by his side, and Sandy's rod was also bent in half. Stefano's fish was a large brown trout, which he brought in as quickly as his light leader would allow, netted it carefully and released it. Sandy's fish was a grayling that flew out of the water and spread its dorsal fin like a sail on a sleek schooner. Lucca netted and released it after briefly holding it up for us to see.

It was my turn now. Lucca left Sandy and walked down to me. He led me to a spot that looked very similar to the places where both Sandy and Stefano were fishing, but the distance between where I would stand and where the lie was under the overgrowth was another five meters or so. It doesn't sound like much, but it meant that I had to pick up more line on each cast and had to mend quickly to avoid drag. The possibility of getting hung up on a branch was also much greater. I broke off two of the sedges before I finally was able to slip my fly under the bushes with enough slack to let the fly float like a natural. A fish came up and hooked himself. In a flash he

had me into my backing and he was still running. I turned up the drag a notch and was able to slow him down. When he stopped I reeled in as fast as I could. He could be gone in a split second if I didn't keep pressure on the barbless hook and my rod tip as high up as I could get it. He wasn't ready to come to the net and took a few more runs, each one shorter than the last. He was tiring and I felt that it was important to bring him in. Lucca was ready. When finally he was close enough I could see that he was a trophy, although only half the size of Bruno III. I managed to get a photo with my iPhone as Lucca was placing him back in the current. *I'll send it to Sofi, I thought. No, I'll send it to Raffaella. I don't have her phone number or mail address.* Then I thought: *I never opened the package she gave me.*

We fished like this for the rest of the day. There were times when the fish did not take, and then suddenly each of us would have one on. We stopped for lunch around one. Lucca had brought a basket from the kitchen that contained bread, cheese, slices of salami, ham and fruit. There was mineral water and wine. Lucca brought out a camp stove from Sandy's car and made tea. No one was in a hurry. The fish were still there when we returned to the water. We called it a day around six. Stefano and I walked back to the hotel together while Sandy and Lucca retraced their morning journey in the Saab. We talked about the fish we caught and the ones we lost. Stefano said that this was the best day he ever had on the *Tevere*, maybe on any river.

I excused myself from drinks and dinner. I felt like just taking a shower and heading straight to bed. It had been a very satisfying but strenuous day of fishing. Sandy and Stefano would enjoy the evening speaking in their own language, I decided. They excused me with mild and polite objections.

"You are going to miss a great dinner," said Stefano.

“I will fall asleep thinking of last evening’s meal and I will be satisfied,” I replied as I walked up the stairs to my room. When I got there I took out from my shoulder bag the small package I had received from Raffaella. It was covered with a plain, light green wrapping paper. I removed the paper to reveal a black box. I opened it. Inside was the fly I had used to catch Bruno III, the Black Marabou streamer. Along with the fly was a card that had been folded in two in order to fit inside the small box. It was Raffaella’s business card: ‘Raffaella Cadore, Civil Engineer’, with her phone number and e-mail address.

I sent her an SMS with my *Tevere* photo and a note: “*Hi Raffaella. I didn’t get a kiss for this one caught in the Tevere. Nicola.*”

Chapter Five

Awakening

Sandy and Stefano had stayed up quite late the evening before and they were both a bit fuzzy-headed and scratchy-voiced over breakfast. Stefano was staying for another day. Lucca joined us again as he had the previous morning. He said that he had slept very well, better than he had in many years after running between us all during the previous day landing our fish. “Today it will be just me and *Signore Palmieri*, and we will catch as many fish as we did yesterday.” I hoped that they would.

We were on our way to the *il fiume Nera* by ten. Sandy said we would fish in the afternoon and early evening today and then fish the whole day tomorrow. Instead of taking the E45, which would have been the faster alternative, Sandy naturally selected the parallel and slower route running south. We passed into the Region of Umbria, Province of Perugia after just a few kilometres. We drove through San Giustino, Selci, Città di Castello and Umbertide. We were in the *Tevere* valley with mountains on both sides.

“This is the heart of the *Appennino centrale*, the Central Apennines. This portion is called the Umbrian Apennines. It is a part of Italia that tourists generally do not see, unless they are the lucky ones who have come here to fish for our large trout. I think you will enjoy fishing the *Nera*. It is a jewel, a pearl, a chalk stream that can be counted among the best of them.”

“A week ago I probably would have doubted that was true, but after having experienced four of Italy’s rivers I really have to wonder how you have managed to keep this secret from the fly fishers of the world.”

“Actually we haven’t. There is a steady stream of visitors—please excuse my little pun—from all over the world. Most of them came to see what most

people come to see in Italy: our cities, churches and museums, and, of course, to experience our food. They ask if there is any fishing in the nearby hills, they catch the biggest fish of their lives, and then keep coming back. They take their friends who tell their friends and now there is a large enough group of them to make it interesting as a source of additional tourism, but not so many to put too much pressure on the waters. If the conditions are right, this is the best time to fish because there are very few visitors and the locals generally fish only on the weekends.”

“Right now in Sweden most of the rivers are still covered with ice or the waters are too cold for the trout to move to a fly that does not hit them on the head on a dead drift. April first is the opening day for sea trout fishing along the coastal waters near Göteborg, but even those waters can have a cover of slush ice unless the clouds allow the sun to shine through.”



“The *Nera* has to warm up in the spring. Unlike the *Tevere* below the dam where we fished, it does not have a steady flow of water which is at a

relatively constant temperature. The *Nera* is also a small river. Where we will fish it will be no more than six or seven meters wide. We won't need our waders because wading is mostly forbidden. I perfected my heron technique of fishing on this river. Short, accurate casts are the order of the day. The majority of the fish are between one-half to one kilo, but there are some quite large fish that have outgrown their prey, and since this is a No Kill section of the river, they continue to live to fight another day."

After passing through Umbertide we saw a sign pointing toward Gubbio to the east. We were on the *Strada statale Tiberina*. "We'll stop in Perugia. It's another one of my favourite cities. It's more well-known than Gubbio because it is a university town. It is also famous for its chocolate. There it is."

Sandy was pointing to the right. A town rose up from the valley to the top of a hill. It looked like a fairly large city. We turned off the road, crossed over the *Tevere* and wound our way up to the center of the city on the *Strada Eugubina*. The last part of the journey was in a tunnel called *Galleria Kennedy*. We emerged in a round-about and continued upward until we were in the *Piazza IV Novembre*. We parked the Saab in a place that was in full site of the entire square and got out to have a look around and have a coffee.

"Is this a date connected to the unification of Italy?"

"It commemorates the end of the war with Austria-Hungary in 1918. We declared victory on this day, but as I said before, it was hardly a victory worth celebrating. In spite of that, there are streets and plazas all over the country named after the date."

"This looks like a larger variation of the square in Udine."

“It is a wonderful combination of the private and the public, what Mercia Eliade called the ‘sacred and the profane’ in his book of the same name (Eliade, Mercia, The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion; 1957). I don’t suppose you read it?”

“You’re joking, right?”

“He was a Romanian religion historian and philosopher. When your reading tastes mature I can recommend him highly. The main public building in front of us is what might be called a city hall today. It is the *Palazzo dei Priori*, the ‘Palace of the First Citizens’. It is a building that has lived and adapted to the changes that this ancient city has experienced. It was not here when Augustus laid siege to the city in order to execute Lucius Antonius, one of Julius Ceasar’s murderers. All of the city’s senators were executed along with Antonius and the city was levelled, with the exception of two temples and pre-Roman walls. The city was quickly rebuilt. This building was also not here when the Ostrogoths invaded in the middle of the sixth century and once again laid the city to waste. Gradually, Perugia gained in power and wealth during the period of Lombard domination. By the twelfth century, the city was recognized as having its own civic authority, and this wonderful building is one of its first expressions of its authority.



“When the first stones were laid in the late thirteenth century, it was called *Palatium Novum Populi*, the ‘New Palace of the People’. It was renamed after the magistrate of the first citizens was formed in 1303. It was added to and refined over the centuries. The stairs and platform over the loggia were added later in the fourteenth century. It was from here that public announcements were read. The Pope took temporal control of Perugia in 1610. You see the battlement on the top of the walls? The papal authorities ordered them removed from the *Pallazo* after they took control of the city. There should be no signs of civic power or places from which resistance to the papal armies could be made, they reasoned. When Perugia and all of Umbria became part of the united Italy, the battlements were rebuilt by order of the city’s new government, a defiant thumb to the nose to the Pope for two hundred and fifty years of his rule.”

We found a café where we had a clear line of sight to the car. Sandy was very careful about not leaving the car out of his sight when it was loaded with our gear. We were not yet in the theft belt of Italy, but cars disappear quickly all over the country, and a car with a interesting looking package is like a red cape to a bull, explained Sandy. He ordered *due caffè lunghi* and a selection of chocolates and other types of candy.

“Perugia is known for its chocolate made by the company named *Perugina*. I have seen the company’s *Baci* candies on my visits to Sweden, so it is famous outside of Italia as well. Today, *Perugina* is owned by Nestlé, a Swiss company. When I was a small boy my mother’s mother used to give all the children two little boxes containing nougat candy called *torrone* that was made by *Perugina*. She came from a small town close to here, and it was a tradition in her family. I could not resist eating both pieces as soon as I received them, while one of my sisters would take small bites from her pieces and they would last from Christmas to the Epiphany.

As good as the candy was, I prized the beautifully printed boxes that held the nougat. They were decorated with scenes from Perugia.”

He picked up a box like the one he had just described, opened it and slipped the contents onto the plate holding the other treats. He pointed to it, offering it to me. I picked it up and brought it close to my nose. It smelled of almonds, like our *marzipan*. On the bottom and top of the cream coloured, rectangular solid candy were white wafers. They seemed to melt when I bit into the nougat. The consistency of the nougat was slightly firmer than a marshmallow. It was very sweet. It had to be chewed slowly and there was not much point in trying to talk until the chewing was finished.

“Sweet, and very rich.” I placed the remaining piece in my mouth. Sandy watched me, smiling.

“The sweetness comes from honey and sugar. Nuts provide the taste. These are almond *torroni*. The wafers are like the host at holy communion. Perugia is also known for its universities, especially its language university, *Università per Stranieri di Perugia*, University for Foreigners.” continued Sandy. “If you were to decide to stay in Italy, you could come here and take an intensive course in Italian. Then you would be able to enjoy everything from the opera to understanding what the waiters are saying about you when you are eating in a restaurant.”

We finished all of the sweets and our Italian coffees and then I poured two full cups of coffee from my thermos. I was becoming quite good at ignoring the disapproving glances from the café personnel when they caught me in the act, as they did on this occasion. My own brew was worth the trouble. After we finished, we walked back out into the piazza. The sun had disappeared and the air had taken on a chill that was not there before we entered the café. There was a wind blowing that had the smell of rain.

“Maybe we should wait until tomorrow to fish. A little rain today will help our chances tomorrow.”

“Whatever you say, Sandy. You know the fishing better than I do.”

“We’ll be fishing for the next three days straight. After the *Nera* we may go down to Lazio and fish the *Salto*, *Fibreno* or the *Liri*, or we may go to Campania to fish the *fiume Volturno*. One day off the water will sharpen our appetite. Let’s take the back road to Gubbio. We can drive through the town where my Nonna Rosati grew up. Would you like to drive?”

“Yes, thank you.” The first drops of rain began to fall.

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Before we left Perugia, Sandy guided me around the city along narrow, winding streets that were flanked with handrails and stepped walkways. Men and women of all ages, from the youngest to the oldest, were walking up and down the sidewalks as if they were as flat as a boardwalk along the sea.

“People who live here must have good hearts and lungs,” I said jokingly.

“I am certain that someone has made a study of this, but I have never seen it. Everything must be more difficult to do in a city built on a steep hillside. You will see that Gubbio is even more extreme.”

We drove out of the city toward the south, connected to the RA6. At *Ponte San Giovanni* we joined the E45 for a short stretch and passed over the *Tevere*.

“Turn at the sign for SS318. Follow the SS318, *Strada statale di Valfabbrica*, to Fossato di Vico.”

I read the signs for each town out loud and Sandy corrected my pronunciation on every one. Torchiagina, Valfabbrica (*It sounds like ‘voting*

factory' in Swedish, I thought), Casa Castalda, Biagetti and Fossato di Vico. At Fossato di Vico we turned north onto the SS3.”

“This is the *Via Flaminia*, the road that leads from Roma to Rimini.”

We passed through Porello and then I read the sign for Sigg-ill-oh.

“See-jeel-oh,” Sandy corrected with his usual chuckle for my mispronunciations. “This is my Nonna Annamaria Rosati’s home town. Don’t follow the main road when it forks up ahead. Stay to the left and go straight. That is the old *Via Flaminia*.”

We were on the back side of the town which sloped upward to the right along narrow streets paved in cobblestones. The cobblestones merged with the sides of the houses that were built in stones of the same colour and texture.

“This is the house where my *Nonna* spent her last years,” said Sandy pointing to a two-storey structure that was the last in a series of houses along one of the streets leading up to the main road. Stone walls surrounded a rather large garden that could be seen through a metal gate leading to the street. “It still belongs to the family. If we knocked on the door we would not be able to leave for a week, even though I was here for a visit just a few months ago. I spent many summers here as a child visiting with my cousins. In the small creek we will soon pass I caught my first fish. It was on a worm and it was definitely not a trout, but it made a welcome addition to the dinner we had that evening.”

“When did you start fly-fishing,” I asked, wondering at the same time why it had taken me so long to ask that question.

“It was soon after the first hunting afternoon with Francesca, her father and her brothers. I was certain I would not be joining them again because of how I felt during the whole time. I was very uncomfortable holding a gun

and could not even think about shooting it. We were still at university. Francesca and I talked about it afterward and she said she would give up hunting if I could not do it with her. That was a very bad idea, I said, because she enjoyed it and it was something she could do with her family. I needed to find my own sport that maybe was similar, something outdoors. ‘*What about fishing?*’ she said. I asked at the local sporting goods shop where they sold fishing equipment, and the shop owner suggested I come along to a meeting of the local fly fishing club that evening. I did, and there was my classmate, Ugo, the one who went to the United States to work for Skidmore. From that point on I fished when Francesca hunted. That’s how it started and how it continued. When I fish now I think of Francesca hunting with her father and brothers. They have all passed away.”

I remembered the conversation with Raffaella in the Defender on our way back to the Piave to catch Bruno Junior. He always fished when Francesca hunted, I thought, and now he imagined that she was hunting all of the time. We drove along the road until we came to a cemetery.

“This is where the family has been buried for the past four hundred and ninety-one years. That is as far back as we have been able to trace the Rosati roots. They were surely *Langobardi*, or Lombards as they are called in English. Nonna had the fairest skin, the reddest hair and the bluest eyes. It is not unusual in the north of Italy where the Lombards had their largest concentrations. Walking down the street of Milan, the capital of Lombardy, it is natural to see blond and blue-eyed men and women.”

Sandy directed me down a dirt road leading past farmland. He told me to swing into the second farm on the right. A narrow dirt road led up to several stone buildings. The main building, which looked like it was a combination house and barn, was uninhabited and dilapidated, but was in the process of

being renovated. We left the car and walked around the farm. Someone was tilling the land around the house. It looked newly seeded.

“This is where my *Nonna* was born and where the Rosati family had lived from the early 17th century until 1978. When there were no longer any Rosatis who could work the land they could no longer live here. We don’t know how this agreement was made back in 1620, but it lasted for three hundred and sixty-eight years. The house went back to the *kommun* over thirty years ago and was abandoned, but now it has been bought by some of our cousins and is being restored.”



It was a beautiful view from the farm in all directions. A mountain dominated the view to the east. Its top was covered by a low cloud.

“That is *Monte Cucco*. It is now the focal point of a national park that extends along the entire ridge over to The Marches. It is a magical place. There are countless monasteries and abbeys, now mostly abandoned, carved into its hillsides. Its natural caves have become a popular destination for spelunkers from all over the world. Hang gliders, mountain bikers and just plain, old hikers have made this one of Italy’s major natural tourist

attractions. Brochures for the park claim that there are trout in the *Torrente Sentino*, but I have not caught any trout in those rivers in many years. The surroundings are quite beautiful, and if I lived here I would definitely work to replenish the fish in these wonderful rivers.”

We returned to the car. Sandy motioned me into the driver’s seat. I drove back to the main road, then headed north. We passed through Costacciaro and turned left onto the *Strada Statale Eugubina*.

“Weren’t we on this road driving into Perugia?”

“Yes,” laughed Sandy. “You might have guessed that *Eugubina* refers to Gubbio. This road starts here and ends in Perugia, passing through Gubbio. We will be entering Gubbio from above after passing over these mountains. There is a wide, flat plain spreading out from the base of the city toward the southwest. Another mountain range separates the plain from the *Tevere* valley that we drove along from Sansepolcro to Perugia. Are you getting your bearings?”

“I think so. I have gotten used to driving with a navigation system, but you don’t seem to need to use one. I guess you have been driving to your fishing spots often enough so that you don’t need directions.”

“Life gets more difficult when the sun doesn’t shine, and when it is dark. Otherwise, it is a matter of seeing the map in your head and knowing which direction is north.”

The sun was in the southwest when we reached the crest of the hill and saw Gubbio below us. The city seemed to cling to the slope.

“If we arrived here in another month the streets would be filled with people, up to two hundred thousand in a good year. They would be taking part in the annual feast in honour of *Sant’Ubaldo*, the patron saint of Gubbio, held every year on the 15th of May. Ubaldo Baldassini was the bishop of

Gubbio in the 12th century. The people loved him for his piousness, generosity and humility, but most of all they loved him for his bravery. He confronted Frederick the First, or *Barbarossa*, ‘red beard’, who was also called ‘The Barbarian’. It was in 1155. Frederick had just been crowned Holy Roman Emperor by the Pope during a campaign on the Italian peninsula to bring the Pope’s enemies, the Lombardi and the Normans, to their knees. Ubaldo convinced Frederick not to sack Gubbio as he had sacked Spoleto a few days before. The city was spared and the people have celebrated the event with a re-enactment of the day’s events. They feared he had been killed by Frederick, but then he appeared, unharmed. In their joy at his reappearance, and in an effort to deliver the good news to the city’s citizens, they placed him on a platform, called a *stanga*, and carried him through the streets. This was the beginning of the ‘*La Festa dei Ceri*’.”

“Like the fruit, cherries?”

“No, but it’s pronounced the same,” answered Sandy with a laugh. “It’s the word for ‘candles’. The good bishop died five years later, on May 16th 1160. Thirty-two years later he was canonized a saint. The feast is celebrated on the eve of his death.”

“What do they do with the candles?” I wasn’t getting the connection between the name of the festival and what it was celebrating.”

“They are not actually candles, but platforms that hold statues of three saints. One of the saints is *Sant’Ubaldo*. The other two are *San’Antonio* and *San’Giorgio*. No one knows how these two saints came into the celebration. I guess someone dreamt up the idea of a race and needed competitors. It makes sense to include as many of the professions and classes of people, each one being represented by patron saint. Ubaldo is patron saint of the builders and masons, Giorgio the merchants, and Antonio the farmers. There are many saints named Antonio. This one is *Sant’Antonio Abate*, the

Father of Monasticism. The frame that supports the *ceri* and rests on the shoulders of the carriers is called a *barella*. During the year the *ceri* and their frames are kept in the *Basilica di Sant'Ubaldo* at the top of *Monte Ingino*, while the statues of the saints are kept in the little church of *San Francesco della Pace*, otherwise known as the Builders' Church, in *via Savelli*."



It was after four when we arrived at the *Hotel ai Cappuccini*. There was a red 1973 Volvo 1800ES Sport in the parking lot. Coincidence? I looked over at Sandy. He was smiling.

"The mountain came to Mohammed. My cousin Giuliano Carlotti and his wife Livia have driven down and will spend a few days here in Gubbio. They are both retired medical doctors. Giuliano is a heart surgeon and Livia a specialist in respiratory illnesses. They will drive the Saab back. I have told them they will have to drive carefully because it may soon have a new owner."

I smiled and nodded my head. "Yes, maybe."

I wasn't really prepared for the building housing the hotel. Sandy explained that it was a monastery built in the 17th century. It started with the construction of a church in 1631. The church was consecrated in honour of *San Nicola di Bari*. Some years later a cloister and a convent were built adjacent to the church. In 1640, the *Cappuccini* friars took over the buildings, hence the name of the hotel.

“This was a promising beginning for such a building, but as I told you when we were in Perugia, a building can tell the story of its city and its country. For over two hundred years, these buildings fulfilled their original function. But five years after the formation of Italy, in 1866, before Roma was conquered but after these lands had become part of the new Italy, the Italian government declared that all religious orders in all of Italy should be suppressed. They ordered the sale of all ecclesiastical estates. The *Cappuccini* friars were thrown out and the property was given to the Town Council of Gubbio. It was a school for farming until the end of the 19th century, when it was abandoned. The stones were taken by the good citizens of Gubbio to build and restore their own houses, shops and public buildings. In the early 1960s, two architects who were principals in the firm of Vincenzo Monaco and Amedeo Luccichenti decided to restore the monastery to its original form and make it into a hotel. The hotel opened in August, 1966. It was completely refurbished by new owners in 1990.”

“You seem to know a lot about the hotel’s history. Are you a shareholder?”

“I worked on both of the renovations, first as an apprentice architect in the office of Monaco and Luccichenti, and then on my own.”

The people in the reception greeted Sandy as if he was the President of the Republic. I was beginning to understand that Sandy had more of a history than he had revealed to me. We did not need to check in. I heard someone saying Sandy’s name and turned to see a man of about the same age as Sandy dressed in a three-piece, grey wool suit. He was walking briskly across the lobby from the opposite side. He was followed by an elegantly dressed and handsome woman of approximately the same age. I guessed they were Giuliano and Livia.

“Saluti a voi mio cugino!”

Hugs and kisses followed. I stood by quietly, now used to these extended greetings.

“Vi presento il mio compagno di pesca, Nicklas Laurentzson.” said Sandy. I understood that this was my cue to say hello.

“Siamo così felici di conoscerti,” said Giuliano. *“Sì, sono molto lieto di incontrarmi con voi,”* added Livia.

“They are pleased to meet you, Nicklas. This is my cousin, Dottor Giuliano Carlotti, and his wife Dottor Livia Carlotti.

“I am very pleased to meet you both,” I replied as we shook hands.

“Mi scusi,” said Giuliano. “My English, he is not so good, but I try. My wife, she speaks much better.”

“My husband is too kind,” said Livia with an embarrassed smile. “I never find the right words.”

Sandy and I were guided to our rooms. My bags magically arrived when I entered my room. Sandy had warned me not to try to offer a tip to the young man who carried my bags or to the assistant who led me to the room. On a table in front of the windows facing toward the treed area on the back side of the hotel was a package wrapped in brown paper, thirty centimetres on each side with a tag containing just my name. I removed the paper, slit the tape holding the carton sealed and pulled out the contents. There were four packs of *Classic Kaffe*, hard as bricks in their shrink-packed aluminium wrappings. There were four tubes of *Kalle’s Caviar* as well. A note from Sofi read:

“There’s more where these came from, so just let me know when and where you need your next delivery. But if you decide to remain in Italy you may want to consider drinking the local brew and finding a substitute for fish eggs in a tube. Sassy and I send our love.”

We had agreed to meet in the lobby at six. We would start with drinks and then take the hotel van to dinner in a place that Sandy described as one of his favourite restaurants. It all sounded great. I was feeling hungry after eating only chocolates in Perugia four hours before. I reminded myself that I had consumed more food during the past week-and-a-half than I normally do in a month. A little starvation would do me good. I didn't have any reason to stay in my room, so I turned around and went downstairs and out into the garden in front of the entrance where there were comfortable looking benches. I sat down, took out my BlackBerry and sent an e-mail to Sofi, thanking her for the coffee. There were quite a few mails in my in-box, and I quickly went through them to see if there was something important. There was a mail from Bengt. He had talked with a friend who worked at Volvo Trucks and had given him my address. I checked further and found the mail he had sent.

"Hej, Nicklas!

Bengt gave me your contact. He thought you might be interested in hearing about a project we have just started. We are looking for engineers with your experience to work on it. It involves developing a truck that drives itself, an autonomous vehicle. It will be hydrogen-powered. The first fifty trucks have been ordered by the City of Paris. They will drive the streets on a continuous basis, identifying illegally parked cars, documenting graffiti, noting road conditions, missing or damaged street signs. This is a completely new area for us, especially because the truck will be rather small. We think that this is where the market is going, smaller, more flexible trucks for in-city duty. If this sounds interesting let me know as soon as possible.

Hälsningar from Henrik Sedersted."

Whew, I thought. This could be a real chance to do something interesting. I sent Henrik a return mail telling him that it did sound like an interesting opportunity and could he send some details and tell me when it would be a good time to talk. Within a few minutes after I sent the mail my phone rang. It was Henrik.

“Hej Henrik. That was quick,” I said when I answered the phone.

“Hej Nicklas. We need to make a quick decision. Our budget has gotten frozen and instead of being able to hire two new engineers we can take only one. We have been talking to three candidates, and one of them is just right for the job. We thought that your qualifications were also really good, but we would need to meet you right away in order to decide if you are the better qualified. So I am calling to see if you could be here today or tomorrow to meet the rest of the team. Is that possible?”

“I’m in Italy right now. Let me think about this for a few minutes. I’ll phone you right back with an answer.”

“*Tack*, Nicklas,” he said and we hung up.

What are the chances that I would outshine whoever it is who has already convinced the team that he—or she—is the perfect candidate for the one open spot? I have not done any work in autonomous driving or hydrogen fuel. Maybe the person has some specialty in one of those two areas. I still have a job. At least no one has told me that I don’t. If I do go up for an interview it would be just as well that I stayed there and cut short this expedition with my eccentric new friend. I’m not sure I’m ready to do that. Besides catching fish, I am learning a lot about things I had never thought would be worth knowing. I redialled Henrik’s number and he answered immediately.

“*Hej* Henrik. Nicklas. I think I’ll pass on the opportunity. It sounds like you have a good person for the open position. If your budget gets unfrozen and you still want to talk I would appreciate the chance to see if I have what your team needs.”

He thanked me and we agreed to meet when I was back in Göteborg. I sent a mail to Bengt to let him know how this lead had played out. A confirmation of our call came in from Henrik. Then a mail from Sofi appeared.

“I checked out the hotel on the Internet. Your host seems to have expensive taste,” she wrote. “If you are getting used to luxury, your next job will have to pay a high salary or you will need to marry into money. Ha ha. *Puss och kram*, Sofi.”

“We are only staying here one night,” I replied in a return mail, “then we will be back to roughing it, sleeping out under the stars and fighting off the scorpions and vipers. Pray that we are not eaten by wild boar. M.v.h, Nicklas.”

My phone rang again. I didn’t recognize the number.

“Hello. This is Nicklas Laurentzson.”

A woman’s voice replied, “*Ciao Nicola*. This is Raffaella.”

“Raffaella! What a surprise. I am in Gubbio at the hotel here sitting outside waiting for six o’clock when Sandy and his cousin and his wife, I mean his cousin’s wife, not Sandy’s wife, come down and then we are going to have drinks, his martini, you know, and we will eat dinner in one of Sandy’s favourite restaurants. Maybe you have been there. It’s *Taverna* something.” I stopped to catch my breath.

“It is nice to hear your voice,” she said, calmly. She had caught me completely by surprise and I was babbling like a school boy who had just

been smiled at by the prettiest girl in his class. “*Zio* Alessandro has a long and enjoyable acquaintance with Gubbio. It is one of my favourite places as well. The restaurant is *Taverna del Lupo*, the Tavern of the Wolf. It seems that you had excellent fishing on the *Tevere*. I am very pleased.”

“It was a great river and the people at the little hotel and our guide were really terrific.”

“You will go down to the *Nera* next, no?”

“Yes, then to two other rivers that Sandy has said are in the next region, the one in which Rome is located.”

“Lazio.”

“Like the football team?”

“Yes, the one your Sven-Göran Eriksson coached before leaving for England. He should have stayed in Italy. He would have been much happier.”

“Do you follow football when you are not fishing or working?”

“I used to play it up until the time I went to university. Now I just watch matches on the TV. Do you play?”

“Not any more. I had to choose between fishing and football, and fishing won. I have found that you meet some very interesting people fishing.”

“I think so too. I’m talking to one of those people right now. I just called to see how you were and to thank you for the photo. Next time could you ask your guide to take one with you holding the fish and send it to me?”

I had several photos of Raffaella in my camera. There was one that I took just before we left their farm, and one with Sandy and Raffaella posing in their waders. She was smiling broadly in all of the photos.

“I was the one in the class photo who always had a sour look on his face, but I’ll try to smile in the photo I send to you.”

She laughed. I remembered that I had liked her laugh when we were together. I promised to give her regards to Sandy, Giuliano and Livia, to send her a photo of me with my next fish and to call whenever I felt like talking. Then we hung up. I sat there for a little while trying to think about what I was feeling. I had not told her about the two job offers I had received or Sandy’s suggestion that I buy his car for one Euro. I especially didn’t tell her about Sandy’s suggestion that I become a fishing guide and farmer. *I’ll tell her about the car the next time we talk*, I thought, *maybe tomorrow*.

“You look lost in a dream,” a voice said beside me. It was Livia.

“I guess I was. The last two weeks have felt more like a dream than reality.”

“Alessandro has always had a way of making the everyday things we do seem very special.”

“Yes, I have learned that. Everything from fishing to eating to walking around a city is an opportunity to experience something new, even if you have done it many times before.”

“Have you ever been to Gubbio?”

“Before this trip the only places in Italy I had been were Trieste and Rome, and those trips were only for business.”

“Gubbio is our little secret,” said Livia, lowering her voice and coming closer. “We try to keep it from becoming like Firenze or Venezia, a place only for foreign tourists who want to eat spaghetti and meat balls and pizza and have their picture taken on the *Ponte Vecchio* or in a *gondola*. Giuliano and I come down here three or four times each year, and every three years we are here for *La Festa dei Ceri*. Has Alessandro told you about this?”

“Yes. We had a short tour of the city before we came to the hotel. We drove over from the other side of the mountain after visiting Sig, Sij...”

“Sigillo.”

“Yes, Sigillo,” I fumbled. “I’m not very good at pronouncing Italian.”

“Neither are most Italians,” laughed Livia. “When we have a problem saying certain words we proclaim that we have invented a new dialect.”

We both laughed out loud. Just then, Sandy and Giuliano came out of the hotel.

“Can we hear the joke,” said Giuliano. “It must have been a good one.”

“I just learned why you have eighteen dialects in Sweden.”

“We have between thirty-two and sixty million in Italy,” retorted Giuliano. “Thirty-two is the official number of dialects and sixty million is the number of inhabitants.” We all laughed together.

“Drinks are being served in the lounge,” declared Sandy, “and I would very much enjoy continuing this discussion over my martini.”

We went into the hotel and then into the lounge. There was something about the design of the interior that made it feel very special. I had been in many hotels, most of them in the three stars or below category since Saab was always very cost conscious. They were mostly cold or noisy or plastic or pompous or unfriendly. This hotel did not pretend to be a luxurious manor house or medieval castle. Maybe it was the oriental rugs or the sandstone bricks or the tapestries and art on the walls. Maybe it was the lighting that was different from anything I had experienced before. Whatever it was, the place was special.

Sandy and Giuliano each had a martini or two. Livia had a *Cinzano* on ice. I ordered a bottle of *Peroni Nastro Azzurro*, a lager comparable to

Swedish beers like *Mariestads* and *Pripps Blå*. The conversation was about food, particularly about what they expected to find on the menu at the restaurant this evening. We were enjoying a plate of little finger food with *bruschetta*, cheese and mini-omlettes called *frittata*. It became clear that Giuliano shared Sandy's interest in food. He explained that the cheeses we were eating were variations of *Pecorini*, cheeses made with sheep's milk and formed into a large wheel. He said that most *Pecorino* cheeses are aged in salt, but that the Umbrians use many different types of aging techniques that result in a wide variety of tastes and textures. The wheels could be rubbed with tomato paste or even buried in ashes in terracotta urns. The natural caves that are abundant in the region are perfect curing places.

The conversation was partly in Italian and partly in English, with one of them apologizing to me for the other two speaking a language I could not understand and then providing a translation. It was like a wrestling tag team match with members of the teams constantly changing sides.

"They have fresh *tartufi neri*," exclaimed Sandy. "I called the kitchen and they had just gotten in a fresh supply. That is black truffles, Nicklas. One dish that I must have is the *tagliatelle* with their own special *tartufo* sauce topped with shaved *tartufo* and *pecorino*."

"It's the *bruschetta* for me," declared Livia. "with all of the variations of *tartufo*."

"I can never leave *'del Luppo* without tasting their *grigliata mista*," interjected Giuliano.

"Mixed grill," explained Livia. "It's the sausage. That is what draws him in. He has always had a soft spot for the *salcicia* of Gubbio."

We continued along those lines for about an hour, until the martinis and Cinzano and beer glasses were drained. The hotel van was waiting outside

to take us into the city. I helped Sandy and Livia provide support for Giuliano as we all climbed into the van. It was dark so there was no point in anyone trying to point out the tourist points. We sat quietly during the ten minute drive from the hotel to the restaurant. We drove up the *Via della Repubblica* to the corner of *Via Giovanni Ansidei* where the restaurant was located. The driver parked as close to the entry as he could get. Sandy led us in, and as soon as the woman in the entrance, who I guessed correctly was the wife in the couple who started and owned the restaurant, caught sight of him, she burst into loud and continuous expressions of greeting.

“*Alessandro, mio buon amico!*” she exclaimed. “*Bentornato. Come sei stato? Ci siete mancati.*”

Everyone got hugs and kisses. I was introduced. Sandy explained that I was an expert fly fisher from Sweden who was teaching him how to catch fish, and that I soon would be opening a fishing school somewhere in the Appenines. The owner seemed impressed by this made-up story so I let Sandy have his fun. We were seated at a table in the middle of the room. Sandy explained that he preferred that the waiting staff were able to move around the table to serve the food properly from behind, rather than having to reach over the outside guests when the table is up against the wall. I had never thought of that. Actually, I had never thought about how food was served. It was always just passed around the table.

A waitress appeared with the menus. On the front of the menu was a small print showing a monk with a halo around his head holding the extended paw of animal that looked like a dog or maybe a wolf.

“What is the significance of the picture?” I asked.

“It is *San Francesco d’Assisi*, Saint Francis of Assisi with a wolf,” replied Livia. “It is a legend about a wolf that was tamed by the saint. Assisi is a town not far from Gubbio. The good saint lived for a time in

Gubbio when he first broke with his wealthy family and friends, having decided to devote his life to God and live in poverty. A fierce wolf had been feasting on the sheep and cattle in the lands surrounding the town when one day the wolf discovered that the flesh of humans was even more to his liking. The townspeople lived in terror and refused to go outside of its protecting walls. *San Francesco* decided to talk to the wolf. The townspeople pleaded with him not to walk through the town gate, but he was determined. With a small and trembling crowd behind him, he walked through the gate and approached the wolf, showing no fear. The wolf lay at the saint's feet as he spoke to him."

'Why are you troubling these good people?' Francesco asked the wolf. 'They have done you no harm. They will show you mercy if you repent. You may live among them and you will never go hungry. Do you agree?'

"The wolf rose up, then sat at the saint's side. He extended his paw and Francesco took it in his hand. He turned to the townspeople and spoke to them."

'The wolf has repented. He has given his word that if you feed him he will live among you as a friend and protector.'

"The townspeople agreed and Francesco led the wolf through the gate and into the town. The wolf lived for two more years and when he died he was truly missed."

"Is this a true story?" I asked. She had told the story as if she had been there and experienced it all at first hand.

"It may be true," replied Sandy. "In any case it is a pleasant story, don't you think?"

"We could use a St. Francis in Sweden," I said. "We have a protected and growing population of wolves and they just can't keep from eating sheep and

especially reindeer. Maybe if we fed them rather than letting them live like wild wolves the farmers and reindeer herders wouldn't want to keep shooting them."

"Let's have a look at the menu, shall we," interjected Giuliano. The menu was in Italian. Livia translated. There were two fixed menus and many dishes that could be ordered separately.

"The first fixed menu is the recommendation of the chef, Signora Aldina Grassini. I will translate it for you, Nicklas.

"Delizie tipiche eugubine, Treats of Gubbio. These are like the little dishes we had with drinks at the hotel plus many more, including prosciutto, sausage of wild boar and others. One of the specialties is rosa di arista. It is a cold salad made with sliced roasted porchetta garnished with pears and pecorino.

"Frittatina gentile con lamelle di tartufo, which is an omlette with truffle slices.

"Scrigno di passatelli eugubini con tartufo di stagione. This is the passatelli treasure trove with truffles. Passatelli is made with breadcrumbs, eggs, nutmeg and parmigiana cheese. The ingredients are mixed into a dough and then pressed through a sieve with holes that are around half a centimetre in diameter. It is a specialty of this part of Italy, in Umbria, Emilia-Romagna and The Marches.

"Mezzelune con verdure di stagione. Mezzelune means 'half moons' or crescents, and they are filled with seasonal vegetables.

"Filetto di mongana in broulé di rosmarino. Beef tenderloin in a broulé of rosemary.

"Agnellino umbro alla brace di carbone. Charcoal-grilled Umbrian lamb. The lambs in Umbria are especially tasty.

“Scelta di dessert della casa. A choice of homemade desserts.”

“There is no other place in Umbria to eat grilled lamb as in this restaurant, so my choice is made,” said Sandy.

“Everything on this menu sounds very good,” I said. “Is there something special on the second menu?”

“Indeed there is,” replied Livia with a broad smile. “This menu is called ‘*Buon Ricordo*’, which means ‘good memory’.

“Insalata di porcini tiepidi con pecorino fresco di Norcia. This is a warm salad of mushrooms with fresh pecorino cheese from Norcia.

“Fagottini con fonduta, Frittatina gentile al tartufo e crostino di porcino. These are dumplings in a cheese fondue, truffle omelette and a little toast with *porcini* mushrooms.

“Imbrecciata di cereali all’eugubina con crostini all’olio umbro di frantoio. That’s a mouthful, isn’t it? This is a chick pea, bean and lentil soup, a specialty of Umbria. It comes with croutons flavoured with olive oil made from the *frantoio* variety of olives.

“Raviolini con porcini e tartufo di stagione. These are small ravioli with *porcini* and truffles in season. It is a simple pasta dish, but it is heaven to taste.

“Filetto di mongana in salsa di rosmarino. Beef tenderloin in rosemary sauce.

“Coniglio farcito del ‘Buon Ricordo’. This is the real specialty of the house, stuffed rabbit. It is the course that is pictured on their *Buon Ricordo* restaurant plate. The restaurant is a member of an association called *Buon Ricordo* that celebrates good memories in eating.

“And the last is the same choice of homemade desserts.”

“I’m full just listening to the menu,” I said with a laugh. “I didn’t hear any fish dishes in either menu.”

“There is a perch dish and a trout dish,” offered Giuliano. “The perch is a fillet with vegetables, and the trout is pan fried with truffles from the Valnerina district.”

“Do you think I could substitute the trout for the beef in the second menu?” I asked. “Would that be impolite? I would really like to try the rabbit.”

“That will be no problem at all, Nicklas,” replied Livia. “Are we all ready to order?”

We ordered, and the dishes began arriving and the wine began flowing. Everyone ate slowly. I did my best. As the last person finished the course, the plates were cleared, cutlery was replaced, crumbs were scooped up and all was readied for the next course. Strange as it may seem, my mind jumped to the Saab production line. The line moved at a steady pace, starting with a platform on wheels and continuing with assemblies being added, mostly by robots, until the very end. Before your eyes, a finished car emerged and it was driven away to its designated parking spot awaiting transport to its eventual destination somewhere in the world. I had so few experiences to which I could compare this type of long, slow and deliberate eating event. Sofi would probably have thought of a ballet or an opera where every part fits so well together. Sandy might compare it to a building project in which hundreds of people do their part to transform a vacant piece of land into a place where something happens that did not happen before. With a perfectly timed meal, chefs in the kitchen and waiting staff were orchestrating how all of the ingredients were assembled in just the right amounts and at just the right times in order for our table, and all the tables in

the restaurant, to enjoy them at their peak of preparation: Just-in-time production. Fantastic!

In between the courses there were mini-courses, such as sherbet. Livia called them ‘palate cleaners’. The main courses were large enough to enjoy the tastes, but small enough not to get so stuffed that the remaining courses were wasted. There was not a single dish that I didn’t really enjoy. All the tastes were more familiar than they were in the northern regions, even though I had never tasted a single dish before in my life. The mushrooms, although exotic, were still mushrooms, and I had grown up picking them and eating them. Our *Carl Johans* and *kantereller* are as good as anything I had tasted. The *porcini* and *tartufo* were subtle variations of what we call *svamp*, but they were not unfamiliar. Finishing my little ravioli in the special house plate and seeing the wolf and rabbit in the bottom reminded me of finishing my *gröt*, or oatmeal, as a child and seeing H.C. Andersen’s wolf talking to the lamb.

Three hours after we arrived and began our evening of dining, Sandy, Giuliano and Livia were hugging and kissing the owners, the chef who had come to take a well-deserved bow, and the waitresses who Sandy made sure received generous tips. I shook hands with the owners and the chef, and waived to the waitresses. The hotel van was waiting outside the door precisely where it had parked when it dropped us off. I fell asleep during the ten minute drive back to the hotel. When we arrived at the hotel I bid them all good night. Giuliano and Livia would see us off the next morning, they said. Sandy looked like he had gotten his second wind.

“Sleep until you are ready to get up tomorrow morning,” said Sandy. “We don’t need to rush through breakfast. It will take us a good two hours to get to the *Nera*. *Buona notte*.”

“*Buona notte*, Nicklas,” said Giuliano and Livia.

“Buona notte,” I said. I found my way to my room, climbed into bed as quickly as I could and fell immediately to sleep.

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We all met in the lobby after Sandy and I had checked out. Sandy was wearing a suit that I had not seen before. It was three-pieced with a three-buttoned, dark brown wool herringbone jacket, a collared vest and plus-four trousers. He had the usual tattersall shirt with black and green piping, and he wore a dark green bowtie with a pattern of little brown trout. A matching silk handkerchief peeked out of the left breast pocket. Dark green wool stockings covered his lower legs, and a very expensive looking pair of dark brown wingtips completed the day’s outfit.

“I have a change of clothes in each of the cars, in case you were wondering,” said Sandy with a smile. “There’s an extra pair of pants with the suit that reach down to the shoes when I need to be more formal.”

“Are you sure you want to ride with me?” I joked.

“One of these days we’ll get you fitted with some proper clothes.”



When our gear was repacked in the 1973 Volvo 1800ES Sport and we had said our good-byes to Giuliano and Livia and all of the staff at the hotel, Sandy offered to let me drive the Volvo. I asked him if he really wanted to

wait to sit behind the wheel. He shook his head ‘no’, removed his suit jacket and slipped into the black leather driver’s seat. It had a 112 horsepower engine and a 4-speed gearbox with over drive. A spherical ebony gear handle topped a bright chrome shift stick that protruded twenty centimetres from a matte finish, black rubber base. The round gauges—analogue of course—took up one-half of the wood veneer dashboard space below the black vinyl-padded cover. I could see the origins of Volvo’s hooded console directly in front of the driver.

As usual, Sandy chose the smallest and windiest road, and, as usual, it was very picturesque. The *Strada statale Eugubina*, SS298, passed through many small villages and farms on its way to Perugia. We passed the interchange for Perugia and we were now moving into new territory for me. Our day off from fishing had renewed my energy and I was anxious to get to the river. We joined the E45 in Bosco and stayed on it for the sixty kilometres to Terni. It was close to noon when we entered the city.

“Are you hungry?” asked Sandy.

“I’m good for the next week after last evening’s dinner,” I replied. Sandy knew me well enough by now to know I was kidding. My appetite was always good. If I had put on weight it wasn’t showing up in my waistline. “Well, maybe I could force something down for dinner.”

“Where we are eating this evening you will not have to force anything. We’ll go right to the river. I’ll give you the short version of the Terni tour as we drive through. It was founded by the Umbrians in the 7th century B.C. and conquered by the Romans in the 3rd. It’s on the *Via Flaminia*, the Roman road that we drove on through Sigillo, so it was an important town until Rome fell and the Lombards marginalized it. It was not as lucky as Gubbio to escape being sacked by Frederick Barbarossa when he was on his rampage. It had a resurgence in the 19th century. Its rivers powered the steel

and related industries that developed here, and it has been called Italy's 'Manchester' because of its growth during the first Industrial Revolution. The Allies bombed it heavily during the Second World War and many of the ancient monuments have been severely damaged."

"Do you memorize guide books?" I asked jokingly.

"It's a pastime more than a hobby."

A light rain was falling when we arrived in Macenano, in the middle of the stretch of the *Nera* between Tettoia and Ponte Santiago along the SS209 that was No-Kill. We crossed the river on the *Via Colle Ponte* and then turned south. We drove along an unpaved road past small farms until the road was once again at the river. Sandy parked the car where we could see the river. If the sun did come out from behind the clouds our shadows would stretch behind us rather than over the fish.

"Let's enjoy a cup of your coffee as we get our minds off the road and prepare to fish," suggested Sandy.

I opened my bag that was resting between my feet on the floor of the Volvo and drew out my trusty thermos. Sandy went to the back of the Volvo and fetched two cups from his travelling kitchen. He held both cups while I poured and then handed one back to me after I had returned the thermos to its spot in my bag. We both sat back and sipped our coffee. It was still very hot. I silently applauded my choice of thermos which I had bought more than ten years ago at *Naturkompaniet* in the center of Göteborg, close to *Ahlströms konditori*. The *Nera* reminded me of one of my favourite streams in Sweden, the river *Tidan*. It is between Sweden's largest and second largest lakes, *Vänern* and *Vättern*. It is no more than ten meters across at its widest with a good variety of fishing situations, from fast water running between boulders, to deep, slow-moving sections with undercut banks. The latter portions of the river are sign-posted as 'No Wading', not to protect the

fish from contaminated wading boots, but to protect the fishers from drowning. There was a ‘No Wading/*No Guado*’ sign on the bank of the river in front of the Volvo.

“Do you have a favourite river, Sandy?”

“I have special memories of most of the rivers I have fished, but I cannot say that I have one special place that I prefer above all the rest. Maybe I will at the end of this expedition. We’ll see. Do you have a favourite?”

He said that he would see what happened after this trip. Could Raffaella have read too much into his plans to explore all the fishable rivers of Italy until the end?

“I was just thinking about the question because this river reminds me of my favourite—that is, before we fished the *Piave* and I caught Bruno the Third. My favourite was a small river called *Tidan*. It is well stocked and has very large rainbows and brownies. They’re not so easy to catch once they’ve been in the river for a few weeks, but they reward the persistent fisher.”

“The same can be said of this little river. It’s a spring creek and this is a limestone valley. It’s ‘Catch and Release’ on this part of the stream, and, as you see from the sign, wading is not allowed. There’s a hatchery close by which is where the fish in here and in the *Tevere* come from. It’s well stocked with browns up to five kilo. I’ve never caught one of the big ones myself, but I’ve seen them caught by other anglers. One of them would make a good photo to send to Raffi.”

I smiled and nodded my agreement. “Has she fished here?”

“Yes. We came here five or six years ago and fished the *Tevere*, the *Nera* and a few other rivers close by. No, she did not catch one of the big ones on that trip, but she had a fish on most of the times I checked.”

“Is there a special pattern or size that they prefer when they’re not showing?” I asked. We had not seen a fish rise since we arrived. In these cases I pulled out my sieve, tried to find something that looked edible and searched for a match in my fly box.

“Here’s a selection from the *Nera* file,” replied Sandy handing me a double-sided fly box. On one side were eighteen dry flies of the same pattern in sizes ranging from 10 to 20, in three colours, black, dark brown and cream. On the other side were eighteen nymphs in the same six sizes and same three colours as the dries. “When they are not rising I go through these one by one. Usually, something triggers a reaction. They are there, of that we can be sure.”

The rain had stopped and a glint of sunlight appeared. My secret weapon worked better when there was some sunlight. I always carried them with me just in case: a pair of Bushnell 8 x 25 polarized compact binoculars. We exited the car. Sandy opened the hatchback and we assembled our gear. I prefer fishing in waders even when I cannot wade unless it is over twenty-five degrees and sunny. Sandy pulled on a pair of brown *Muck Boots* that reached halfway up his calves. *One day I would have to try fishing in a three-piece suit*, I thought.

“I’ll walk a bit upstream but stay within earshot in case you need a gillie to help you haul in a fish.”

I walked to the river, stopping several meters short of the bank, and watched. The water was clear. It looked like it was a few meters deep at most. It’s probably just a trickle during the summer. There were no signs of surface action. I drew up the Bushnells to my eyes and slowly scanned the river from the middle to the far edge. There they were, three silhouettes idling one behind the other. One moved up slightly and then backed into the same position she had held. I imagined it was a female. The lead fish broke

the line and swam back, turned and rose up almost to the surface and then rejoined his comrades, this time at the back of the queue. I could not see what they were feeding on, but whatever it was, it was floating under the surface. I turned over the fly box to the nymphs, picked one from the middle, a #14 dark brown, and tied it on to the leader.

Even though the river meandered through farms and settlements, it was lined with trees, so there was not much room for a backcast. On the other hand, not much of a cast was needed due to the narrowness of the river. I found an opening a few more meters upstream, moved close to the bank and stripped out line onto the water. I made a roll cast so the fly landed a good four meters above where the fish were lying. The belly of the line began to move much more quickly than the leader portion and the fly was dragging before it came to the fish. I pulled out more line, performed a modified Spey cast to keep the line on the water and out of the trees. I mended the line once and then again, but it didn't help. There was too much of a difference between the speed of the water in the narrow channel where the fish were lying and the middle of the stream. A long bamboo pole with a fixed line of monofilament attached to the top, and a hook with a gob of worms at the other end, would do the trick from this side, but I couldn't see how to get a fly to float naturally over those fish. I looked up river. Sandy had a fish on. I walked toward him. Just before I got to him he was about to release a smallish chub.

"I saw you were having a problem with the current. This river looks easy to fish but I have found it to be one of the most difficult. That lie where the fish were holding is fully exposed in the summer so the stream bed there has a different structure to the main current. Let's go down and try a different tactic with your fish."

"Have you got some magic tricks up your sleeves?"

“Not me, but one of my friends who fished this river with me many years ago just about this time of year had a solution to the different currents. Cast downstream instead of up. Put the fly about a meter or so above the fish’s nose. Just before the fly lands, jerk the rod tip back and give out more line. That’s better than a mend on the water because it doesn’t spook the fish. The fly will float above the trout before it starts to drag.”

“Sounds good in theory. Did it work?”

“It did for him. I was never able to get the hang of it.”

“I’ll give it a try.”

We took a position above the lie. I checked on the fish with my Bushnells. They were still where I left them. I stripped out enough line for the cast and the in-cast mend. Before making the cast I took out my phone, set it to camera mode and handed it to Sandy.

“Raffaella asked me to send her a photo with my next fish,” I said, apologetically. “Would you mind snapping it just in case I catch one of these browns?”

Sandy smiled, nodded and took the camera, placing it in the outer breast pocket of his suit.

“You’re only going to get one or maybe two chances at this, so give it your best shot.”

Nothing like a little extra pressure, I thought. Suddenly, an image of Stefan Holm popped into my head. He won the gold medal for Sweden in the high jump at the 2004 Olympics in Athens. Stefan was famous for his pre-jump preparations. He pepped himself up by slapping his thighs and then his cheeks, rocking back and forth, bobbing his head to the steps he would take and then lifting his gaze high up into the sky as he imagined himself soaring over the bar. Focus. Concentrate. I made the cast. With

the fly about to land, I flicked the rod tip backward and released a few more metres of line. The nymph sank beneath the surface and began to drift downstream, drag free. Then the fly and my line were rushing away from me at a blistering pace.

A rainbow, maybe weighing over a kilo, vaulted through the surface and performed a few twists as if he was trying to build up some 'degree of difficulty' points for the judges. He stopped. I started reeling in as quickly as I could. He turned upstream, jumped and jumped again before turning and heading downstream. I kept enough pressure on the reel's drag to keep the barbless hook in his lip but not so much that I snapped off the leader. Finally, he came to Sandy's outstretched net. I put down my rod and held the fish gently in the water while removing the fly.

"Smile!" I heard Sandy say. I looked up and Sandy clicked the shutter just as I released the fish back into the stream. I had smiled.

We spent the rest of the afternoon in the same area, keeping the car within eyeshot. We each caught a few more fish, mostly smaller versions of the first one I had caught. It was approaching five o'clock when we agreed to call it a day. Sandy drove while I sent the photo to Raffaella with a short note: *I will phone you this evening.*

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The sign along the road was difficult to see, hidden behind tree limbs and overgrown with vines. *Pensione Russo* was written on two lines in all capital letters, red on a white background. A narrow, unpaved road framed by stone walls led up a steep hill to a farm. The main house, two stories of stone construction with a red tiled roof and chimneys at both gable ends, was at the top of the road. It looked very old but well maintained. The red window frames and bright red door looked newly painted. *What's with all the red*, I thought. Sandy drove the Volvo around to the back of the house.

The house formed one side of a courtyard around ten meters square that was framed on the two other sides by barns. A wooden porch with an exterior stair extended along the second storey on the back of the house. Hanging from the porch were dead animals, from hares and pheasants to goats and something that looked very much like a *vildsvin*, a wild boar. There was a smoky aroma in the air. As we walked through the stone-cobbled courtyard, a short, stocky man appeared from the back door. Then, a short, stocky woman joined him. They looked to be in their fifties. Both had bright red, curly hair.

Sandy introduced Rosolino and Evelina Russo. Neither spoke English, but their smiles and hand shakes made me feel very welcome. We entered the house and my nostrils were immediately filled with the smell of roasted meat.

“It’s Rosolino’s famous *porchetta*. He roasted it on the spit outside today.”

It was a large country kitchen with a high ceiling and an open fireplace at one end. The contents of a big, black cauldron on a swinging arm simmered over a thick bed of coals that covered the base of the fireplace. A large sturdy wooden table, higher than the normal height for a dining table, filled the center of the room, and dozens of copper and cast iron pots, pans and tools hung from a metal rack that hovered over the table, fastened to the ceiling with long metal rods. At one end of the table the steaming pig rested in a pan. The skewer was still in the roast. On a white cloth sprinkled with flour at the other end of the table were many small pasta packages.

Rosolino poured wine into three short water glasses and handed one to Sandy and another to me. ‘*Alla salute!*’ said Rosolino. ‘*Alla salute!*’ we replied. Sandy and Rosolino talked while Rosolino carved the roast. Evelina smiled and nodded while she prepared potatoes and greens, and I

just took it all in. After half an hour or so and two more wine refills, Rosolino led us up the stairs to our rooms. There were four guest rooms sharing two toilets and one bathroom. My room was small, but very pleasant, at the front of the house and a view toward the river. We agreed to meet downstairs in an hour. Sandy offered to let me shower first, which I did, and then after getting into my dinner clothes, I sat down in the armchair filling one corner of the room and dialled Raffaella's number.

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"Ciao, Nicklas."

"Ciao, Raffaella."

"It looks like you managed to do something that not every fisherman does on their first day on the Nera: catch a trout."

"It was really Sandy's catch. He told me how to get the fly over the fish."

"His in-the-air mend?"

"Yes. It worked."

"I have used it many times since he showed it to me and it works almost every time if I have a fly on that looks to the trout like anything edible. Thank you for sending the photo."

"The fish is more photogenic than I am."

"You're smiling."

"I thought of you and the smile came naturally."

"I knew you were romantic."

"That is a first. No one has ever called me 'romantic'."

“No one has ever called me to talk about fishing. Are you at the Russo’s?”

“It sounds like you have a copy of the trip plan.”

“It’s just that *Zio* is so predictable. Once he finds a place he likes, whether it’s a river, a restaurant or a hotel, he keeps going back. The Russo’s *pensione* is one of his most favourite. Evelina will start you off with her wonderful *cappeletti i brodo*. *Cappeletti* means ‘little hats’, and that is what they look like swimming around in a clear chicken and vegetable broth. Evelina’s recipe is her own but I think it includes veal, pork, *mortadella*, *prosciutto*, grated *Parmigiano-Reggiano* and nutmeg, the crowning touch. An egg is used to bind everything together. This will be followed by her *frittata* made with small pieces of pork, *pecorino* cheese and her secret combination of herbs. Then you will have *porchetta*. Rosolino’s roasted suckling pig is among the best I have ever tasted. Evelina will serve her delicious potatoes and onions, fava beans sprinkled with olive oil and grated *pecorino* cheese and finally sautéed greens with garlic.”

“The roasted pig was on the table in their kitchen when we arrived, just off the spit. And the little hats were spread out on a floured cloth. With all of this great food, Raffaella, how do you manage to keep your beautiful figure?”

“Nicola, you are embarrassing me.”

“Oh, sorry, I didn’t mean it that way. Well, yes, I guess I did. You do have a beautiful figure, even in waders.”

“Thank you, Nicklas.”

“Would you rather call me Nicola? It sounds nice when you say it.”

“Yes, if you don’t mind. When I think of you I say ‘Nicola’ to myself.”

“When I think of you I say ‘Raffi’. I know that’s Sandy’s special name for you.”

“It’s my special name for me as well, so I would like you to call me Raffi.”

“Sandy is going to think I fell asleep. I should go down and join them. I’ll talk to you soon. Good night, Raffi.”

“*Buonaserà*, Nicola.”

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Sandy, Rosolino and Evelina were in the kitchen when I came downstairs.

“You are just in time, Nicklas. Let us go into the dining room to enjoy this wonderful meal prepared by our hosts.”

The room was in the corner of the house closest to the drive up from the main road and had windows on two sides. Unlike the kitchen, which had a wood-beamed ceiling and walls of stone on the two exterior sides and exposed brick on the two interior ones, this room had whitewashed walls and a ceiling painted in light blue. There were framed photographs that hung wherever there was a free space. A deep red-coloured rug covered most of the wide panel oak floor. In the middle of the rug was a large round heavy dark oak table covered with a white tablecloth. There were four places set with room for at least four more. A steaming pot rested on a warming burner on top of a low sideboard, also in oak, that covered one wall. Evelina poured each of us a bowl of her soup and then one for herself. Before we picked up our spoons, Rosolino said some words, then he, Evelina and Sandy blessed themselves and motioned that it was time to eat.

“What did Rosolino say?”

“I think it is called ‘grace’ in English. He thanked God for bringing us to his and Evelina’s house and for providing the food that we are eating.”

“Do all families in Italy say grace? We didn’t say grace when we were with Michele, Gabriella and Raffaella.”

“No,” answered Sandy, “religious belief is one trait that we did not have in common with our best friends. Gabriella was born into a family in Bologna that would have made Lenin feel like a *bourgeoisie*. They were confirmed aesthetes, as is Gabriella. Michele was ambivalent about his feelings toward religion, so it was easy for him to convert. My goddaughter is more like her father than she is like her mother in most things, except when it comes to religion.”

I had two bowls of Evelina’s soup, each with a generous sprinkling of *parmigiano*. I would have had a third but I knew it would have been impolite to refuse a second helping of the next course, the *frittata*. This was a dish I could eat every day. Then came the *porchetta*. Just the aroma of the pork told me that I would want a third helping of it as well. I did, and this time I did not stop myself. Raffaella had described the dinner perfectly. The roasted potatoes, the beans and the sautéed greens were all there. Sandy explained that the greens were *liscaro*. They look like chives, or what we call in Swedish *gräslök*, but they taste like spinach.

I did not believe it was possible for anyone to eat more slowly than Sandy, but both Rosolino and Evelina now had won my Slow Eaters prize. They did not talk very much although they smiled and truly seemed to enjoy my appreciation for the food. Then Sandy said, “We will have company tomorrow, Nicklas. Alberto Abbate is an old and dear friend. We studied together. He was a promising architecture student until his father asked him to join him at his firm. You have heard of Maserati, yes?”

I nodded. No one who works in the car industry has not heard of Maserati.

“His father’s firm was a supplier of headlights and tail lights to Maserati. Like Maserati, the firm was eventually bought by Fiat. Alberto moved into management at Maserati and worked there until he retired a few years ago. He is still a technical advisor.”

“And he is a fly fisher, of course,” I said rhetorically.

“Yes, and he is an avid fly fisher, ever since he was a little boy growing up in Bologna. He taught me many of his tricks. He is the one who showed me the cast that helped you catch a fish yesterday.”

“Was this planned or just spur of the moment?” I said with a laugh.

“I gave him a call while you were getting ready for dinner and told him you caught one of his fish, so he thought he had better meet you.”

Sandy obviously had an idea that there was something I could do with Maserati. Why not? They sell almost as many cars as Saab does—or did—I thought, and unlike Saab they are on the way up. We finished dinner and moved to the parlor next to the dining room. Instead of whitewashed walls as in the dining room, it had deep green ones. The ceiling was cream-coloured. Tapestry-upholstered chairs and sofas filled the room, arranged on top of a Persian rug with deep red as its primary hue. Rosolino lit a fire in the large hearth that formed most of one wall. Sandy took out his pipe, as did Rosolino, and soon the air was a mixture of the smoke from two very different tobaccos blended with the aroma of burning walnut logs, which were the remains of trimming off the excess from the trees surrounding the house and farm.

We sat quietly for almost half an hour. Then Evelina came in with a tray containing a pot of coffee she had brewed and dessert.

“Evelina knows that *maccheroni dolci* is my favourite,” said Sandy, smiling broadly. “*Grazie, Evelina.*” Our host returned the smile. Sandy explained, “This is a sweet usually eaten at Christmas. It is made with cooked *strangozzi*, which is like *fettuccine* but a bit thicker and with only flour and water, no eggs. Ground walnuts, breadcrumbs and cinnamon are mixed with honey over heat until the honey is thin enough to pour. Enough of the pasta is placed in a glass form so that it is nearly full to the top and then the honey mixture is poured over it. It is covered and set in a cool place. When it can be cut into pieces it is ready to serve.”

Pasta for dessert? My doubts melted like the morsel in my mouth. This had to be one of my favourite desserts so far. They were beginning to pile up. We sat, drinking coffee, Rosolino and Sandy exchanging a few words between puffs on their pipes, Evelina knitting what looked like a baby sweater. I thought of *mormor's* and *morfar's vardagsrum*, or living room, where we used to sit after our Christmas dinner, *Julbord*, when everyone was full of ham and meatballs and herring and *mormor's* famous *Janssons frestelse*. The next thing I knew, Sandy was gently shaking my shoulder to wake me up. I had been asleep for an hour. “You have given our hosts the best possible compliment.”

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Rolling tires on the dirt road and a growling engine working at low RPMs woke me the next morning. Daylight was just breaking. I got up and looked out the window. A red Maserati was just being parked outside the corner of the house. A tall, thin man with thick, white hair emerged from the car. I dressed and went downstairs to meet our fishing colleague for the day, who was with Sandy and our hosts in the dining room. Evelina was pouring coffee into oversized cups. She filled them halfway then added warm milk to fill the rest along with a raw egg. The mixture was stirred until the egg,

coffee and milk were one. Slices of toast made with loaves baked that morning were stacked on plates along with different cheeses and dried sausages.

“Nicklas, this is my good friend Alberto Abbate.”

“I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Abbate. Sandy told me that I owe the fish I caught yesterday to you and your special casting technique.”

“Please call me Al, Nicklas,” he responded in perfect British English. “That is what my English-speaking friends call me. Alessandro has told me that you are no stranger to catching fish. I look forward to joining you today.”

We traded talking for eating. I followed Sandy’s lead by quickly dipping and removing a slice of toast into the cup, biting off the moistened bit and then biting into slices of cheese and sausage. This isn’t all that different from a Swedish breakfast of an *ost och skinka smörgås med en kopp kaffe*.

“Your car looks like a classic.”

“It is a 1950 A6 1500 Turismo,” interjected Sandy. “You could combine the value of all of my cars and they would still not add up to the price Alberto could get if he put it up for auction.”

“I could never sell it. My Godson will inherit it. What were you using yesterday?”

“It was one of Sandy’s nymphs, a #14 dark brown.”

“Sandy’s flies usually work just fine. Form, size and colour. He has never been very interested in deciding whether to use an *Ephemeropter*, *Trichopteral*, or *Plecoptera* imitation. Ninety-five percent of the time it doesn’t matter, and he has proven that over the years by catching many more fish than I do.”

“When the hatches are on, you outfish me ten-to-zero,” laughed Sandy. “That’s when I beg for help.”

Neither Sandy nor I had talked about whether our flies were *Ephemeropter*, *Trichopteral*, or *Plecoptera* (mayfly, caddisfly or stonefly respectively) imitations. Like Sandy, I had some favourite patterns that worked, like my Muddler Minnow or Zonker. When I read my *Flugfiske I Norden* magazine and come across *dagsländor*, *nattsländor* and *bäcksländor* I always feel a twinge of guilt about not really knowing the difference between one and the other. Maybe I should take a course or read a book to make up for my deficiency, I would think, but I never did. I kept fishing and hoping that the flies I was using were as effective as the flies that were still in my fly box.

“I tied up some special flies just for a day like today on the *Nera*,” Al said. He took out a large fly box. “The CDC Sedgehog and the Pupa d'Avorio are caddis patterns and are my two favourites for the big browns in the *Nera*. The other flies are mostly caddis patterns as well in all the various stages, from nymphs and subimagos to imagos and spent spinners. You know the subimagos and imagos as emergers or duns and spinners. A few of the nymphs are weighted.”

They were great looking flies, perfectly tied, in sizes from #12 to #20. He handed me a box and gave another to Sandy. The boxes were works of art as well, highly polished mahogany with *Fiume Nera, aprile 2011* carved perfectly into the lid.

“These are for you to remember our day of fishing together,” said Al. I was speechless.

“*Sei troppo generoso, mio buon amico*,” said Sandy to Al.

”One can never be too generous with one’s friends. Shall we see if we can catch a few fish?”

We drove to another stretch of water where wading was allowed—and necessary to get away from the heavy growth along the banks. In some areas it was possible to walk across the river when the water was a bit lower, while in other areas it was necessary to wade up to the chest in order to get the fly where it needed to be. My fishing companions knew the water very well. Sandy was upstream in front of me and Al was in behind with fifty yards between us.

Each with our new box of flies, we spread ourselves out so that gradually we were out of sight of one another. I passed the morning trying variations of the flies in single, double and triple combinations. I had always felt most comfortable fishing a single fly, knowing that there was only one point that could hook a tree branch or my ear, only one weight that the leader had to place correctly into or on the water. But I started to get the feel of multiple flies, and they seemed to work better in twos. Three flies continued to be a challenge.

We broke for lunch around one o’clock, gathering close to where we had parked the cars. I was beginning to get used to eating a later lunch than our normal 11:30 or so in Sweden. Evelina had packed us a basket with bread, cheese, sausages and a cold *frittata*. The basket also contained a bottle of wine that Al and Sandy shared. I stuck to my own-brewed coffee. Both Sandy and Al had caught fish all morning and were in the best of spirits.

“Alessandro tells me that you work for Saab Automobile.”

“I’m not sure I have a job, but I did work for Saab ever since I left university. I’m on a forced vacation while the company decides if it will continue in business.”

“It won’t, I’m afraid. The company has no way to continue. GM has cut off all avenues of funding, and your government will not be bailing them out like the Americans bailed out GM and Chrysler. Eventually, pieces of the company will be bought by the Chinese. They’re the only ones with money now, and maybe something will be produced once again in the town where the factory is located.”

“Trollhättan,” I interjected.

“Yes, the troll place. Do you want to stay in the car business?”

“That’s all I know.”

“You know how to fish. I’ve seen that,” he said with a big smile.

“He wants to make things, Alberto. You, more than anyone, can appreciate that.”

“The car business is changing. I’ve been in it all my life and it seemed like it would go on as it had forever with more and more people driving, starting as soon as they could and continuing until the end. No one saw cars as a problem until there were too many of them, just like horses. When cars appeared a little over one hundred years ago many people saw them as the answer to one of the biggest environmental problems of the time: horses in the cities. Horse shit, horse piss, dead horses lying in the streets and constant humming of flies feeding on the whole mess were the by-products of what was then modern transportation. Today, noise, air pollution and accidents are the result of too many cars, and we need to find a new solution to how we get around.

“I really see fundamental changes,” continued Al. “This recession is not going to end quickly, and when it does, people will not be buying cars as they did before. This is just a coincidence of timing. It would have happened without the economic crisis. Your generation and the one coming

after it—I call you the ‘chauffeured generation’—are not driving cars like we did, especially in America and northern Europe. We chauffeured our children everywhere and they have gotten used to having someone else drive them around. They are not taking their driver’s licenses like we did, as soon as we could apply. It’s too expensive to own a car, especially if, like many of the young, you do not have a steady job.”

“What do you think is going to happen?” I asked, truly curious about what he was saying.

“In a few years you will start to hear about self-driving cars. Companies like BMW and Mercedes and Alessandro’s favourite, Volvo, will begin to announce tests and talk about all the safety benefits of cars that don’t crash. They will follow the Three Laws of Robotics. Have you ever read Isaac Asimov’s books on robots?”

“I saw the movie, *I, Robot*. Audi had a concept car in it.”

“Do you remember the laws?”

I nodded. “It was something like a robot can’t hurt a human, a robot has to obey orders from a human unless it breaks the first law, and a robot has to protect itself unless it breaks either of the other two laws.”

“Correct! Substitute ‘car’ for ‘robot’ and you have the laws for self-driving cars. That’s where I’m putting my money and the rest of the time left for me on this earth, into self-driving cars, specifically, self-driving taxis. I have already started the company. How would you like to be my first employee, as head of research?”

I was speechless again. Sandy filled the void.

“Alberto, if young people are not driving, maybe they will be using the buses and trams instead. This is what urban planners have been trying to promote for years. Take public transport rather than driving cars.”

“How many cars do you own, my friend,” teased Al, “and when was the last time you took a bus or trolley? We are a dying breed, Alessandro, those of us who drive our own cars. This generation will treat cars like we treated the horses and horse-drawn wagons that our parents cherished. But they will not give up the freedom and convenience that a car offers, to get to where you want to go when you want to go there, not where the trains, buses and trams can take you according to a schedule made up by the people who run the transport systems. They will want cars; they just won’t want to drive them. What do you say, Nicklas? I have enough money to carry the idea for at least two years and during that time I will be looking for new partners and investors.”

“It sounds like a great opportunity, but I don’t know anything about self-driving cars. All the work I have done has been making driving cars safer.”

“I just have a feeling that you are the right person to lead the development team. Think about it. I’m not in a hurry for an answer.”

What am I doing right? “I promise to give it a lot of thought. Can I let you know in a few weeks, once I am certain about what is happening back home?”

“Certainly, take your time. Here is where you can reach me,” he said, handing me his card.

We finished lunch and fished for the rest of the afternoon. Sandy switched back to his dry flies, while Al and I continued with nymphs. I was very impressed with the size and condition of the fish we caught and the beauty of the surroundings. I would never have found such a place on my own. There are guides who know the waters and can put you over fish. We met one of the best a few days before on the *Tevere*, and this is also one of the waters that he fishes. It’s fairly easy to find a guide in a region where you would like to fish. It’s usually just a matter of searching on the Internet,

finding the guide's home page and booking a time. I have never gotten into the habit of using this lifeline when I'm in an unfamiliar region. Usually, I simply ask at a local fishing store, like I did in Trieste. This time I got very lucky.

Rosolino and Evelina were in the kitchen when we arrived back at their farm. Al had already told us that he would not be staying for dinner. He said his good-byes and we followed him out to his car. He rolled down his window after he entered.

"I look forward to hearing from you, Nicklas," he called out as he drove away waving to us all.

We all walked back to the kitchen. Sandy explained that we would be having a simple weekday dinner this evening, just pasta, *umbricelli*, with Evelina's special meat ragu using pork sausages Rosolino had made that day. Sandy explained that *umbricelli* is a hand-rolled spaghetti made only with water and flour. The dough is kneaded for about ten-to-fifteen minutes until it is very smooth and not sticky. It is formed into a ball and then rolled flat to a thickness of around half a centimeter. The circle of dough is cut into strips about a centimeter wide, and these strips are rolled by hand into long, round strings.

I said that was fine with me, but I was sure that what he thought was a simple meal would still be a feast. We went up to our rooms to change and wash up. When I came down Sandy and Rosolino were in the living room, a fire was lit and Sandy was pouring two martinis. Sandy, as usual, asked me if I would like to try one, and, as usual, I declined. Rosolino offered me a glass of what looked like wine.

"It is dry vermouth, Nicklas. Rosolino has made it himself. He usually gets half a barrel of dry vermouth when he makes his wine."

I took a sip. It didn't taste like wine or liquor. "How is it made?"

"He uses the grapes that are not of the best quality and makes the wine in the usual way. Then he adds distilled spirits he has made from corn and then puts in his own combination of many herbs and spices, like anise and fennel seeds. Shake it all up, pour the mixture through a coffee filter or cheese cloth and *voila*: vermouth."

Rosolino smiled broadly. I wished then that I could speak Italian, to thank him for his hospitality and generosity. One day I would come back and do so, I thought. *Would I?*

Evelina called us into the kitchen where she had laid out the plates. Our simple dinner was a single course of the delicious pasta along with a large salad made with dandelion leaves and other spring greens Evelina had picked in the field. When my plate was empty, Evelina offered to fill it again. I did not refuse. Rosolino's red wine seemed to be made for this dish. I could not manage a third helping.

"It will be difficult to leave, Sandy," I said after we had finished and cleared our plates.

"I suggest we travel down to Benevento where the '58 PV445 is garaged. We'll fish the *fiume Volturno* which is close by, the stretch between Amorosi and Castel Campagnano. We'll spend one night in Campobasso, which is along the way."

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Chapter Six

Excited

While the fastest route between two points is not always the most direct, the most direct route in today's motorway landscape is usually not the fastest. Our trip to Benevento defied all the rules of those route planning systems I had been analyzing and developing since I began my studies. With Sandy at the wheel, we drove south toward Montefranco and then turned off onto the SP4. We skirted around the Lago di Piediluco, which Sandy said was a good place to spend late summer evenings casting from a boat or canoe. We joined the SP3 at Pie di Moggio as we crossed the border to the region of Lazio and followed this until we reached Rieti. We turned east toward L'Aquila, crossing into the region of Abruzzo along the way.

"It will be Easter in a little more than a week," said Sandy, waking me from the trance I had been in since we left Macenano. "Two years ago, Easter was two weeks earlier than this year, on the 12th of April. On the 6th of April there was an earthquake centered in L'Aquila which killed 297 people. It was the most severe earthquake since the one in the province of Avellino in Campania in 1980. Almost three thousand people died in that one.

"All those people, they did not have to die," Sandy continued. "There had been tremors for months. People were ready to evacuate, but they were told by the deputy head of Italy's civil protection agency, backed up by a group of six scientists, that the tremors were a good sign, that the earth was releasing pent-up energy. This was less than a week before the earthquake hit. Unfortunately, the experts were wrong."

We drove through L'Aquila. There were still many signs of devastation, including buildings and walls that had not been repaired and shabby

construction fences covered with *graffiti*. *Via XX Settembre* read a street sign. “It seems that every city in Italy has a street with this name. What does it mean?”

“September 20th is Roma’s Liberation Day. On that day in 1870, General Raffaele Cadorna led the Italian army into Roma, bombed the city for several hours and, when the Pope finally capitulated, declared it to be the capital of the unified Italy. The Pope, who was Blessed Pius IX at the time, was not so pleased. After he capitulated, he put himself under house arrest in the Vatican and he and his successors up to Pius XI did not agree to free themselves until Mussolini gave them their own country in 1929. That was when the Vatican State was born.”

Another piece of history revealed to me, I thought. Sandy manoeuvred the Volvo through the narrow city streets. We came to a park with a fortified castle. “This is the *Forte Spagnolo*, the Spanish Fort,” explained Sandy. “In the 15th century, the city had become the most important city after Napoli in the Kingdom of Napoli. But when the French and Spanish fought over the throne at the beginning of the 16th century, the citizens of L’Aquila took the side of the French. The French were defeated but came back briefly in 1527, again with the help of the citizens. A year later the rebellious forces were subdued and the Spanish ordered this fortress to be built, not to defend the city but to control it. Its canons pointed toward the city. It was never finished and never used in battle, a tremendous waste of money.”

We joined the *Autostrada dei Parchi*, A24, and passed a sign which read: *Parco Nazionale del Gran Sasso*. Mountains rose ahead.

“We are in the Gran Sasso National Park. The *Corno Grande* up ahead is one of the three main summits of the Gran Sasso Mountain. It rises up to 2912 meters and is the highest peak in the Apennines, and the highest peak

in Italy south of the Alps.” It was majestic, still covered in its winter mantle of snow. “Below the peak of the *Corno Grande* is the Calderone glacier. It’s one of the southernmost known glaciers in Europe. It is shrinking by the minute say the glacier experts. They don’t think it will be here after 2020—unless something drastic happens, like a new Ice Age.”

“Experts have been known to be wrong,” I suggested, then immediately regretted what I had said. “Bad joke. Sorry.”

“No, don’t be sorry. We Italians are not so sensitive. Let’s come back here in ten years and see if it is still here.”

“It’s a deal,” I said, relieved that I had not caused offense. I changed the subject. “What do you think of Alberto’s idea for self-driving taxis?”

“If anyone can turn an idea into a successful business it is my old friend Alberto. With this idea he reminds me of the scientist who tries to find a potion that will allow him to live forever. In this case, Alberto wants to be able to drive his Maserati for all eternity. His mother, God rest her soul, was the first woman in Bologna to drive a car—at least that is the legend. Her father bought her a Lancia when she turned twenty-one. She was a faithful Lancia customer for the rest of her driving life. She was ninety-two when her nephew, who was the captain of the local *Carabinieri*, came for a visit to convince her that she had to give up her driver’s license. Her sons and daughters put him up to it. She is now ninety-seven and lives with one of her daughters. Every day she sits in her last Lancia behind the steering wheel and dreams she is still racing down the country roads. Alberto’s father was equally crazy about driving. The Maserati Alberto is driving is one of the five his father owned.”

“It’s not so much the idea as it is the position. I have never been a manager of anything. The closest I have gotten is ‘team leader’.”

“Alberto will be enough of a leader for the company. He will need to have someone who can turn dreams into reality. I think he felt that you were that kind of person.”

The Adriatic was now in sight. Instead of taking the *Autostrada Adriatica* we continued to the coastal road and turned south at Giulianova toward Pescara.

“You mentioned Easter. I had completely forgotten about it. Don’t you want to spend it with your family?”

“I was going to talk to you about that as well. We will be in the south and making a long drive up to Bologna to be with my cousins, or up to Verona to be with my son, will mean that we will miss a lot of sights and fishing. So either we continue to Napoli after we pick up the car in Benevento, or we turn back north and fish our way back to Bologna. What do you think?”

“Don’t they make good pizza in Napoli?”

“The best! You can get everything from a simple *Pizza Margherita* to a *Pasqua la pizza speciale con vongole, gamberetti, tonno e acciughe* ; clams, shrimp, tuna and anchovies. I suggest we go to Napoli, a place where people know how to celebrate *Pasqua* with fish, and then to Roma for Easter Sunday receiving the blessing of the *il Papa* in Saint Peter’s Square. What do you say? It will mean taking a few days off from fishing.”

“I like the idea of seeing how a real pizza is made. I’m not sure about the Pope part.”

“O.k. We’ll take it one place at a time and see how things develop as we get close to Napoli. Here is Pescara. The origin of the name is the Latin word *piscaria*, meaning ‘abounding with fish’. I know a great little restaurant where they make the best *Brodetto*, a fish soup with mussels, fish and

tomatoes. The restaurant is called *La Vongola*, ‘the clam’. They also make the best spaghetti with clam sauce outside of Napoli.”

Sandy was driving slowly along the beach road. Restaurants and hotels lined the western side and the Adriatic stretched out to the east. The *Viale Aldo Moro* turned into *Viale della Rivièrs* and then into the *Lungomare Giacomo Matteotti*.

“Here it is.”

As usual, a parking space right in front of the restaurant was waiting for us. Summer was obviously its high season. I imagined the beaches filled with sun bathers and the paddle tennis courts in constant use. As we approached the restaurant’s entrance Sandy stopped and pointed toward the south.

“The *Fiume Pescara* flows out into the Adriatic just a few more hundred meters down the road. The origins of the river are near L’Aquila where it is called *Fiume Aterno*. It should be a better trout water than it is. It flows through beautiful country. There is a river a little further south called *Fiume Sangro* which has received most of the attention. The Italian Fly-fishing Museum and School is in Castel di Sangro, which is where the Upper Sangro begins. The Upper Sangro, which ends in Lake Bomba, is the best trout fishing water. I thought we would stop at the museum after lunch. It is small, but it has some things worth seeing, and even though I have been there many, many times, I always enjoy going back.”

La Vongola is designed to maximize views of the sea with expansive glass walls. For an off-season weekday there were quite a few customers. We were led to a table next to a window with a clear view of the water.

“I called ahead to reserve,” said Sandy with a wink, surmising what I was thinking. A waiter appeared.

“Buongiorno, Signore Carlotti,” greeted the waiter. *“Bentornato.”*

“Buongiorno, Giacomo,” replied Sandy. *“E ‘bello essere di nuovo qui. Vorrei presentarti il mio compagno di viaggio, Nicklas Laurentzon.”*

“It is very nice to meet you, Signore Laurentzon,” offered Giacomo. “I hope you will enjoy your meal with us today.”

Just as Giacomo was getting ready to tell us the specials for the day my phone rang. It was Sofi. I excused myself and went outside, answering as I walked through the door.

“Hej, Sofi.”

“Hej, Nicklas. Am I disturbing you?”

“No. Sandy and I were just about to hear the lunch specials at a restaurant in Pescara. Perfect timing.” There was a wind blowing off the water and into my phone’s speaker so I walked around the side of the restaurant where it was calm.

“How are you doing?”

“I’m doing very well. We continue to catch fish, the food is great and I keep getting job offers.”

“The job offer is why I called. I was in Nordstan this morning and met Bengt Lagström. He said that they have been flooded with applications from engineers from Saab after production stopped in Trollhättan when all the suppliers refused to deliver parts. It looks like everyone is leaving the sinking ship. The positions are filling up quickly, he said. He thought it would be a good idea for you to come in for an interview very soon, next week if possible, before Easter. Were you planning on coming home for Easter?”

“Actually, Sandy and I just made a plan for Easter. We will spend *långfredag* in Napoli and *påskdagen* in Roma.”

“It sounds like you aren’t giving much thought to coming back here. It’s good that you don’t have any plants and all your bills are on automatic pilot. Do you need anything? More coffee, *Kalle’s*?”

“I’m fine, Sofi. I’m taking your advice. I’m not coming back until I’m ready. I’ll send Bengt a mail and tell him I won’t be back for awhile. If the good jobs are taken maybe there’ll be one left for a junior assistant. You’re a good friend to call me. Give my regards to Sassy.”

“O.K., Nicklas. I understand. I think you are making the right decision. If you do need, anything please call me. Will you?”

“Yes, of course I will call, and I look forward to seeing you soon.”

“When you are back we can talk about how we can get on with out lives. I think it’s time, don’t you?”

“Yes. *Glad Påsk*, Sofi.”

“*Glad Påsk*, Nicklas.”

We hung up. I thought about her words, “*I understand*,” as I walked back into the restaurant. I wondered if she really did know what was going on in my head when I didn’t exactly know myself. When I returned to the table Sandy was sitting with a glass of white wine and looking over the menu.

“That was Sofi. She was in the city this morning and met my friend at Volvo. He told her that the vacancies for engineers were filling up fast and if I wanted to be considered I should get in there before Easter.”

Sandy just nodded his head slowly, acknowledging that he heard me but saying nothing. I continued.

“If I hadn’t been out of the country when we were temporarily put on leave this wouldn’t even be an issue. I would have kept busy, probably fishing for sea trout most days after the season opened on the first of April and sneaking into the office the rest of the time.”

I stopped and waited again for a reaction. Swedes are usually the ones who can remain silent, letting minutes pass by during meetings without saying a word, infuriating and confusing guests from other countries, especially America. Finally, Sandy smiled and broke the silence.

“But you weren’t in Sweden when it happened, and no one planned the timing of the work stoppage so that it coincided with your business trip to Italy. You decided all on your own to go to Percoto and fish the *Torrente Torre*, just as I did on that day. You and I both picked our own hotel and our meeting was pure coincidence. It was also a coincidence that Raffaella was at home visiting her parents when we arrived. She was supposed to be somewhere else, but her appointment was cancelled at the last minute and she decided to visit her family. She knew I would be there, but not that I would be bringing a guest. I was as surprised...”

“You mean you didn’t arrange the meeting?” I said, bewildered, and cutting him off before he could finish his sentence.

“I wish I could take credit for that, but it was pure chance. You and she will decide for yourselves whether anything comes out of the meeting. I have already given you my opinion on what I think you should do.”

“What about Stefano and Alberto, did they just show up as well?”

“No,” replied Sandy, laughing, “but I invited them to fish, not recruit new employees. They made up their own minds about you and decided to offer you a position totally on their own. I was pleased that they thought so much

of you, of course, but I didn't do anything except introduce them to you. Do you lose out if you don't return to work?"

"I did some checking up on this and it turns out that it would be better for me to leave on my own than to wait until the company goes bankrupt. I will receive my payment for saved vacation and compensation time, assuming there is money in Saab's account. So I can continue to stay on leave and use my vacation time, or I can resign now and take out the money, or I can get on a plane and show up for work on Monday."

"If you decide on the last option I will miss having you along on my journey, but I can understand that you might not want to risk being out of work."

"I'm going to call in sick. That will give me a few more days to decide."

"Fine," replied Sandy with resolve. "Now we can order. Giacomo, we are ready."

"*Signori*, would you like to start with our *gamberoni al sapor d'agrume* or the *insalatina di seppiolini*. I can highly recommend both."

"The first is a king prawns with a citrus flavoured dressing and the second is a salad with cuttlefish. We will have one of each and share them."

Sandy ordered the rest for us, as usual. For me he ordered a pasta variety I had not yet seen. It is called *anellini*, and it is ring-shaped. The dish is called *anellini alla pecoraia*. The sauce is a plain tomato base with vegetables and *ricotta* cheese. This was my first taste of this soft cheese specialty of the south. Sandy explained that it was made by curdling fresh milk with vinegar and salt. For himself he ordered the spaghetti with clam sauce. We ate the fish soup dish as a main course. Sandy explained that *brodetto* is made with cuttlefish, *branzino*, which is a sea bass, mussels, clams, *langoustine*, which are large shrimp with heads on, squid cleaned and

sliced into one-half-inch pieces, tomatoes, garlic, marjoram, parsely, thyme, balsamic vinegar, *peperoncino*, a healthy portion of dry white wine and to top it all off, saffron. It is slowly cooked in an earthenware pot.

“*Lo zafferano* is used in everything in Abruzzo from *antipasti* to *dolci*. When we drove past Gran Sasso we passed through the heart of Europe’s principal source of saffron. The saffron flowers have grown in these mountains for centuries and the money earned from the sale of the prized spice paid for the castles and fortresses we had seen. Over one hundred thousand flowers from crocuses are needed to make just one kilogram of the spice. They are picked in the autumn. The red stigmas are carefully separated from the petals. They are dried over a wood fire and placed in the little cellophane wrappers to be sent all over the world.”

“For the last two weeks, except for the trout we caught, we have been eating all types of meat dishes,” I said between mouthfuls of one of the best fish soups I had ever eaten. “We travelled a few kilometres and now we are in fish paradise.”

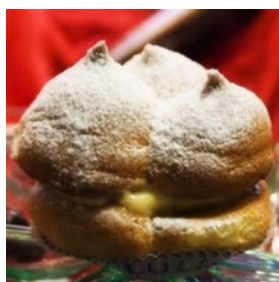
“Yes, but it is the same along the entire coastline, both the Adriatic and the Mediterranean. Italy is as much as fish country as a meat one. But you come from Göteborg, a town that has a world-class fish restaurant serving wonderful fish from northern waters.”

“I’ve been in more restaurants in the past few weeks than I have been in in my entire life spent around Göteborg. What restaurant do you mean?”

“*Sjömagasinet*,” he answered, pronouncing it almost perfectly.

“I’ve heard of it. Carolina and her sambo Rikard go there for the anniversary the day they met.”

“It was one of the restaurants I visited when I was in Göteborg. The owner and chef, Leif Mannerstrom I think is his name, came out and talked with us. My host was a frequent guest.”



We weren't leaving without dessert, declared Sandy. He ordered his two favourites which we shared. Two *Sise delle Monache*, or 'nun's breasts', arrived on an oblong plate. The custard-filled sponge cake had a top layer with three rounded cones dusted with powdered sugar, each cone having a tip like a nipple. It did not take much imagination to see three breasts. I had to take a photo of it.

“What is the story around this delicacy?” I asked, curious to hear what could have led to its name.

“*Delle Monache* means ‘of the nuns’ and *sise* is another name of a place here in Abruzzo, so one of the stories of its origin is that it was made by local nuns. That is not so convincing, I think. The most believable is that it was the invention of a well-known local chef named Giuseppe Palmerio, and the three peaks are the summits of *Monte Majella: Acquaviva, Focalone and Murelle*.”

The second dessert was a slice of a cake called *Parrozzo*. Giacomo brought the entire cake to the table and cut two pieces. It was perfectly shaped dome covered with a chocolate icing. Beneath the icing was a golden-hued cake.

“Is it saffron cake?”

“Poor man’s saffron,” offered Sandy with a large grin. “This cake is full of eggs and Italian history. Like the city of Pescara itself, it owes something to the writer-soldier, Gabriele D’Annunzio, *Principe di Montenevoso*. D’Annunzio was born in Pescara. He was a successful, if controversial poet, author, journalist and playwright. He achieved more notoriety during the Great War with his daring feats. After the War he became incensed with the terms of the Treaty of Paris and the degrading way that Italy was treated by its allies. The proposal to cede the city of Fiume on the Adriatic to the Croats, or to make it an independent free state, was too much for him. He led a small army into the city and occupied it for fifteen months, eventually being evicted by the Italian Army. But while he was there he created a model of a government that would later be followed by Mussolini. He called himself *Duce*, ‘leader’, he used the Roman salute, gave balcony speeches using the rhetorical dialog that became Mussolini signature method and formed black-shirted gangs who terrorized opponents. D’Annunzio was fifty-six when he was evicted from Fiume. He lived for eighteen more years and never became part of the government Mussolini formed in 1922. His princely title came in 1924 from Vittorio Emanuele III. Using his capital as Italian hero, he sponsored the formation of the current city of Pescara by combining the municipalities of Pescara, that was south of the *fiume Aterno-Pescara*, with the municipality of Castellamare Adriatico, which was on the north.”

“And the cake?” I asked a little impatiently.

“He gave the cake its name. At the height of his journalistic influence, he made it a cause to convince the pastry chef who created the dessert to baptize it as *Parrozzo*. The name is derived from *pan rozzo*, a cornmeal bread that was made by Abruzzo peasants in the same shape. It means ‘unrefined bread’. The cake is made with semolina instead of cornmeal, and the eggs give it its colour, resembling the colour of cornmeal.”

“There are almonds in here, I think. I like it.”

“Your taste buds are beginning to take shape, Nicklas,” Sandy said with a smile that seemed to signal a sense of pride in his accomplishment. I was pleased to receive the compliment.



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It was two-thirty and we were back in the Volvo *P1800ES*. A light rain was falling. Since I was the one not having wine with lunch, I was driving. I knew this car. I had done a paper on it for one of my courses at Chalmers. It was designed by a Swede, Pelle Petterson, but Volvo insisted that all the press information state that it was designed by the Italian company Petterson was working for at the time, Pietro Frua, a subsidiary of Ghia. The first prototypes were built in late 1957, and the first production cars were assembled in the West Bromwich, England plant of Jensen Motors, who were contracted by Volvo to produce the cars. The ES came in 1972 and was the last of the P1800s to be produced. It was a coupé estate, or station wagon as the Americans called them. Sandy's car had the Borg-Warner three-speed automatic, rather than the four-speed overdrive manual. There were only a little over eight thousand P1800ESs produced during the two model years.

I followed the signs for *Autostrada Roma-Pescara*, A25. The highway led southwest around the edge of a national park, *Parco Nazionale della Maiella*.

“There is a wonderful cave in this park,” enthused Sandy, “the *Grotta del Cavallone*. You need to be rather fit to take the tour of this cave. It is one of the deepest in all of Europe. Francesca and I came here as newlyweds, before we had children, and then we came back once with Jacopo.”

We crossed the *fiume Aterno-Pescara* just before entering Popoli. The road bent south and then southeast. We left the *Autostrada* at Pratola Peligna and joined the SS17. After Sulmona we began an upward climb with the road offering a number of hairpin curves. We reached Castel di Sangro and the Italian Fly-fishing Museum and School around four-thirty in the afternoon.

“It’s only another hour-and-a-half to Campobasso, so we don’t need to rush through the museum. We’ll arrive just in time for a late dinner.”

“The Sangro looks very fishable.” There were at least a dozen fishermen in the river and along the banks.

“Yes. There is a fifty kilometer stretch from here up to the *Lago Bomba* that contains a lot of very good brown trout fishing. It is heavily stocked and heavily fished. We’ll save it for another time.”

We were met at the entrance to the museum by a very helpful and cheerful young woman who served as both docent and guard. She was new to her job and therefore did not recognize Sandy. That meant we got the full treatment. She explained that the museum is in a former convent, *Convento della Maddalena*, built in the late fifteenth century. It is just two rooms on the ground floor where there is also a museum of archaeology and

exhibitions of contemporary and classical art. A sign at the entrance to the museum says that it is dedicated to Stanislaw Kukiewicz.

“That doesn’t sound like an Italian name,” I commented to the guide.

“No, it is a Polish name. Signore Stanislaw Kuckiewicz Romika was born in St. Petersburg of Polish parents in 1909. He began fishing at a very early age. His family returned to Poland but fled back to Russia at the outbreak of The Great War. When the second war began, he tried to join the Polish army but was captured by the Russians and sent to Siberia. He escaped, somehow managed to find the Polish army and eventually fought with it in the battles for the liberation of Italia. He stayed in Italia after the war and brought with him his deep knowledge and love of fly fishing. This museum is dedicated to his contributions and to his memory.

“The purpose of the museum,” continued the guide, “is principally to prepare a bibliography of the most significant volumes in the evolution of fly fishing. We are also trying to create a collection of fly fishing equipment that at one time was in common use among the fishermen here in Italia. We already have a very good collection of equipment from donations.”

We arrived at a case with a collection of vintage fly reels.

“These are our prized possessions.”

“Yes, I recognize many of them. Many of them once were mine.”

“You are Signore Carlotti!” exclaimed the guide.

“Yes. I once thought about collecting fly reels, but it was so difficult to find them and when I did they were very expensive to purchase. I bought a dozen or so, but it wasn’t much of a collection. Then I talked to the founder of the museum who said that he wanted to put together an exhibition of the history of fly fishing and include equipment from different periods. I decided to donate my reels and help the founder to find other donors. We

asked for donations to auctions held at fly fishing club dinners and other functions where the reels were auctioned and the buyer received a substitute prize, like a guide for a day, and the reel went into the museum.”

“I would like to fish with those reels. People landed good-sized fish with them at one time, and it would be great to feel how they performed.”

“Most of them are not usable.”

“Maybe I could make new ones that look exactly like the originals.” I filed that idea in my head to be pulled out at a later time.

We looked at the other equipment that had been collected. It was an ambitious project that had been started. Hopefully, there would be enough interest among Italian fly fishers to keep it going. We bid our host farewell, climbed back into the Volvo and headed south toward Campobasso. I stayed behind the wheel and Sandy navigated. He directed me to the SS652 and then back to the SS17, which we followed almost the entire way to Campobasso. Sandy told me to turn off at Santa Maria delle Macchie and then follow the signs to the center. Once there, the familiar street names began appearing: *Garibaldi, Mazzini, Via IV Novembre*.

“Here’s a new one for me, *Via XXV Aprile*.”

“That’s when we celebrate the end of the Second World War and the end of Nazi occupation. The date was chosen because it was the day Milano and Turino were liberated. It took another week before the whole country was free.”

“It’s this coming Saturday, the day before Easter.”

“Those who are still working will miss a day off this year since both Friday and Monday are already holidays. I am sure they will find a way of making it up. We are in the Region of Molise now, Italy’s second smallest

and newest. It used to be joined together with Abruzzi until 1963, when they were split apart forming Abruzzo and Molise.”

“I have a feeling there is a reason for the why one is Abruzzi and the other is Abruzzo, but I’m sure it is going to be complicated”

“Yes, it’s complicated, but I am more than willing to take you through the story.”

“I’m more interested in why they split up the Region. In Sweden the politicians are combining counties into ever larger ones in order to save money, they say.”

“It was the first Italian government that forced it to join with Abruzzi, so it really is just getting back the independence it lost.”

“With a history as long as Italy’s I am surprised that there are any days left that are not holidays.”

“In my opinion, there are seven dates which are most important in the history of Italy. The first is 31 B.C., when Caesar Augustus defeated his last rival, consolidated all power and formed the Roman Empire. For the next two hundred years, there was relative peace around the Mediterranean Sea. It was a time called *Pax Romana*. The second date is 330 A.D., when the Roman Emperor Constantine abandoned Roma for the new capital of the Empire, Constantinople, built on the site of Byzantium. Even though the Empire later came to have two capitals, one of them in Roma and the other in Constantinople, the division of the Empire reduced the resources available to defend Roma and the Italian peninsula, leaving it open to attack by any warlord who wished to risk his life and those of his men for the riches that plunder might bring.

“The third date is 756 when Pepin, who had been crowned king by Pope Stephen two years before, donated lands to the Pope that Pepin had won in

battles with the Lombards. These lands, called the ‘Donation of Pepin’, became known as the Papal States and they allowed Pope Stephen and Popes up to the time of the the *Risorgimento* to reign as temporal rulers. The fourth date is 1084, when Robert Guiscard, a Norman, marched into Roma to restore the Pope, Gregory VII, who had been besieged by the Holy Roman Emperor, Heinrich IV. Robert and his heirs united the southern third of the Italian peninsula, which became the foundation for the Kingdom of Sicily by 1154.

“The fifth date is 1453, when the Popes refused support to Constantinople and it fell to the Ottoman Turks. This left the Roman Church without serious rivals within Christendom, giving the Popes more power and wealth with which they built more monuments decorated with sculptures and paintings. The Renaissance was born. The sixth date is 1870, when the Pope, Pius IX, was forced out of the *Palazzo Quirinale*. The last remaining portion of the Papal States was confiscated by the Italian government, and the Kingdom of Italy, with Victor Emmanuel II as the regent, claimed control over the entire peninsula.

“The seventh, and last date is 1941, December 11th to be exact, when Italy, led by Benito Mussolini, declared war on the United States. This act ensured that the Americans and its allies would drive out the Germans, who had infested our entire country in the name of preserving Fascist rule. The last Germans were pushed off our soil in 1945.”

“What about 1934 when Italy won the Football World Cup, defeating Czechoslovakia?”

“There are many people, like the supporters of our current government led by *il Presidente*, Silvio ‘Bling’ Berlusconi, who want to remember many achievements during the twenty-two years that Mussolini and his henchmen ruled our country,” replied Sandy, with a clear tone of disdain in his voice,

“but he made a fatal mistake, for himself and for the Italian people, by tying his star to Hitler’s. If Hitler had not come along, Mussolini would probably be buried in St. Peter’s today, instead of in a little grave in the village where he was born.

“Campobasso suffered from the fighting and bombing,” continued Sandy. “In the autumn of 1943 the Allies, led by Canadian troops, attacked the town. It was strategically placed and well fortified by the Germans. When the fighting was over, much of the town was destroyed, thirty-eight of its civilians, including its bishop, were killed.”

There was nothing I could say, so I was silent. I waited for Sandy’s next instruction.

“We are staying at a hotel just outside the centre, the Grand Hotel Rinascimento. Turn left here on *Garibaldi* and then look for *San Lorenzo*.” I drove along *Garibaldi* and then turned right onto *San Lorenzo*. A sign for the hotel appeared at a three-way fork and we arrived at the hotel a few minutes later. It wasn’t quite what I had expected. It was a large tourist hotel.

“It has secure parking,” explained Sandy, seeming to sense my wonder at his choice of hotel, “and a very good restaurant.”

When we pulled up at the entrance two young men dressed in smart uniforms appeared. One of them took the overnight bags we handed to them, and the other took the keys to the car and disappeared with it through a large opening in the side of the hotel. We checked in, received our keys and were led to our adjoining rooms on an upper floor, first to Sandy’s and then mine. It was an oversized room. *I’ll get lost in here tonight*, I thought. I took out my phone, scrolled to Carolina’s number and pressed the dial button.

“*Hej Caro.*”

“*Hej Nicke.*” Then followed her usual question: “Where are you?”

“I’m in Campobasso in the region of Molise.”

“Let’s see where that is.” It never failed that whenever I told her I was somewhere that was unfamiliar to her, she immediately pulled up her *bingmap* application on her phone and did a search. “C-a-m-p-o-b-a-s—is that with two esses?”

“I think so.”

“s-o. There you are. It does not seem to be very close to any place that looks familiar.”

“We’re going to fish a river south of here tomorrow and then stay in Benevento.”

“Tomorrow is *Palmsöndagen*. I guess you won’t be coming home for *Påsk*?”

“The plan is to be in St. Peter’s Square on *Påskdagen* to see the Pope.”

“That sounds like a great plan. I always wanted to do that.”

“You did? I didn’t think you were interested in religion.”

“It’s not so much the religion as the event, being there with all of those people who are there because they believe in something that the Pope represents.”

“I’m thinking about going to church with Sandy tomorrow. He doesn’t miss mass on Sundays, although so far he has been there and back before I have even woken up.”

“Then I guess I can tell you that we will be going to church on *Påskdagen*. Anna Britt is singing in the children’s choir. I also have some

news, actually two pieces of news. The first is that I am pregnant, and the second is that Rikard and I have decided to get married. The wedding is going to be on *Midsommar* in *Kungsbacka kyrka* and you have to be here.”

I had to take all of this in and process it before I could respond to my sister’s revelations.

“You are full of surprises today, Caro,” I finally replied, “all very good ones. Congratulations on all counts. Of course I will be there.”

“It would be wonderful if Sofi came too. You know how much I like her.”

I could hear that she was crying. I felt a lump in my throat and tears started welling up in my eyes. Since our parents died she has always taken my happiness as a personal quest. She was certain that left on my own I would always be melancholy. I could sense her relief when Sofi and I were together, and the return of her anxiety when Sofi and I separated and the chances for reconciliation faded. I never felt that I needed to be in a relationship to be satisfied with my life, but I did sense the difference when Sofi and I were in the best phase of our time together.

“We’re not going to be able to finish this conversation with both of us dripping tears into our phones. I will call you again soon. Give my love to Rikard and to Anna Britt.”

I sat for several minutes to collect my thoughts. Then the phone rang.

“*Ciao, Nicola,*” her voice said. As soon as I heard it I relaxed.

“*Ciao, Raffi.*”

“Where are you and my wandering *Zio* now?”

“Campobasso.”

“In the Grand Hotel Rinascimento?”

“Yes. Are you sure he has not given you an itinerary?”

“I’ve known *Zio* for all the thirty years of my life, so it is not so difficult to guess what he is up to. You will have to fast for the remainder of the week after you have had your dinner tomorrow on *domenica delle Palme*,” she said laughing. “There is only one reason why *Zio* makes this a regular stop and it is his weakness for Molise food. You will fish the *fiume Volturno* between Amorosi and Melizzano, yes?”

“Yes, but I guess we won’t be going there until Monday, and then we will stay in Benevento.”

“He is going to get you to Napoli,” she said with a sing-song voice. “Has he talked about going to the *Teatro di San Carlo*?”

“No, at least not yet. He says that the Neopolitans know how to make food for Easter.”

“The *Napoletani* know how to make food for every day of the year. You’ll see. Nicola, can I ask you a question?”

“Of course. What is it?”

“What happened with your relationship with Sofi?”

I had to think for a moment. Where should I start?

“We met at university,” I began, “at one of the coffee places close to the school. I was sitting at a table working on a paper and she came in and sat down at the next table. I had seen her many times. It was difficult not to notice her. She was in the same class as the one I was writing the paper for, and she asked me if that was what I was working on. This surprised me because I wouldn’t have thought she had taken any notice of me. She moved over to my table, we talked about the paper and then the other courses we were taking and then she left. A few days later I received an SMS that said: Coffee? 11.00. Sofi. We met back at the same place where we had met first,

and from this point on we were a couple. It was the first time I felt happy since my parents were killed in the car crash. We did everything together. The only times I fished were when she had to travel on business or take a course, which was not very often. I didn't feel like I needed to go off on my own.

"One evening, a few years later, when we were having dinner in our apartment, Sofi asked me if I thought it was time to start a family. I said I wasn't certain I wanted to have children. I explained that I was so very sad to lose my parents I couldn't think about a son or daughter of mine feeling the pain I felt if I was taken away from them. Sofi said she understood that I needed more time to come to terms with these emotions, but something changed that evening. After that, I started to work more and I started to fish more. I was home less than I was away, even though I was not so far away. We both decided it would be better if we separated. Sofi and Sassy, our cat, moved into Gothenburg, closer to where Sofi worked, and I stayed in the apartment. That was five years ago."

"She shouldn't have asked," Raffaella mused. "There are times when it is better to ask for forgiveness rather than for permission. It sounds like she is waiting for you to change your mind and you are waiting for your mind to change."

Raffi had just summed up the last five years of both my and Sofi's lives in a way that neither of us had succeeded in doing. Sofi and I had been living in suspended animation, and would likely continue to do so until we either made a baby or stopped seeing each other. I was still not sure which one it should be. I had not felt there was any reason to decide—until now.

"Maybe that was the case for me until I met you."

"I hoped you would tell me that, Nicola. That's why I asked. I wanted to be sure. Time to go. *Arrivederci, amore mio.*"

“*Arrivederci, Raffi,*” I said, and we hung up.

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The next morning Sandy and I met over breakfast. We had agreed we would attend mass together. He explained that he continued the tradition of fasting for three hours before taking communion, and we were going to attend the high mass at eleven o’clock, so we met at seven thirty for breakfast. He was already down when I arrived, and on his plate was an assortment of what looked like cakes and pastries.

“They have started to make the Easter breads and cakes, and I can see no better time than at breakfast to enjoy a small taste of them all. This is my favourite, *ciambellone*.”

He held up a slice of something that looked like a cross between cake and bread. It was yellow inside and had a dark brown crust that was glazed.

“It is made in a ring. It may be too dry for your taste. I usually dip it in my coffee, and this is *ricotta* pizza, my favourite. It is a combination of *ricotta* cheese, flour, butter, sugar and chocolate chips with a generous dash of maraschino liqueur. Try it.”

I tried them all. Sandy was right. The glazed bread was far too dry for my taste. *Maybe if I added a little butter*, I suggested. “Sacrilege,” replied Sandy with a fake frown. I did it anyway and it was a major improvement. The soft cheese pizza tasted a bit like our *ostkaka*, but it was not quite as sweet. I told Sandy that I was going to save room for lunch and brewed myself a cup of tea.

We drove into the center of the city and then up to the castle, *Castello Montforte*, that was placed up on a hill overlooking the town. It looked like a toy castle: square, each side with sloping stone walls as high as they are wide topped with battlements, and cylindrical turrets on each corner. “This

is where the original town was located. It was the Montforte-Gambatesa family who built the castle in the early 14th century. The whole area was abandoned in the middle of the 18th century in favour of the low field where the city is now located. ‘Low field’ in Italian is *Campo Basso*.”

We walked down to the church, *San Bartolomeo*, which was at the bottom of the hill where the castle was perched. I promised to fetch the car when mass was over so that Sandy did not have to walk back up the slope, otherwise we would have driven down. I was beginning to feel the weight being added to my frame, even though I did try to eat in moderation, and I tried to find as many opportunities as I could to get some exercise.

“We could have gone to the Cathedral, but I prefer *San Bartolomeo* because it is older and has more character. It dates from the twelve hundreds and is in the Romanesque style.”

“It doesn’t look like any of the churches we have in Sweden. Is our style Swedenesque?”

“You might say that about the small churches,” replied Sandy with a laugh. “but the big churches, like the ones in Uppsala and in Linköping follow the architectural style principles in France, Italy and Germany that were current when they were built.”

The inside of the church was very different from what I remembered from my end-of-school-year visits to the churches in Sweden. Some of the smaller churches on the west coast, south and north of Göteborg, have model ships hanging from the ceiling, held in place by nearly invisible wires. They have chandeliers that hold real candles that are lit at Christmas and Easter and on *Sancta Lucia Dagen* on the 13th of December. The walls of the Swedish churches I had seen were whitewashed and bare and there were no statues or paintings. In one of those churches the paint that covered the walls was being carefully removed to reveal the early Christian artwork.

We were early and people were arriving while men and women and boys and girls moved around the altar fixing flowers, lighting candles, opening up big prayer books and getting everything ready for the service. Palm Sunday is always the Sunday before Easter Sunday, Sandy had explained, and it commemorates Christ arriving in Jerusalem on a donkey. Apparently, this was the last straw for the Jewish leaders and they decided that he had to be gotten out of the way.

“What are those plaques on the walls?” I counted fourteen of them, seven on each side of the church.

“Those are *le stazioni della Via Crucis*, the Stations of the Cross. They depict the last days of Christ’s life and his death by crucifixion. All during Lent, on each Friday, there is a service when the faithful gather to pray at each station.”

The altar area was full of priests in purple-coloured robes. They walked around and down the central aisle splashing water on everyone and swinging a smoking container. All the while they and the choir and the people were singing. During the service everyone stood up, sat down and kneeled down in unison, as if there was someone giving a cue, but I could not see who it was. There was a sermon in Italian given by one of the younger priests who did not have on one of the more decorative robes. Of course I could not understand what he said. Sandy told me later that this priest was a fly fisher and a member of the local fly fishing club, and he was a regular visitor to the river we would be fishing the next day, but since this was the busiest and most important week in the Roman Catholic calendar, it was unlikely we would meet him on the water.

We returned to the hotel around noon. Lunch would be served at one-thirty. Sandy suggested that we sit in the lounge.

“How do people learn to do all of those things that go on during a Catholic mass? It must be hard for people to convert from another religion. I’ve never had any religion, so I have no idea what becoming a Catholic means. Is learning when to kneel and when to stand and when to sit at mass part of the test people have to take to be accepted?”

Sandy laughed out loud. “That’s the easy part. Most people just do what the person in front of them does. That’s why it looks like a stadium wave whenever there’s a change of position. The hard part is actually accepting the basic rules of the religion that are summed up in the creed recited at each mass. To do that all you have to do is suspend belief in the laws of the universe. People who are born Catholic learn how to do that from birth. It gets more difficult as one grows older, especially for those of us who remain Catholic, but it’s not impossible. If you are interested, I’ll be your coach.”

“I don’t think I am ready for such a big step,” I said with a smile, and then I added, “I have never understood the purpose of religion, probably because my parents were so strict in their atheistic beliefs, and also because I never felt the need to think about it.”

“Ever since humans could think, some of them wanted to know why bad things happened. Why did it rain too much or too little; why was it too hot or too cold; why did the winds blow too strong, or not enough; why did the young child die and the old person continue to live? Against the forces of nature, humans are helpless creatures. Religion’s function, according to some thinkers like H.L. Mencken, is to provide access to the powers that control one’s destiny, and its sole purpose is to convince those powers to be friendly to him or to her. This sounds cynical, but I think it explains religion in a very down-to-earth manner. Another view is that there is an unseen order to everything, and religion helps us to align and adjust ourselves to that order. In the former view, we try to change the minds of the supernatural

beings, and in the latter view we try to change ourselves. If you look at all religions, they promote one or the other or both of those positions.”

“What is the Catholic way of thinking?”

“Christianity, including Catholicism, Judaism and Islam all claim there is only one way to be saved, and that is by praying to their one, true god. These religions are each a bit of both, I would say. They offer an explanation of the world we see and the world we cannot see, but they provide for a god who will respond to our prayers. For myself, I do not believe there is anything but natural forces controlling my destiny, so my reason for taking part in the rituals, including attending mass, is to remind myself of what I have done recently—and what I haven’t done—to be a better member of the many communities to which I belong.”

“I don’t see what standing, kneeling and sitting at different times has to do with either of those reasons for religion,” I replied, challenging.

“The mass has been carefully designed to keep people from falling asleep while they are praying for favors or recounting their transgressions.”

That was enough for me on the topic of religion. I changed the subject. I felt it was time to ask him why he was making this trip. Once I decided to act, there was only one way to do it, and that was the most direct way possible.

“Raffi said that she was worried that you didn’t want to continue living much longer, and this fishing trip was your way of saying good-bye to everyone.”

There was no smile or frown on his face. He was quiet for more than a few seconds. “I might have had those thoughts just after Francesca died, but they disappeared, gradually.” He paused, as if he was gathering his thoughts and then continued. “I have enjoyed fishing for many years. I have made

elaborate plans for trips with friends, or I have just picked up when the spirit grabbed me to try my luck on one of my favourite streams. But at a certain point, one begins to think that the hands and arms and legs and eyes and even the brain will not cooperate as they always did to catch fish. I have seen it in some of my friends. At some point they could not fish anymore. I saw it with Francesca's father, not with fishing but with hunting. Gradually, he could not put all of the pieces of the puzzle together. This trip is both a personal test to understand where I am in my own journey through life, whether the body parts are still able to do what I ask them to do, or whether I have to begin to accept that they don't. It is also a visit, perhaps a last one, perhaps not, to all of the places where I have fished in my own country, to enjoy the sights and smells and, most of all, to eat the foods. I want to relive some of the best moments of my life and maybe experience new ones. That's why I am taking this trip."

"Well, I can't judge whether you were better at catching fish before, but I can say you are very good at catching them now."

He smiled. I saw that his eyes were filled with tears. Mine did as well.

"Thank you, Nicklas. I have had one precious moment so far on this trip that I will always keep with me. It is when I saw you together with my goddaughter. I said you played like children. It reminded me so much of Francesca's and my life together. I have a loving son and daughter-in-law, grandchildren, and the world's best goddaughter who I thought would never find someone she could consider an equal on the water or in the home. No, Nicklas, unless I slip and drown, I hope to have many more days of fishing."

I felt relieved, and I planned on telling Raffi this good news as soon as I had the chance. We could see that lunch guests were arriving so it was time to take our seats in the dining room. The room was elegant without being gaudy. That was true of the entire hotel. It was a relatively newly built

hotel, Sandy had said, but the architectural style was eighteenth century classical. “I never liked designing modern buildings with neo-Roman, neo-Greek, Gothic, Renaissance or Baroque details, but, for some reason, I don’t mind this building.”

Eight of us sat at the table together. After introductions in Italian and English, we settled into our seats. The first course arrived. It was a fixed menu so we were all eating the same food, like at one of the many sports banquets I had attended, but the food at those dinners was hardly in the same category as this. Large, colourful plates filled with slices of sausages and ham and cheese were placed on the tables while waiters and waitresses poured red wine in each of the glasses. Smaller plates of bruschetta filled in the empty space on the table.

“Molise is a province of herbs,” said Sandy, “and they use them in as many ways as they can. This a typical antipasto with different types of cured meats: *soppressata*, *capocolli*, *salsiccie*, *ventricina* and *prosciutto*. The *salsiccie* is *al finocchio*, made with fennel, the secret ingredient of the people who live in *gli Appennini centrale*.”

“Your friend said that you and he are on a fishing trip,” the woman sitting to my right said. She looked to be about Sandy’s age. She introduced herself as Roberta Ferri. “Is the fishing better here in Italy than where you come from? I believe he said you were from Sweden.”

“The fishing has been very good here these last two weeks. We still have ice on some of our lakes and rivers back home. Sweden is a big country so the places to fish are farther apart than in Italy. Maybe it’s not better or worse; it’s different.”

“What do you do when you’re not fishing?”

“I worked for a car company, but it does not look like it will stay in business.”

“That’s what most Italians say about our car companies, that they don’t look like they will stay in business, but somehow they do.”

We both laughed. Sandy, who was sitting across the table from me, gave me one of those looks that men give to men when they see that they are charming a woman.

“The next course was something my late husband really loved,” said *Signora Ferri*. “This is really one of our local Campobasso specialties, called *calcioni di ricotta*. Everyone makes it with their own secret ingredient. I have not yet tasted it here at *Rinascimento*.”

“They look like fried ravioli.”

“That is what they are. The filling is *ricotta* and *provolone* cheeses, diced *prosciutto* and a generous portion of parsley. Along with the *calcioni* we serve a dish made with fried artichokes, cauliflower and potato croquettes mixed with sweetbreads and brains, all covered with melted *scamorza*.”

Provolone and *scamorza* were new for me. *Signora Ferri* explained that these were cheeses from the southern parts of Italy. Both are made with cow’s milk. *Provolone* is a hard, sharp cheese when it is aged, sweet when it is young. *Scamorza* is similar to the more familiar *mozzarella*, but it has a stronger taste. It has a soft texture and a white colour. When the cheese process has been completed it is formed into balls that are hung by a string tied around them a third of the way down from the top.

I could have devoured a few dozen of those Italian ravioli-like popovers. They were really delicious. But I kept my intake down to six. The side dish was also very tasty. There was just enough of the melted *scamorza* to bind it all together without overwhelming all of the other ingredients. Mamma used

to make a dish with *blomkål*, *falukorv* and *tomater* topped with slices of American cheddar cheese that was baked in the oven. It didn't have a name, like *Sjömans biff* or *Biff ala Lindström*. It was just Mamma's *blomkål med falukorv*. It was one of my favourite meals.

The main course was roasted lamb that had been cooked on a spit. It was served with stuffed sweet peppers. "How do they come up with these mixtures that all taste so different and are all so delicious?" I commented to *Signora Ferri*. The stuffing is made with breadcrumbs, anchovies, *peperoncino* flavoured with basil and parsley, she explained. The mixture is sautéed in a frying pan and then chopped tomatoes are added and cooked together. The sweet peppers are first roasted over an open flame and then dipped in cold water to loosen the skin. After they are peeled, they are cut below the stem and all the seeds are removed. Then they are stuffed and then baked in an oven.

I had no room for dessert, but I was not going to be allowed to leave the table until I had tasted one, small bit of every one of the offerings. They were mostly fried dough in different shapes and sizes and with different toppings or fillings. With these was served a dark, thick liqueur called *Nocino*. It is made from green walnuts, I was told. It felt like it had the kick of a strong *aquavit*. It was very sweet.

When lunch was finished I excused myself from the company and went out for a long walk. It was almost dark when I arrived back at the hotel. Sandy was sitting in the same place where we had been before the meal. I sat down with him long enough to make the plans for our departure the next day and to deliver my message: "I am not eating for a week!"

"We'll see how you hold up once we are in Benevento."

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Early on Monday morning we left the Grand Hotel Rinascimento and headed to the *Fiume Volturno* near Telese Terme in Campania. We drove south through the town and then along the *Strada statale Sannitica*. The road bends around the mountain range with *Monti del Matese* rising up from the valley. We turned off to the west toward Pontelandolfo and drove on a winding rural road through small villages until we reached Amorosi a little over an hour-and-a-half after we left the hotel.

Along the way we talked about fly selection.

“I’ve been thinking about what Alberto Abbate was saying about choosing the right fly,” I said, opening the topic. “Did you ever think about learning more about matching the hatch or discovering exactly what the fish are eating at that particular time?”

“Yes, every time I met Alberto,” replied Sandy with a laugh, “but then I quickly put those thoughts out of my head. It’s another kind of fishing. Why didn’t you study entomology?”

“I figured I would need to carry around too many flies or have my fly tying gear with me all the time.”

“Alberto has a fly collection that would make Orvis feel understocked. You know Orvis?”

“I know it makes reels and rods and sells other sporting equipment.”

“Its headquarters are in Manchester, Vermont in the United States. It has stores around the world. Even though clothes take up the majority of floor space in most of the stores these days, they still have a very large selection of well-tied flies. Alberto is one of their best customers.”

“Shall we try to match the hatch today, just for a change?”

“Why not. I have my trusty **The Art & Science of Fly Fishing** with its short, sweet and useful chapter on entomology, and my little net for scooping up the critters.”

Sandy had explained that a fishing association, called *Onlus Fiume Volturno*, had created a two-kilometer stretch of ‘recommended no-kill’ fishing on the river. So ‘no-kill’ is not mandatory; fishers are asked to return their catch. It has become a popular spot for both fly- and spin-fishers because it is well managed, has excellent water conditions and there are plenty of brown and rainbow trout. Sandy said that we might have a lot of company, but when we arrived we spotted only one car and two fly fishers. We put on our waders but left our rods and other gear in the car, taking only the book, the net, our coffee thermos and cups, walked down river from the two fishermen and started our investigation of life in, on and adjacent to the stream.

“This is as good a place as any to start,” suggested Sandy pointing to an undercut spot along the river where we could sit comfortably and look at the stream. The surface was relatively slow moving where we decided to station ourselves, while both up and down river there were riffles. We settled in, I took out the thermos, Sandy the cups, and I poured coffee for us both. We watched the slow moving surface for signs of life, both from fish and from insects. It took a few minutes for our eyes to adapt.

“It looks like the bottom is stony. What does that tell us?”

“Let’s see what Lenox Dick has to say about that. Round bodies are out. *‘Round-bodied nymphs live in silt and slow moving water.’* That leaves oval-bodied mayfly and stonefly nymphs, caddis and every other type of insect that swims on or under the water.”

“O.K. I do see a few flies hovering over the water, but I don’t see any fish rising to take them.”

“The fish are in there. They are down there on the bottom among the rocks. There! There’s one, tail up, poking down next to that big boulder, rooting out a nymph or caddis pupa. Dick says the caddis and stoneflies emerge at night, so the flies over the water are either emerging mayflies or they are spinners coming back to lay their eggs. Since the trout don’t seem too interested in them, they must be spinners. There aren’t enough of them for even a light snack.”

“It sounds like we are narrowing it down to nymphs and caddis larva, rather than emerging mayflies or duns, or caddis pupae, right? Shall I turn over a few rocks on the bottom and use the net to collect what comes up?”

“Let’s finish off the coffee and see if anything comes out of the water.”

We sat for another half hour sipping the *Classic Kaffe* I had brewed that morning before we left the hotel. It was still piping hot. We watched the water’s surface for any sign of escaping mayflies, but saw none. A few small trout slurped down a spent spinner or two. I finally took the net into the stream, along with Sandy’s wading staff, pushed the staff between some stones and scooped up what floated out from under them. Sandy had placed a saucer from one of our coffee cups on the grass between us. I carefully picked out the insects from the net and placed them on the saucer. I also had picked up a couple of caddis larva. These specimens looked like miniature concrete sewer pipes.

“I was fishing with my *Morbror Micke* when I was in my early teens. We had caught a lot of trout and brought them home to clean, rather than doing it on the river. Mamma was watching as her sink was filling up with sand and pieces of twigs and leaves. ‘Do fish need ruffage?’ she asked. *Morbror Micke* laughed and explained to us both that the caddis larva were trout delicacies, but that they had to take them in their casings in order to get what was hiding inside.”

“I’d say there’s a fair chance we would pick up a few trout with a good imitation of those encased larva, wouldn’t you?”

He showed me the hand drawn illustrations of the different insects Lenox Dick had made. They were simple, but provided all of the detail that was needed to tell one fly from another.

“Now I remember the other reason I gave up on being a match-the-hatch expert.”

“What is it?”

“Matching the imitation to the real thing when it came time to use them. The flies in my boxes were not labelled ‘oval-bodied mayfly nymph’ or ‘caddis spent spinner’. They have names like Yellow Humpy, Adams Purple Parachute and Woolly Bugger. It seemed that I had to know the history of every fly I owned and to have total recall when I discovered the exact fly the fish were taking.”

“I agree with you, Nicklas,” offered Sandy, and he took a fly off the fly-drying patch on his vest and held it up for us both to see. “This is one of my favourite patterns. What is it?”

“It’s a wet fly in my book, a Leadwing Coachman, I think. I fish it across and down. I guess it’s supposed to represent a mayfly or stonefly nymph, or maybe a caddis pupa when the wings have appeared.”

“Maybe it doesn’t matter which one it is as long as it catches fish, but if we are really going to match the hatch we should be able to decide, don’t you think?”

“I think it is a mayfly dun,” which was a pure guess.

“Dick says that mayfly duns have wings that are ‘smokey’ and dull in appearance’. I believe these wings look both smokey and dull, so I think you are correct.”

“By the time we figure all of this out we have lost half a day of fishing and the hatch is over,” I said, and we both laughed louder and harder than we had since we were in the Trieste fishing shop with Rosso Grosso.

When we stopped and caught our breath, Sandy suggested we put our new-found knowledge to use and catch a few fish, which we did. I fished larva pupa and Sandy fished a non-mistakable imitation of a caddis nymph. The Leadwing Coachman went back on Sandy’s fly drying patch and stayed there for the rest of the day. The largest fish of the day was a half-kilo brown that took on a #14 pupa I presented on a short drift.

It was close to five when we walked back to the 1800ES. The two other fishermen were pulling off their waders and storing their rods. They looked quite similar to one another. As we approached I could see that they were twins. They were rather short and overweight. They seemed to have a very jolly temperament. They wore wire-rimmed glasses and each of them had a hearing aid in one ear, one on the left and the other on the right. Sandy spoke first, in Italian. I guessed he was asking them how they did. They smiled, nodded, showed him the flies they had been using—caddis nymphs and pupa. Then one of the twins spoke in English to me, presenting himself and then his brother.

“My name is Carlo Savino, and this is my brother Armando.”

We shook hands as I introduced myself. Sometimes, when you shake hands with a person you feel that the person is actually interested in meeting you and maybe you would like to get to know that person. That’s how I felt when I exchanged greetings with Carlo and Armando.

“Signor Carlotti has told us that you are a Swedish engineer who is taking a break from his work, and that you and he have been fishing together for the past few weeks,” said Carlo.

“That’s right. I feel that we have been doing more eating than fishing, but we have managed to catch our share of fish.”

“We are on our way to Benevento to Hotel Antiche Terme and then planning to come back here to fish tomorrow,” interjected Sandy.

“We are also going back to Benevento,” said Carlo. “That is our family home where our parents and most of our relatives still live. I live in Milano and Armando in Napoli. We are here with our families for *Pasqua*. Our home is in the center, less than a kilometre from the Antiche. Would you like to join us for dinner this evening?”

Sandy looked at me and I at him.

“Nicklas is fasting for the Easter week and I am afraid that we both have been enjoying the foods of the regions we have visited perhaps a bit too much. We were in Campobasso yesterday where we had a dinner that will last for a day or so more.”

“Then let’s plan to meet here tomorrow and have a lunch on the river together,” said Carlo. “We’ll bring everything.”

We agreed, finished packing up and then followed them to Benevento. Sandy explained that the Duett was at a used car dealer and repair workshop close to the hotel. It was owned by two brothers and it was named simply *Fratelli Contadina*, The Contadina Brothers. They used the Duett in their showroom, and they would do the same with the 1800ES until Sandy picked it up or gave them the go-ahead to sell it.

“We’ll pick it up after checking into the hotel. Carlo and Armando will be surprised when we arrive in a new classic tomorrow,” Sandy said with a chuckle.

The thirty-six kilometre journey took about an hour. Armando, who was at the wheel of their Fiat Multipla, circa 2004 model, seemed to have a

similar driving style as Sandy, with one speed: SLOW. From Amorosi, we drove around the northern edge of the *Parco Regionale Taburno-Camposauro*, which is part of the *Parco Nazionale del Taburno*. We were escorted to our hotel entrance. Carlo and Armando got out and bid us farewell. We agreed to meet at 9.00 on the river the following day.

Hotel Antiche Terme sits on a hill overlooking the *Ponte Vanvitelli* crossing over the *fiume Calore*, which runs through the center of Benevento. It has the look of a castle with plaster walls the colour of salmon flesh and cream-coloured trim around the large windows. Check-in went quickly and we were helped up to our rooms by two young men very well dressed in hotel uniforms. Both of our rooms faced toward the river. Mine was large and bright with light yellow walls and red umber curtains. We met in the lobby half an hour later to drive the short distance to pick up the car.

Driving out of the hotel parking area we were immediately on a familiar road: *Corso Giuseppe Garibaldi*. Sandy was driving. He took a short detour, turning off to the left on to *Via Traiano* to show me the *Arco di Traiano*, the monumental arch which Emperor Trajan had built between 114 and 117 A.D.



“There is also a Roman Theater built by Trajan’s successor, Hadrian, in 126 A.D. They are both very well preserved. Benevento became a Roman colony in the middle of the third century B.C. When the Romans took it from the Samnites, it had a name that did not sit well with the conquerors:

Maleventum, signifying an ‘evil event’. They changed it to Beneventum, meaning the opposite. It has become Benevento in modern Italian.”

We reached our destination. I could see the car, a two-tone orange and white 1953 Volvo PV445 Duett, inside the small showroom. I had done some Internet research on the car while we were driving. On July 4th, 1953, Volvo delivered its first Duett. So Sandy’s car was really a classic. It wasn’t the first model delivered. That went to one of the founders of the company, Assar Gabrielsson and Gustaf Larson.

Two men, both rather tall and thin, stood outside the entrance door, and they had wide grins on their faces as we stopped the 1800ES within a few meters of them and climbed out. Except for their similar height and facial features, they were quite different in appearance. To start with, one was dressed in a suit that hung loosely on his bony frame. The other was dressed in workshop overalls and had grease on his hands and face.

They do not speak a word of English,” advised Sandy.

“*Buona sera, Signore Carlotti,*” said the mechanic brother.

“*Buona sera, Franco. Buona sera, Umberto,*” returned Sandy. He said something in Italian and then turned to me and said that he told them they had taken very good care of his old friend. Sandy had brought along two presents, and I assumed he told the brothers that it would be fine if they opened them after we had left because they brought them inside and then returned. They talked for awhile in Italian.

“They said they could have sold it a hundred times, and it has probably helped them to sell at least a dozen more cars by bringing customers into their showroom. They said the 1800ES will be even more of a draw.”

Umberto opened the large windowed doors to the showroom and drove out the Duett. The 1800ES would go into the shop for reconditioning before

being placed on display. Sandy checked to see that the suitcase he had packed with a new set of clothes was where it should be in the back of the Duett. It was, of course. Then he slid into the driver's seat and I into the passenger's seat and we drove away with Franco and Umberto standing together waving good-bye. It had a familiar feel. I had been inside this car many times in my life, from my earliest years. *Morfar, farfar, farbrors* and *morbrors*, friends and acquaintances all had one at one time or another. It was sparse. The comfortable seats looked oversized for the cabin. The large steering wheel and the long stick shift on the floor were its most pronounced features. The dashboard was less than a decimetre wide, formed in a V-shape with the bar separating the two panes in the windshield stemming from the bottom of the V. I relaxed and enjoyed the slow ride back to the hotel.

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We met on the river at nine a.m. and fished until noon. There were few rises; most of the action was under the surface. Each of us caught a couple of nice trout, but we had to work for them. The four of us met back at the parking area, and I wondered what sort of 'light lunch' the brothers Savino had in store for us. Carlo took out from the back of the Fiat Multipla a large picnic basket and a cooler, while Armando set up a sizeable folding table on which he placed a camping stove. Armando then removed four folding chairs and a smaller table from the side of the van. This looked like it was going to be a serious lunch.

"We thought we would make you one of our specialties, *Mozzarella in Carrozza*," explained Carlo. "They are nothing more than simple grilled cheese sandwiches, so you don't have to worry too much about breaking your fast, Nicklas." He gave a wink to Sandy, who seemed to get the joke.

Out from the cooler came eggs, oil, a *mozzarella* that was not round but oblong in shape, a carton of milk and a glass jar that looked like it was filled with some sort of sauce. From the basket came a large loaf of bread and a jar of bread crumbs, as well as a heavy sauce pan, a smaller sauce pan, plates, bowls, cutlery, five smallish glasses, a cutting board, a roll of wax paper, a roll of paper towels and a utensil for dipping in and removing food from a deep fryer. Carlo and Armando set to work. Armando started the stove, filled the large sauce pan half way up with oil and placed it on one of the burners. He spooned out the sauce into another pan and placed that on a low heat on the other burner. Carlo whisked together four eggs and two decilitres of milk in a large bowl. In a second bowl he poured another two decilitres of milk, and then spread the bread crumbs on a sheet of waxed paper held in place at the corners with four of the glasses. Armando cut the loaf of bread into three centimetre thick slices and then cut out rounds from each slice using the fifth glass as a cutter, just like Herb the Canadian salmon fishing guide used a glass to form his buttermilk biscuits. Carlo made one centimetre thick *mozzarella* slices using a wire cheese cutter. I was fascinated to see what they were going to do with all of these ingredients.

“*Carrozza* means ‘carriage’,” said Carlo. “We are not making carriages, but the wheels of the carriage.”

Carlo placed a slice of cheese on a bread round. The cheese was just slightly narrower in diameter than the bread. This must have been planned from the start. Another piece of bread was placed over the cheese forming a sandwich. Carlo dipped the sandwich quickly into the bowl of milk and then pinched the bread pieces together to seal the edges. Each side of the sandwich was placed on the bread crumbs and then rolled like a wheel on the short end to seal the edge even more securely. Finally, the sandwich was dipped into the egg mixture, placed in the hot oil and fried until it was golden brown on both sides. When it was removed it was placed on a on a

plate covered with paper towels to drain. All this went very quickly and within several minutes there were half a dozen of the piping hot bread and cheese packages ready to eat.

“If you like, you can try it with an anchovy sauce,” suggested Carlo. “It’s made with melted butter, chopped anchovy fillets, parsley, capers and lemon juice.”

“I’ll try one without it first.”

“Careful you don’t burn yourself. They’re hot.”

I picked one up and took a small bite, just to test how hot it was. A puff of steam escaped. I worked slowly, blowing on the edge to cool it down. By the time the last bite was ready to finish I could pop it in without worrying that I would burn the roof of my mouth. What a great variation on a grilled cheese sandwich, I thought. Maybe a spot of *Slotts senap* would be all that was needed to make it perfect. I didn’t mention this.

“Let’s see what the anchovy sauce adds,” I said as I took another one, dropping on a spoonful of the sauce. The sauce was wonderful, but I decided I preferred the simple taste of the cheese and bread. The twins and Sandy were definitely anchovy sauce fans. I’m not sure how many I ate, but it was at least one less than I wanted to eat. I gave myself a pat on the back for exhibiting exemplary will power in the face of such temptation.

I had brewed an extra thermos of coffee that morning that we had borrowed from the hotel. Carlo and Armando had never tasted Swedish coffee before, and they seemed genuinely pleased by the experience. There were not enough compliments to make on the lunch. Sandy was obviously extremely touched by their generosity and hospitality. We arrived finally to the subject of fishing the river flowing in front of us.

“This is our home water,” said Armando in halting English with a very heavy accent. I guessed that this was the reason he had been a man of few words. But he spoke slowly so it was not difficult to understand him. “We grew up fishing here with our father and our uncles and cousins. The best time is May and June when the *Ephemera Danica* hatch. It is also special because here in August the *Oligoneuriella rhenana* hatch. The river cooks with rising native brown trout and the stocked rainbows.”

“At this time of year the mayfly and caddis nymph patterns work very well,” continued Carlo. “The holdover fish are hungry and the rainbows will eat anything that looks like food. In a few weeks they will start to be very selective.”

“Will you come back to fish here in May?” I asked.

“If we don’t it will be the first time in thirty years, since we began coming here thirty years ago,” replied Armando.

“It is getting more difficult these days with our business,” added Carlo.

“What is your business?” I asked.

“You could not have failed to notice that Armando and I each wear a hearing aid?”

Sandy and I both nodded in the affirmative.

“Our company is developing a prosthetic device—a substitute for a part of the inner ear—to mitigate the effects of specific types of deafness or hearing loss. Armando is a medical doctor with a PhD in medical science. I have a PhD in industrial engineering. We have been in the research and development phase for almost ten years and we are finally reaching the point when our prototype is given approval in the United States and in the European Union. The next stage is the hardest, actually producing the products. Once it is produced it will not be difficult to sell. It will sell itself.”

Armando continued: “We have something called ‘nonsyndromic deafness’, which is hereditary. Our father has it as do our uncles and as did their father. Ours is mild, with only partial hearing loss in one ear, called unilateral deafness. One of our uncles has bilateral deafness, which means he is completely deaf in both ears. We can both speak normally because we have postlingual hearing loss. One uncle has congenital hearing loss; he could not hear before he learned to speak.”

“The problem is caused by damage to parts of the inner ear and the middle ear,” added Carlo. “We are working on the middle ear. It contains three tiny bones. They transfer sound from the eardrum to the inner ear. If these bones are incorrectly formed they do not perform their job properly. Replacing them is extremely difficult because the bones have to be shaped specifically for the individual. We have discovered how to create the material for the bones, and we have tested a few methods to make the moulds, but we do not think this will give us the precision we need. We are still working on that part of it.”

“It sounds like a perfect application for 3D printing,” I blurted out, feeling like a complete fool after saying it. I was talking to two scientists with doctorates who had been working on their idea for over a decade. What could I possibly add to their knowledge?

“We think so too,” said Carlo with a big smile, “but neither of us knows anything about it and we have not been able to find anyone in our network of contacts who does. Do you?”

“Well, in my job at Saab, or my former job, because I’m not sure I have a job any longer or whether there is a company left to have a job with, I started to research 3D printing for some of the new sensors we were developing. I have some things on my iPad that I can show you, but it’s back at the hotel.”

Carlo and Armando did not say anything but looked at each other, smiling and nodding. Sandy had been quietly listening, savouring his coffee. He spoke: "Can I suggest that you come to the hotel after our day of fishing where we can have a quiet drink together and Nicklas can show you his work?"

"Yes, that would be perfect," replied Carlo. "Could I make a further suggestion that you come to our home afterward where we will not talk any business but enjoy a light Easter week dinner with the rest of our families?"

We agreed that this sounded like a superb plan. I was certain that what they all meant by 'light' would be more than a few dinners and lunches back home. After collecting all of the cooking and eating utensils and placing the tables and chairs and camp stove back in the Multipla, we spent the rest of the afternoon catching and releasing a dozen or so fish among the four of us. We continued to use mayfly nymph and caddis larva patterns with the barbs flattened for quick extractions of the flies. My mind, however, was less on my fishing than on how one might go about modelling a tiny middle ear bone for producing it on a 3D printer.

By four p.m. we were packing up and leaving the river. It was then that Armando commented on the car.

"Is that the same car you had yesterday?" he asked. "It isn't, is it?"

"Well, no it isn't," replied Sandy with a smile. "I was wondering if you would ever notice."

"We have never been that interested in cars," offered Carlo, "as you can see by the car we are driving. Armando has an even older Fiat."

"It's one of my hobbies, owning and driving old Swedish cars," said Sandy, "and I don't have a Maserati at home in the garage."

“That’s funny, because we do,” replied Armando and he and Carlo burst out laughing. “It belonged to our great uncle. I’m not sure when it was driven last.”

Carlo and Armando stood and looked at the Volvo, smiles on each of their faces, most probably thinking what they should say that would be accepted as a compliment. Apparently, they could think of nothing and continued to smile, nod and wait for the subject to somehow change.

“Shall I drive, Sandy?” I said, breaking the deadlock.

“Spendid idea.”

“We will come by your hotel at six and then we will take you to our family home around seven-thirty,” said Carlo. “Is that all right?”

“Very good,” answered Sandy, and we climbed into our cars and drove toward Benevento, following the route we had taken the day before.

“It will be interesting to meet the whole Savino family, don’t you think Nicklas?” said Sandy soon after we were on our way.

“It seems that all the men are partially or fully deaf. I assume they got the idea for their professions just to be able to work on the problem of deafness.”

“Some of us have our professions chosen for us by the circumstances of our own lives.” I understood what he meant. “Some see problems that others are having and decide to devote their time to finding cures, solutions, remedies or an opportunity to earn money. And others just fall into a job, find it interesting or fulfilling or good enough to pay the bills and keep on going until retirement. None of those reasons for working are better or worse than the other.”

“I hope they are not disappointed with what I’ll show them. I’m not an expert or anything of the sort. I’ve studied the technique and think it could be applied to what they’re doing.”

“Could one of those 3D printer gadgets produce a model of a building?”

“Oh, yes. That’s one of the applications that is very highly developed already. Small models can be produced of an entire building. To make larger models, the pieces of the building can be produced. A face of a building can be printed in extremely high detail, and any shape can be created. You can produce an entire building with rooms and doors and furniture. If you can draw it or scan it, you can print it.”

“Now this is getting very interesting.”

We were in the lounge when the twins arrived just after six. Sandy was wearing a new lighter weight grey tweed sport coat I had not seen previously, and a dark blue, herringbone patterned shirt with a burgundy bowtie dotted with jumping trout. He had on dark grey trousers and burgundy single buckle shoes. He was smoking his pipe while reading a newspaper. I had my iPad out and was looking through the material I had on 3D printing.

“*Buona sera*,” they said simultaneously.

“*Buona sera*,” Sandy and I replied.

“Do you mind my pipe?” asked Sandy, politely.

“Not at all,” answered Carlo. “We grew up in a house filled with pipe and cigar smoke, and it is the same today as it was then.”

“I have ordered my usual Bombay Gin martini, and Nicklas is having a Peroni beer. What shall I order for you?”

“*Strega Dolce*,” answered Carlo.

“What is *Strega*?” I queried.

“It’s Benevento’s special brew, a 40 proof liquor,” answered Armando. “*Strega* means ‘witch’, and Benevento is the city of witches. It stems from an old legend about an Egyptian cult that lived here in the time of the Romans. They worshipped *Isis*, the goddess of magic and mystery, and its practices continued even after the Romans accepted Christianity in the fourth century.”

Sandy ordered two *Strega Dolci* while Carlo explained that the drinks were made with mashed strawberries, dark rum, fresh lemon juice, some syrup for sweetening and a shot of *Strega*. Too sweet and strong for my taste, I thought.

“What do you think we should know about 3D printing, Nicklas?” asked Carlo after they had taken a few sips of their drinks.

“The main difference between this technique versus cutting it out from a solid piece of metal or stone, or moulding it, is that this is an additive process rather than a subtractive one. It’s more like building a house than carving a statue. What I know is that almost any kind of material can be used. Anything that can be drawn and modelled, whether it is a solid object or one that has an internal structure and an external shell, can be produced. The object is built up in very thin layers using a device that looks like a laser or ink jet printer. The printer head is driven by a computer-aided drawing that slices the solid model into the layers.”

“We can photograph the person’s middle ear bones using X-ray photography, and then feed those photos into a CAD program. We have gotten that far in order to make the injection molds,” said Carlo.

“Then you have come quite far. But the hard part will be finding the right equipment for working with the material you have created.”

I showed them a few videos of the 3D printing process in fast motion. One of them showed a printer making the bust of a person's head, and the person turned out to be me. Another showed the production of miniature space frame formed into a hemisphere. I showed them pictures of different types of equipment and examples of real products that were already being sold. It was clear that the twins saw the possibilities that this technique could offer.

"I guess these machines are very expensive," said Armando.

"They really vary in price from a few thousand Euro to millions."

We finished our drinks at around seven fifteen and walked out the entrance of the hotel. The Multipla was waiting for us and in it a late teenager.

"Our sister's son, Alfredo," said Armando. "He is our designated driver this evening."

If we had walked it would have taken us fifteen minutes at the most. I could have used the exercise, but it would have been a struggle for Sandy, and, I suspect, for the overweight twins as well. We drove through a portal near the end of a street and entered a very large courtyard with a three-car garage and paved parking along one side and a garden on the other. Three stories rose on the side we entered and on the side to the left. A high brick wall connected the left side to the garage on the right. There were a dozen-or-so teenagers and younger children in the garden when we drove in. We were introduced and each of them presented himself and herself, shaking hands. Most of the boys had obvious hearing and speech impediments, while the girls had none that I could notice. They were all well dressed and wore very big smiles on their faces, just like the twins.

There were many more people inside, and we met them all. Most of them lived in this great, big house in the middle of Benevento, where, we learned, the family had been since the early 1800s when the house was built. Slowly but surely we moved toward the dining table in a room large enough to seat the close to forty people who were there, excluding the infants. Sandy and I were placed across from each other in the middle of the huge table with Carlo's wife, Adelina, sitting to my right and Armando's wife, Assunta, sitting to Sandy's right. Not surprisingly, they were sisters, although not twins.

"Carlo says that you are travelling through Italia fishing with *Signor* Carlotti. Have you done this before?"

"This is the first time I have fished in Italy. It is really the first time I have travelled in Italy."

"Where did you start?"

"In Trieste. I was there when I learned that my company was in trouble. All the employees were told to take some time off. I decided to spend it fishing, and since I was already here, I decided to try it. Mr. Carlotti—he asked me to call him Sandy—and I met on the first river I fished in Friuli-Venezia Giulia. He asked me to join him and here we are."

"I suppose you have found that the food is very different from one region to the other, but that some things are quite similar."

"Yes, it seems the bread culture is similar, and the dried and cured meats are widespread. What are the specialities in Benevento?"

"You have already heard about *Strega*, our local liquor, from my husband and his brother. I can always tell when Carlo has had a *Strega Dolce*. He is not a regular drinker, nor is Armando. As you get further away from Napoli, less fish and shellfish and more meat is eaten. The biggest

difference between us and the central part of *Italia* is that our *maccheroni* sauce is usually without meat, just tomatoes. Theirs is mostly meat. We use *mozzarella* and *scamorza* cheeses as a main ingredient in our dishes, and not just on pizza or in salads.”

There was a carafe of red wine within easy reach of every place at the table, so it was simply a matter of filling your own glass when it was empty. The first dish arrived in very large and colourful ceramic serving bowls. It was *spaghetti* with a thin covering of tomato sauce. There were two dishes on the table at each place, both with similar colourful designs as the serving bowls. The top dish was a shallow bowl for the spaghetti, and the bottom dish was flat for the *secondi piatti*.

“The sauce is simply tomatoes, onions, garlic, basil, salt and pepper and olive oil. You can add your own grated *Pecorino Romano* cheese. There is hard evidence to back up the claim that tomato sauce on *maccheroni* was first used in Naples in the 1830s, but the rest of Italy has a difficult time accepting that fact.”

Adelina complimented me on my spaghetti-eating technique. I told her I had gotten lessons from a pro. There were no spoons on the table.

“Do you mind me asking how you and Carlo met?”

“It was through my sister, Assunta, who is two years older. She and Armando were both studying medicine at *Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II*. In English, it is the University of Naples Federico II. Since we lived in Napoli, I met Armando with Assunta when she brought him home for dinner one Sunday. He told us he had a twin brother who was studying engineering in the United States, and when he came home for the holidays we met. That was it. We sent a lot of letters between Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, where he was, and Napoli. I was studying

accounting. Five years later we were married and we both found positions in Milano.”

“Are you part of the company Armando and Carlo have?”

“Assunta and I each have a quarter share of the ownership, but we do not take part in the activities. Carlo is the only one working full time. Armando has research assistants who are doing the medical work, and they are funded through state investments for business development, a portion of which will have to be repaid if the company ever makes money.”

I left the subject there. The second course was arriving. It was artichokes in a tomato and meat sauce. Assunta explained that the meat is a combination of veal sweetbread, pork, veal and beef.

“It is the pancreas of the calf that we use, which is located close to the animal’s stomach. The dish is made in a terra cotta pot, like many of our dishes that combine meat and vegetables. The meats are browned with garlic and onion and then sautéed with white wine until it is reduced. Then a plain tomato sauce is added to cover the meat. When this thickens, the artichokes are added and the dish stews for another half an hour.”

There were slices of bread in baskets spread around the table. Not a drop of the sauce was left on any plate, and not a spoonful was left in the pot. We took a pause in the courses. Plates of raw vegetables and olives were passed around the table. I thought I could not say I felt like I was at home because my home was never like this, but it felt very good to be with the Savino family. Just before the next dish arrived, Assunta turned to me and said: “You will most likely recognize the next dish by its looks, but its taste will probably surprise you. It is *melanzane alla parmigiana*, or ‘eggplant parmesan’, as they say it English.”

It certainly did look like the dish I had eaten in the lunch restaurants around Chalmers when I was a student. These restaurants, with names like Rimini and Capri, served pizza and pasta, and were probably started by Italians who came to Sweden after the Second World War. They were taken over by successive generations of immigrants from Turkey, Greece the former Yugoslavian countries, and then Iran and Iraq. The pasta and pizza took on different flavours and *nasi goreng*, *kebab* and *souvlaki* were added to the menus. I took a bite of the wedge I had on my plate. All memories of what I had eaten before that was masquerading as this dish melted away.

“What’s the secret?”

“It’s not for vegetarians,” she replied with a smile. “There is sausage in it and fresh *mozzarella* cheese. The freshness of the cheese makes all the difference in the world.”

“I guess it has a lot of *Parmigiano* cheese as well,” I offered.

“The *parmigiano* in the name comes from a completely different word. It is *parmigiana*, a Sicilian word for a wooden window blind that is formed in layers, just like this dish.”

“So this is a Sicilian dish?”

“Sicily was part of the Kingdom of Napoli, which, during a period of time, was also called the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. We still consider that we are living in one region south of Roma, even though the politicians think otherwise.”

“I told Carlo and Armando that I was fasting this week because of all the food Sandy and I have been eating since we started on this journey, but if I were to be offered another small piece of this dish I could not refuse it.”

The adults did not leave the table until eleven. The children had been put to bed a few hours earlier after they ate their *gelato*. Carlo, Armando, their

father and uncles and some of the uncles' sons sat with Sandy and me for another hour or so before we were led to the Multipla for the short ride back to the hotel. Sandy and I would be leaving Benevento the next morning to drive to Napoli. We bid our hosts good-bye, but we had agreed that during the following week I would visit Carlo in Milano in his office.

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Chapter Seven

Relaxed

We drove out of the city on Wednesday morning to the south along the *Via delle Puglie* and the *Via Avellino* and connected to the SS88, the *Strada statale Benevento-Avellino*. Our first waypoint was Avellino. The plan was to be in Napoli by lunchtime for pizza and to eat dinner in a small restaurant that is Sandy's favourite in the middle of the old city, the Spanish Quarter, *Quartieri Spagnoli* he called it. The next day we would drive north to Roma, spend Easter there and then move on to a village called Broccostella, an hour east of Roma, near Sora, where we would fish the *fiume Fibreno*, a tributary to the *Liri*.

There is a faster way to make the trip from Benevento to Avellino. It is driving along the *Autostrada*, which first follows along the path of the *Via Appia* westward towards Brindisi before turning south. The SS88, which is more or less a straight line south following *La Valle del Sabato*, or the 'Saturday River Valley', is more direct, but slower. So, of course, we took the slower route.

"I've been thinking about my suggestion to visit Roma and see *il Papa* on Easter Sunday," said Sandy after we were clear of the city. "Maybe it's too much in too short a time, especially since you will go to Milano during the next week."

"Will we still go to Bologna right after Roma?"

"That was the idea, but there is so much to see along the way, like Siena and Pisa and Firenze. And I've had reports that the fishing in Piemonte and Aosta is starting to come along. What about going back to the original idea

to go to Broccostella and fish, and then to spend Easter in Bologna with my cousins? Then you can make the trip up to Milano to meet with Carlo.”

“What would you do if you were on your own? This is your trip and I’m supposed to be just tagging along.”

“I wouldn’t be going to Roma. I might have skipped Napoli, although I really do enjoy the restaurant where we will be eating. The next place we will fish is very special, so I might have stayed there an extra day or so, depending on the fishing. It’s in Lazio, so it has many of the dishes that are found in *Roma*. And I would have spent *Pasqua* in Bologna.”

“O.K. That settles it. Do you think it is too late for Raffaella to change her plans for the Easter weekend?”

“Why don’t you ask her yourself when we stop for coffee in Avellino.”

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Avellino is about one-third of the way from Benevento to Napoli. It was just before noon when we arrived there. After Sandy suggested I call Raffaella she was all I thought about. The rural scenery along the way was a blur. Sandy dozed off. I did make a mental note to ask about all of the *Sant’Angelo* sign variations I saw along the way. *Who was this Saint Angelo?* I would also ask him about the Sabato River we drove alongside. Just as we drove under the *Autostrada* and entered the city, Sandy awoke from his slumber.

“You can stay on this road marked SS88 until we come to *Via Francesco de Sanctis*, and then turn left.”

“What a great setting for a city with all of the mountains surrounding it. Everything looks new. Isn’t this an old city?”

“It’s a very old city, but bombs, earthquakes and volcanos have a way of making work for city planners, architects and builders. Over the centuries it

has been rebuilt many times. The earthquakes in the 1980s were especially damaging. During the last World War, the Allies bombed the city to try to dislodge the Germans, who had taken it over from the Italian army after we had capitulated. When the Germans decided that the city was lost, they dynamited the bridges and rails and roads.”

“I seem to remember one of my colleagues at Saab travelling down to the south of Italy to meet with a supplier. Are there automobile companies or suppliers close to here?”

“Right here in Avellino. *Fabbrica Motori Avellino*, the Avellino Engine Factory is here. It makes the engines for Fiat, Lancia and Alfa Romeo, of course, but it also makes them for Opel. You could say that Avellino is the center of the automobile industry in the south.”

“Are we meeting any of your friends here?”

“I have a second cousin here, my great uncle’s granddaughter. She works for *FMA*, I think in their human resources department. Shall I give her a call?”

“I guess we are a little short of time. Maybe if the other jobs don’t work out.”

We found the *pasticeria* where we would have coffee. As was our usual practice, we ordered *due caffè longi* in order to have large cups that we would use for the *Klassic Kaffe* I had brewed before we left our hotel. There was a large selection of cakes, cookies and pastries lined up on shelves behind a brightly polished, crystal clear glass display case.

“What is Avellino’s specialty?” I asked the woman standing behind the pastry case. She smiled but did not answer. Sandy provided the translation.

“Qual è la specialità di Avellino?”

“Tutto è speciale, ma facciamo le migliori sfogliatelle della città.”

“She says that everything is special, but they make Avellino’s best *sfogliatelle*. I can vouch for that claim because that is why we are here in this modest looking place.”

“What is it?”

“The name means ‘small, thin leaf’,” replied Sandy. “It looks like stacks of leaves. It is filled with a creamy and sweetened ricotta cheese. Once you have eaten one of the best, you will travel many kilometres out of your way to enjoy it again.”



Sandy asked for two of the *sfudge-ala-tell-he*, and added a small bag of cookies. We had our pick of tables. I took a bite of the pastry. It melted in my mouth, mixing the taste of the sweet creamy cheese filling with the wafer-thin flakes. Sandy was right.

“Why are there are so many places named after Saint Angelo along the way down here from Benevento?”

“It is not Saint Angelo that *Sant’Angelo* refers to, but the Angel Saint, *san Michele Arcangelo*, or Michael the Archangel. He became a favourite of the *Langobardi*,” answered Sandy, “The Angel Saint of the Lombards.”

“What about the Sabato River? Is it fishable?”

“It looks fishable, doesn’t it? It is one river I have never tried. I can’t explain why. One day I will have to do some investigating. Do you have any

more questions about our journey from Benevento to Avellino while I was napping?”

“Not for the moment. I am going to concentrate on this wonderful piece of pastry and enjoy my coffee, and let you do the same.”



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Before we returned to the car, I called Raffaella to tell her about our change of plans.

“Ciao, Raffi.”

“Ciao, Nicola.”

“We’re in Avellino. We just had coffee and something I cannot pronounce. It sounds like ‘sfudge-ala-tell-he’. It’s flaky, like our *wienerbröd*, and mine was filled with lemon-flavoured cream. Sandy’s was filled with chocolate cream.”

“You had my southern favourite, *sfogliatelle*: ‘svol-ya-tell-eh’.”

“Yes. We also bought a bag full of cookies, ‘must-ah-choley’, I think they’re called.”

“Yes, *Mostaccioli*. Almond cookies. Did you take all the ones shaped like fish?”

“How did you guess? We will soon leave for Naples. I have some news. We decided not to go to Roma, but to spend the time fishing in Broccostella and then to go to Bologna for Easter.”

“Wonderful! You don’t have to ask me if I will be there. I will.”

“I’m learning that you make life easier for me, Raffi. I have some more news. I met two men in Benevento, twin brothers. They were fishing on the *Volturno* when we were there. We talked and the next thing I knew we were invited to their family’s house for dinner. It turns out that they own a company together. It’s based partly in Naples, where one of the brothers is a doctor with a medical research lab. The other part is based in Milan, where the other brother is an engineer.”

“What do they make?”

“Right now, they don’t make anything. They plan to make something that can be implanted in a defective ear so that the person can hear. Their family has a disease that is inherited through the fathers that causes deafness. They are trying to find a way to beat the disease with a new inner ear.”

“Have they offered you a job?”

“No, but they asked me to visit them in Milan next week, after Easter. There is something about the idea and about the two men that makes me think I would like to work with them. They’re pretty good fly fishers as well.”

“It’s time for you and *Zio* to take a little break, and for us to spend some time together, don’t you think?”

“That’s exactly what I was thinking. We’ll be in Bologna on Saturday.”

“*Ce vediamosabato, cara*. I will see you on Saturday.”

“*Ciao*, Raffi. What does ‘*cara*’ mean?”

“You can look it up,” she said with a laugh. “*Ciao*, Nicola.”

I did a quick search on my phone. ‘Dear one’. It was good that I was sitting in a quiet place and had a few minutes to calm down. Raffi’s voice had begun to have a very strong effect on me.

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With Sandy at the wheel, we drove out of the city to the north and joined the A16. “That’s *Montevergine* you see to the right. It’s almost fifteen hundred meters high. On another day we would drive up past the *Santuario di Montevergine* and walk to the top where we could see *Vesuvio*, Napoli and the sea. Keep that in mind for the next time you pass this way. It’s a beautiful sight.”

We were in a valley, and it seemed to me that there should be a river somewhere. There wasn’t. The mountains to the north gradually disappeared after the exit to Baiano. Shortly after we passed Schiava and the road bent to the southeast, a single mountain with two peaks appeared on the horizon.

“There’s *Vesuvio*, Nicklas,” exclaimed Sandy pointing at the mountain that had appeared in our windscreen. “The Greeks who settled this area gave the volcano its name. It means ‘hurling violence’, and that it has surely done over the centuries. Pompei bears witness to what a volcano eruption can do.

Heavy clouds formed over the twin peaks as we passed the turnoff to Caserta and Roma. We were one of the few cars that used the cash lane in one of the first toll gates we had to pass through. The terrain had turned very flat on both sides. A familiar site came into view where the A16 ended and Sandy slowly steered the ‘53 Volvo PV445 Duett through the ramp that merged us onto the E45/A1 heading south. A big blue and yellow box with

the huge IKEA letters signalled that we were close to the city, but still far enough away so that anyone coming to the store would have to drive.

“Anything you need to pick up?” asked Sandy with a smile.

“I’ve got enough coffee for a week or so. It just doesn’t feel right to even think about going into an IKEA on this trip.”

“Enough said.”

We stayed on the A45/A1 as we passed a sign pointing toward Napoli. *Vesuvio* was in site again to the east. We continued until the exit for A56, *Aeroporto* and Napoli. Somewhere along the A56 the city and the sea revealed themselves.

I did not expect to see what I saw when we arrived in Naples. Actually, I didn’t know at all what I expected to see. ‘Naples’ or *Napoli*, were names of restaurants or fast food *kiosker* back home. I thought it might be a small city with fishing boats in a little harbour. I don’t know where that idea came from since I had never had a reason to think of Naples as a place where I would one day visit. It is a large city, bigger than Stockholm, with over a million inhabitants, I read on my iPad as we drove in over the hills to the northeast. “Listen to this, Sandy,” I said as I continued to read the description. *The dappled turquoise Mediterranean meets the light blue sky speckled with whiffs of clouds at the horizon.* “How do people come up with these ideas?”

“Believe it or not, people get paid a lot of money to write phrases like that. One of our friends was a travel writer, God rest his soul. He talked like that all the time. But we have the same with fishing writers, don’t we?”

I didn’t answer, but I thought about the only fishing material I read, the monthly *Flugfiske i norden*, or *FiN* as we call it for short. Sometimes the articles were full of descriptions about the trees and the sky and the coffee

they were brewing. I just want to know the name of the river, where the fisherman was standing when he caught the fish, whether he was fishing up, across or downstream and what fly he was using. That information, if it is included at all, always requires digging to find it.

We turned off the highway onto the *Via Don Giovanni Bosco*. *Visuvio* was visible again for a moment and then we were in the midst of the city.

“We are staying in the old center of Napoli in the Hotel Toledo. I have arranged for an indoor parking place for the car so we do not need to worry about carrying in all of our gear. Leave a car with anything valuable visible for just a minute in Napoli, and it will be stripped clean. We can then concentrate on our purpose for coming here: *pizza*.”



We manoeuvred through the narrow streets until we came to an even older part of the city with even narrower streets. I was beginning to get used to the feeling of Italian cities. If the centers were new, it meant they had either been bombed in a recent war or had been wiped out by a volcano or an earthquake of major proportions. If they were ancient, they were either off the fault line or upwind of a volcano or out of the crosshairs of all the

invaders who seem to have made their way up and down and across the peninsula.

The city felt dirty, I thought. Most buildings were covered with graffiti along the ground floor. When I was in my early teens I had friends who did it, and I went with them a few times. The fun was almost getting caught in the act and outrunning the police or the security guards. Seeing your ‘tag’ on the wall day after day as you passed it on the bus was also a small thrill. It was the stealing that I did not like, lifting spray cans from the hardware store. *Pappa* knew the owner of the hardware store in Kungsbacka, and I think he saw me take a can once. I walked in fear for a week thinking that the store owner would tell *pappa* and then I would be in real trouble. After that I stopped doing it and stopped hanging out with those friends. Since then, I had not thought much about graffiti. It was just there, appearing on the wall of a building that had been clean the day before. I just passed by it without taking any notice or making any judgments. Now, after a few weeks of seeing it in places that would obviously be more attractive without it, like here in this otherwise well-preserved part of an ancient city, I felt offended by it.

“It would look better without all the graffiti,” interjected Sandy into my musings.

“I was just thinking the same thing, but this isn’t the only place we have seen it. Nobody tells the kids why they shouldn’t do it.”

Sandy stopped the Volvo in front of the entrance to the hotel. Two young men appeared. One opened the door for me and the other did the same for Sandy. One of them repeated *buongiorno, buongiorno* a few dozen times and waited for us to take out what we needed for the overnight stay.

“Guido does not speak much English, and his cousin Domenico speaks even less.”

The Volvo disappeared with Domenico at the wheel while Guido carried our bags. We checked in and Guido guided us to our rooms. We had agreed to meet in the lobby in half an hour. I went down immediately and looked around. It was not so different from most of the hotels we had stayed in during the past three weeks or even the NH in Trieste where I had stayed many times on my business visits. *They all have a certain fragrance*, I thought. One of my work colleagues constantly dropped mints into his mouth to counteract the breath that came with heavy smoking. The hotels had a similar combination of odors. The furniture was a bit worn, but not shabby. The paint on the walls was faded, but the walls themselves were clean. In the rooms, the sheets were always crisp and white, and the bathrooms spotless. The public spaces seemed weary. Yes, weary, tired, like *mormor's* house when she became too old to clean like she had cleaned in her younger days.

Sandy came down. He had on the same brown corduroy slacks and herringbone sport coat he had worn during our trip from Benevento. He had changed into a newly ironed light blue shirt and a green paisley patterned bow tie with a matching handkerchief in his breast pocket. He was carrying a cane for the first time. I was wearing the jeans which had been newly washed and ironed in Benevento and the checkered shirt and dark green sweater I had worn to dinner the evening before.

“We are going to a place where pizza is made in the Neapolitan tradition, from start to finish. It happens to be in one of the most touristy places in Napoli. We don’t always expect that the restaurants in these districts have the best quality, but I believe there are many exceptions in Italian cities to this *de facto* rule. It’s just down the street from here. You are going to have a special treat, Nicklas. You’re going to actually make a pizza.”

“I burn toast, Sandy. I’m not sure I would let me be in charge of making lunch.”

“You will be making your own lunch, Nicklas, and I mine. We’ll be making our own pizzas, so if we have a bad meal it will be our own fault. Just kidding. Don’t worry, Nicklas, my friend is a good teacher and I guarantee you that your pizza will be outstanding.”

The owner of the small and anonymous pizzeria was waiting outside to meet us as we arrived. Antonio Bruttico and Sandy greeted each other like long-time friends, as surely they were. We walked through the empty dining area that held less than a half dozen round tables and into the kitchen where a wood burning oven covered in brightly coloured tiles was the centrepiece.

“If you are wondering where the guests are, Nicklas,” informed Sandy, “the Neopolitans do not eat their pizza until the dough has had time to rise and the oven has reached its proper temperature. It’s one of the slowest foods there is.”

Antonio got right down to business.

“*Pizza Napoletana* consists of three parts. It must have the proper crust, the right tomato sauce, *salsa pizzaiola*, and the best cheese. Everything else is optional. You can sprinkle it with ground pork or beef, place slices of *prosciutto* or *peperoni* or mushrooms, add capers, sliced peppers, whole cloves of garlic, shrimp or anchovies. You can even add pineapples like you do in Sweden, but don’t try it in Napoli. You can do anything after these three parts are done, but you have to get the three done right.

“I’m going to show how to make four pizzas, which is a good number if you are going to have a small party. You can cut the recipe in half, double it, or make it ten times and go into my business.”

He paused for a big laugh, which got both Sandy and me laughing as well. When we were all settled down, Antonio continued. “You start by making the *pasta*.”

I interrupted Antonio with a question delivered in a good humoured way: “I thought you were making *pizza* not *pasta*.”

“*Pasta* means ‘dough’ in Italian,” replied Antonio, laughing. “You can look it up in Google. From *pasta* we make *pane*, *maccheroni*, *fettuccine*, *ravioli*, *gnocchi*, *crosta di pizza* and much more. I don’t know who started using *pasta* as the *primo piatto*, but I would like to find him and give him a piece of my mind. Cakes are made from *pastella*, what the English call ‘batter’.”

“We call it *smet* in Swedish, at least that’s the word *mormor* used.”

“O.K.,” declared Antonio. “Now we know what we are making. I shouldn’t make it more complicated, but I have to.”

“This is where we hear about the secret ingredient, Nicklas.”

“*Si, Si*. You need to have good *lievito*, the yeast, to make good *pasta* for *pizza*,” counselled Antonio. “If the *lievito* is bad, the crust looks and tastes like cardboard. Most *pizza* makers use the powdered variety of yeast. I use *lievito* that my grandfather started over one hundred years ago.”

“It’s called ‘sourdough’ in English,” added Sandy.

Antonio opened the door to one of the big refrigerators. It was filled with litre-sized glass jars with a metal clamp holding a glass lid. He took one of the jars out, flipped down the metal clamp and turned up the lid.

“Early each morning when we come in to start the fire in the oven and get ready for the day, we feed all of the *lieviti*, adding two deciliters of flour and two deciliters of water to each one of them. We give them a good stir and let them sit out for a few hours, then we put them back in the fridge. After we

use one to make a *pizza*, we do the same, and then we take another jar for the next batch. You have to keep the *lieviti* alive.

“Now, let’s make the *pasta*. Put eight deciliters of flour and a tablespoon of salt in a large bowl. I sift the flour like my mother did. You have to use the course flower for bread, not cake flower. Make a well in the center and pour in six deciliters of the *lievito* along with three decilitres of lukewarm water and a half decilitre of olive oil. I always use the local olive oil because it is fresh. See how I mix the dough, squeezing all the ingredients together until it is a rough ball. Now I put it onto the floured board and knead it until it is smooth and elastic. This part takes time, maybe up to fifteen minutes. It’s like when you have sex,” he said with a wink and a smile. “If you skimp on the foreplay, you don’t get a very good result in the end.”

Sandy looked over at me and I at him, and we both smiled. *I guess you have to love what you do to make a comparison like that*, I thought. I made a quick look-up in my brain’s storage compartments to try to find any comparisons I had ever made with car systems design and the joys of making love. Not a one. He put the shiny ball of dough into another bowl, dusted it with flour, covered it with a clean, dry dish towel and put it into a corner of his counter.

“It’s going to sit there until late this evening. We will use a *pasta* that I made early this morning. It needs at least ten hours to rise so it is light and airy. The ball should be twice the size it is now when it is ready to use. We’ll make the second ingredient, the *salsa pizzaiola*. I use only tomatoes I have canned myself.”

He reached into one of his cabinets and took out a glass jar identical to the sourdough jars. I could see it was filled with coarsely chopped tomatoes floating in liquid.

“I want my customers to feel like they can come in here any day of the year and get the same good quality *pizza* every time. I don’t short-change them on the dough, I don’t short-change them on the tomato sauce and I don’t short-change them on the cheese. I take the best fresh plum tomatoes I can find, *pomodori perini*, starting with the ones I grow myself. I cut them into quarters, boil them and put them into canning jars. I make enough for a year. If business is good and I run out, I close up and take a vacation,” he said with another big laugh.

“Chop two white onions, not too fine, and cook them in the olive oil in a saucepan or pot. I use the big enameled pot my mother had. The oil should not be too hot so the onions don’t get all brown and crisp. Cook and stir for about seven or eight minutes. Chop two cloves of garlic very fine and add them to the pot with the onions. Stir for a few minutes. Then pour in the tomatoes right out of the jar with their liquid and put in a small can of tomato paste, a tablespoon each of dried oregano and fresh, finely cut basil. Add a bayleaf, two teaspoons of sugar, one-and-a-half teaspoons of salt and a half teaspoon of freshly ground black pepper. Bring all of this to a boil, turn down the heat to very low and let it simmer for about an hour. Leave it uncovered. When it’s finished it will be thick and smooth, but still lumpy from the tomatoes. Take out the bay leaf. It has done its job. Some of my friends in the trade push the sauce through a sieve so that it is totally smooth. Not me. When you taste my pizza you taste real tomatoes, not *passata di pomodoro*.”

Antonio checked the temperature of the oven. It was good, around four hundred degrees Celcius. The fire in his brick oven was started in the morning. Antonio’s young assistant, his brother’s grandson, had the job of feeding the fire that warmed the oven.

“My father wanted to have an oven that sang to him while he made the *pizzas*. That is why he covered the front of it with all the colourful tiles.”

“Where does the wood come from? With all of the *pizza* ovens that must be burning wood every day in this city, the wood cannot be coming from a local forest. The trees would be gone in a week, wouldn’t they?”

“We have plenty of forests south of Napoli with the oak that is needed to get the ovens up to four hundred fifty degrees so the pizza cooks in a minute to a minute-and-a-half. There are chestnut trees as well to add the flame that gives the *crosta di pizza* its blackened spots.”

“Now we’re going to make the *pizzas*,” ordered Antonio. He took the cover off the dough that had risen to twice the size. He sprinkled a handful of flour on the marble counter top, gave the ball a few punches and then cut it into four pieces. “First, wash the hands.” When we finished washing, he continued, “Nicklas, here is your ball, and Signore Alessandro, here is yours.” As we were about to receive our instructions, someone entered the kitchen.

“Ah, just in time!” exclaimed Sandy. “We saved a *pizza* for you.”

“*Scusami*,” said the new arrival.

“Nicklas, this is my good friend Oscar Notariani. He and I studied architecture together. He has been rebuilding Napoli since we finished our schooling.”

“And I have been eating at least one of Antonio’s *pizzas* every week since returning. It’s how I keep my weight at exactly the right level,” he added pointing to his ample waistline.

“*Grazie, grazie*,” replied Antonio with great laughter. “Wash the hands so we can get started, *signore*. Push it with the palm of your hand, like this, to flatten it into a circle, two-three centimeters thick. Then pick it up and

turn it and pull it at the same time so the circle gets bigger. We eat the *pizza* on a dinner plate, so that's how big it has to be. If it's bigger, it's too thin. If it's smaller, it's too thick."

My *pizza* was more square than round when I got it to the right size. Sandy and Oscar seemed to have had more practice. Antonio showed us how to crimp the edge of our *pizzas* by pressing the dough between our thumbs. This was so the sauce did not run out, he said. He had a ladle that was about a decilitre, and he spooned out that much sauce on each of our *pizzas* and his own. We copied his motion with a big spoon of smoothening the sauce out over the whole *pizza*.

"All that is left is the cheese and a sprinkling of olive oil," said Antonio. "The cheese is *mozzarella di bufala* made from buffalo milk. I buy my *mozzarella* from the Puoti brothers in Mondragone. It is the best in the world. We grate what we need each day so it is fresh."

Antonio instructed us to pick up a handful of the grated *mozzarella* and distribute it evenly over the *pizza's* surface, and then to give the pizza a few squirts of olive oil from the bottle with a long, metal nozzle. He added a sprig of basil to each *pizza*.

"In this neighbourhood we still keep the tradition of *Pizza alla Margherita*," said Antonio, proudly.

"She was the wife of Italy's second king, Umberto," explained Sandy. "The *pizza* is named after her because during a visit to Napoli in 1889, she supposedly asked for one that has the colours of the Italian flag."

Antonio picked up each one of the *pizzas* with his long, wooden shovel and slipped them into the oven. In less than two minutes they were done. He set each one on a brightly coloured earthenware plate, and we sat together at the marble work table with the warmth of the oven and the aroma

of the freshly baked pizzas creating an atmosphere that we would describe in Swedish as *mysig*. Like *lagom*, it is difficult to translate *mysig* into another language. In English, it is something like ‘cozy’ or ‘genial’, I have been told. This was definitely the best *pizza* I had ever eaten, and I decided then and there that I would make my own *pizzas* forever after using Antonio’s recipe.

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Sandy, Oscar and I walked out of the kitchen and through the seating area. It was still empty at mid-afternoon. Sandy was favouring his arthritic hip and leaning on his cane, so I was fairly sure this would be a short tour. As I came out of the door I was surprised to see a horse and carriage directly in front.

“There is no better way to see Napoli than in a carriage,” exclaimed Oscar, answering my question before I asked it. “Please step in. Sandy and Nicklas, you will sit in the back facing forward and I will be your guide. First, a short history of our city.”

The carriage pulled away from the sidewalk and into the street with cars rushing around us in all directions. Oscar began to talk and pulled us into his world, which was Napoli.

“It is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. I’ll bet you didn’t know that.” I nodded that I didn’t. “The Greeks founded a city here in the sixth century B.C. and called it *Neápolis*, which means ‘New City’. It became the cultural center of the Roman Republic, the capital city of the Kingdom of Naples from 1282 to 1816, then the capital of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies until 1861. During the time it was part of the Roman Republic, the people of *Neápolis* continued to speak Greek and practice Greek cultural customs. It was a holiday center for the Roman elite.

Our historic city center is a World Heritage Site and is the largest in Europe—larger than the historic centers of any other of Europe’s capitals.

“Today, Napoli is the third largest municipality in Italy after Roma and Milano. We are the fourth largest economy, after Milano, Roma and Torino. Our port has the world’s second highest level of passengers travelling in and out each year. Only Hong Kong is higher.”

Oscar obviously cared a great deal for his city, and his enthusiasm was of the kind that made others want to know more. I listened carefully while we moved slowly through the streets of Naples and he described each of the sites. We passed through the *Piazza del Plebiscito* with the Royal Palace on one side and the beautiful church of *San Francesco di Paola* on the other. Oscar told us about the famous operas that were played in the *Teatro di San Carlo*, the oldest opera house in Italy. Directly across from the opera is the *Galleria Umberto I*, a public shopping arcade with glass-covered halls and a huge glass dome in the center named after the second king of Italy who was assassinated by the anarchist, Gaetano Bresci. Oscar suggested that one day I should come back and see all of these sights on foot. Sandy had probably made many tours of Naples, both in his business days and while visiting friends, so this tour was really organized for my benefit. I understood and appreciated this gesture and felt very privileged.

Oscar had convinced Sandy to join him and his family at their house for dinner, rather than eating at a restaurant. Sandy had asked me if I minded and, of course, I said that I did not. The carriage started up the *Via Toledo* and then turned left into the heart of the *Quartieri Spagnoli*. I saw a resemblance to Stockholm’s *Gamla Stan*, with its very narrow streets, but that is where the similarities ended.

“Why is it called the ‘Spanish Quarters’?”.

“It was built in the sixteenth century to house the Spanish troops who were stationed here to put down any rebellion amongst the residents of Napoli. It is known mostly for its crime, prostitution and garbage, but one day, people will be paying the same rents to live in here as they do to live in the most expensive apartments in *Milano*. Before we get there, we have a lot of work to do.”

We returned to *Via Toledo*, turned left and drove along until the *Piazza Gesù Nuovo*. Here we turned right on to *Via Benedetto Croce* which eventually turned into *Via San Biagio dei Librai*.

“This is one of the three main east-west streets from the original Greco-Roman city of *Neápolis*,” explained Oscar. “It is the most southern of the three. It was called *Decumanus Inferior*. The middle street, now called *Via dei Tribunali*, was *Decumanus Major*, and the northern most street is *Via Anticaglia* and *Via della Sapienza*, which was *Decumanus Superior*. These *decumani* are crossed by many north-south streets which are called *cardini*, or *Cardus* in Latin.”

“The street has another name, doesn’t it, Oscar?” said Sandy.

“Yes. It is *Spaccanapoli*. It would be translated to ‘Naples splitter’ in English because it is so long and straight that it looks like it splits the city into two parts.”

The carriage stopped in front of a corner building on the southern side of the street, and Oscar announced that we were at his home. We climbed out of the carriage, thanking the driver and bidding him good-bye. Oscar unlocked the door to the entrance and we walked into a large hallway. It was dark, lit only by the window over the entrance door and a crystal chandelier hanging from the ceiling in the middle of the hall. There was an open elevator shaft surrounded by a stairway. We entered the elevator and took it to the top floor.

“All of the apartments in this house belong to members of our family. My wife and I occupied the top two floors while our children were growing up, but now we have the top floor only. My middle son, Pierandrea, and his family live on the fifth floor now.”

We entered an apartment filled with light. Oscar’s wife, Lucia, greeted us at the door. “Alessandro!” she said in an excited voice. Obviously, Sandy was as close a friend to Lucia as to Oscar. The hugs and kisses would not end. Oscar looked over at me and said, “I was her second choice after Francesca won his heart.” Sandy and Lucia released their grip on one another and Sandy presented me. Lucia extended her hand and welcomed me with a warm smile, and then, as if she could not resist, gave me a large hug and kisses on both cheeks. We moved through the main room and into a glass enclosed conservatory at the end of a veranda that extended along the entire side of the apartment with a view over the Mediterranean. There was still a sliver of flaming red on the horizon from the setting sun. Lucia said there was a chill in the air, otherwise we would sit outside. The conservatory was welcoming. A martini shaker was clearly visible on a tray with martini glasses as well as an assortment of liquors and liqueurs. There were three side tables filled with plates of *bruschetta*, olives, cheese and nuts.

“I know what Oscar and Alessandro will be drinking. What would you like, Nicklas?”

“I’m not much of a liquor drinker,” I replied, apologetically. “I could try the red one, *Cinzano*.”

Conversation moved quickly from one topic to another, orchestrated by Lucia. She was a handsome woman and very animated. I imagined her forty years younger, determined to make Sandy her own. She was probably not so happy to have been out manoeuvred by Francesca. I was curious

about Oscar's experience with fishing, and when there was a short lull in the exchanges, I asked my question: "Have you and Alessandro ever fished together?"

"Yes," answered Oscar, "many years ago. When two people are starting to be friends they want to learn about the things that each of them enjoys doing. Alessandro was passionate about his fishing, so I naturally wanted to see if I could be interested in it as well."

I looked over at Sandy. He had a smiling look on his face, enjoying a story he had probably heard many times before, but maybe not so recently. Lucia also looked amused.

"We went to Sansepolcro and fished the *Tevere*. I think you have fished there on this trip, yes?"

I nodded in agreement.

"Alessandro provided all of the equipment and spent the first day with me teaching me the basics of fly fishing. At the end of that day I felt very pleased that my mind and body, the first two parts of the fly fishing holy trinity, were working well enough together so I could cast a line without catching the grass and trees behind me or snapping off the hook of the fly on a rock.

"The next day I was ready to try to catch a fish. After a few casts, a fish came up and hooked itself on my fly, and it was then I decided that the third part of the fly fishing holy trinity, my heart, was not able to join my mind and body to complete the enjoyment of this sport. I could not feel exhilarated when the fish jumped and ran and finally, against my will, continued to stay on the hook until I brought it to Alessandro's outstretched arm holding a net. When the fish was released, I said: '*I hope we can stay friends, Alessandro, but this is not for me.*'"

I saw the scene clearly in my mind's eye, and thought about the few times when I felt close enough to a person to introduce him—or her, in the case of Sofi—to my favourite pastime. Usually, they gave up before they ever hooked a fish, before they had to put the priest to the head and the knife to the anus. *If only they would just try a little harder and a little longer and give it enough time until they catch a fish, I'm sure they will like it*, I would say to myself. I never thought that the catching part might be the one they liked least.

“Yes, my friend,” said Sandy. “People fish for all sorts of reasons, but one of those reasons has to be catching fish. Otherwise, they should not use a hook and we would have to call it a different sport.”

“If we did not have hooks or nets or whatever they use to bring in the fish, we would not have much to eat this evening,” said Lucia with a laugh. “I think it is time for us to enjoy dinner.”

The table was set when we came into the dining room. Lucia directed Sandy and me to our respective places. When we were seated, two young women began to serve the first course, which was spaghetti with clams, *alle vongole*, and tomatoes.

“There are families who only eat *spaghetti alle vongole* with tomatoes and those who only eat it without,” explained Oscar. “In our house, it is with.”

“The same in ours” agreed Sandy. “There is a very special taste that comes from combining the clams and tomatoes which I miss in the white version.”

“The important step is adding the water which is used to cook the clams to the tomatoes after they are sautéed with the garlic,” added Lucia.

I could have had seconds and thirds, but I was determined to save enough space for the eventual dessert. Our plates were cleared and new ones set. The women brought in the next course, peppered mussels, poached octopus and marinated anchovies with lemon, respectively *impepata di cozze*, *purpetiello affogato* and *alici marinate al limone*, explained Lucia. The women served each one separately, starting with the marinated anchovies. They were all wonderful, but I especially liked the anchovies.

We drank a red wine with the spaghetti and white with the second courses. Oscar explained that the wines of Campania have started to receive attention among the experts after many years of well-deserved neglect. The wineries have started to pay attention to bringing out the best in the local grapes, he explained, like the red *Aglianico* and *Piedirosso* and white *Biancolella*, *Forastera*, *Olivella* (named for its shape) and *Coda di Volpe*. There is even a sparkling wine made from the *Aspirinio* grape, *Asprinio di Aversa*.

The main course was *baccalà alla napoletana*. I didn't need to be told what *baccalà* was. I knew it was dried and salted cod, what we call in Sweden *kabeljo*. *Mormor* often made it when we went to visit in the winter months. Before it can be used it has to be soaked in water to remove the salt and to bring back the consistency of the flesh. It has to soak for at least twenty-four hours with the water being changed two or three times. After it has been soaked, the bones should be pulled out and then it is ready to cook.

"The fish pieces are floured and fried while the tomato sauce is cooking," said Oscar. "At this time of year, before we have the fresh, ripe tomatoes, we use the ones we prepared ourselves from last season's harvest. To make it a *Napoletana* sauce you add the capers and *Gaeta* black olives. When the fish is fried to a nice, golden colour, you put the pieces into the pan with the sauce and let the fish take in the sauce."

I remembered the chewiness from *Mormor's kabeljo*, but the addition of the tomato sauce with capers and olives and garlic made this dish more than just edible. It was delicious, really delicious.



We ate a salad that was served on the side of the main dish. Lucia said it was called *Caprese* salad, which was simply slices of tomato and *mozzarella di bufala* with fresh basil, sprinkled with olive oil. It is named after the Isle of Capri, explained Sandy. There was fruit and cheese that followed and then we came to the dessert.

“We have two desserts,” explained Lucia. “*Pastiera* is Oscar’s favourite, and *babá*, which is Alessandro’s. *Babá* is an import from France before *Risorgimento*. It is a simple flour, egg, milk and butter cake saturated in rum and filled with whipped cream. *Pastiera* is our traditional Easter cake, but we took the recipe from the pagans, like many of our traditions. *Pasqua* comes in the spring, and the pagans celebrated spring as a time of the renewal of life. Christians celebrate the resurrection of Christ. The egg was the pagan symbol for new life, and it is now the Christian one for *Pasqua*.”

Ricotta and wheat are mixed with eggs and some water in which spices have been added. Every family has its own special additional ingredients that make it unique, and every family believes that its unique *pastiera* is the most original and tastiest of all. It is baked and served in a pan called *ruoto*.”

After tasting each of the dessert offerings, and, against all good common sense accepting seconds on each, I decided that Campania had the absolute best cakes and pastries in Italy. *Espresso* coffee was served with a licorice-tasting liqueur, called *anisette*, poured into the cup. The clock was approaching midnight when Sandy suggested we bid our hosts a goodnight. A taxi was waiting for us when Sandy and I, accompanied by Oscar and Lucia, walked out of the apartment entrance onto the street. It took quite a long time for them to release us. There was always one more hug and one more last word. Finally, we were in the taxi with Oscar and Lucia waving us farewell.

“Did you enjoy dinner and my friends?” asked Sandy when we had made our last wave.

“Both. I guess if you are an architect you get to pick the best apartments.”

Sandy laughed. “Oscar was born in this house and has lived here his entire life, except for the period when he was at university. It was his great great grandfather who bought it before *Risogimento*. They have been wonderful friends to both me and Francesca. I am pleased you liked them.”

“Are you sorry that Oscar did not enjoy catching fish?”

“I knew he wouldn’t. I thought it was best to get the whole thing out of the way as soon as possible so we could go on to be friends on different terms.”

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Early on Thursday morning we checked out of the Hotel Toledo. Domenico had driven the Volvo around to the front and Guido had our travel bags draped over his shoulders as we bid farewell to the hotel manager. It was agreed that I would drive, and Sandy guided me through the narrow streets to the A3, *Autostrada del Sole*. We travelled due north until we came to Caserta and then our heading was northwest. Vitulazio, Pignataro Maggiore, Calvi Risorta and Teano.

“That looks like another volcano over there to the left.”

“That is *Roccamonfina*. It’s extinct, or so they say.”

There was a long stretch of road when we did not see any towns and then a sign appeared with LAZIO on top and CAMPANIA on the bottom crossed out with a red line. We were leaving Campania and entering Lazio. The next sign was for a turn-off to S. Vittore and straight ahead on the A45 toward Roma. A sign appeared for Cassino after a few kilometres and Sandy instructed me to turn off the *Autostrada* and drive toward Cassino.

“The name of this town is familiar, but I do not know why. It’s not because it sounds like the gambling place.”

“That’s spelled with only one ‘s’. This is where the Germans decided to draw a line in the sand late in 1943 to stop the Allies during World War II. Our government, with the king having re-taken control from Mussolini, had capitulated on 23 September 1942. The Germans quickly took control of the country. Some Italian troops continued to fight alongside the Germans, but most either joined with the Allies or were put in prison by the Germans. The Gustav Line, as it was called, extended from the coast south of here, through Cassino and up to the Adriatic just south of Pescara. It was heavily defended. The Benedictine abbey on Monte Cassino, founded by *San Benedetto* himself, became the focal point of the battle.

Sandy explained that American, British and Polish troops engaged the Germans between January and May, 1944. The official number of dead and injured was 125,000, but it was probably much higher. The Allies thought they were facing a force that would slowly retreat, just offering enough resistance to limit their casualties. Instead, they discovered after their first assault that the enemy intended to defend their position with vigor. In the first attack, the Americans lost over two thousand men who were killed, wounded or captured. It would take three more attacks to dislodge the Germans. The Americans and British were convinced that the Germans were using the Abbey to direct their defences because of its strategic position. *Il Papa* told the Allies that he had assurances from the Germans that they were not occupying the monastery, but they did not believe him. Then a German radio message was intercepted and misinterpreted, either by mistake or purposely, saying that the German headquarters was in the Abbey. That was enough for the Allies. For several days they dropped from the air the heaviest bombs they had and reduced the Abbey to dust. When the bombing stopped, the forty or so people who were still alive walked out of the rubble. They included six monks and their abbot and three tenant farmer families. Two hundred thirty Italian civilians who sought sanctuary in the Abbey perished. No Germans were among the dead.

“How did the Pope know the Germans were not in there?”

“Because they had promised him they would not do so out of respect for its historic and religious value. As a sign of good faith, a few months before the battle along the Gustav Line began, a few officers had suggested that all of the treasures in the monastery be removed and shipped to Roma. They provided the transport. Once the Abbey was demolished, the Germans did occupy it and used it as a strategic observation post, probably prolonging the fighting for several weeks. It’s been rebuilt, as you can see.”

It looked like a great fortress occupying the entire top of the hill.

“Who paid for the reconstruction?”

“The answer depends on whom you ask. The Americans say they did through the post-War Marshall Plan. The Italian government says it paid all costs. In the end, we all paid. It was re-consecrated by *Papa Paolo VI* in 1964. Hopefully, it will not have to be rebuilt again.”

The SR509 led to Atina and then to Broccostella where we found the small hotel, *Agriturismo La Pesca*, on the side of the *Fibreno* along *Via la Pesca*. The hotel sits literally along the edge of the river.

After we had brought in all of our gear we met outside. This would be a reconnaissance walk, so we left our rods behind. I brought my Bushnells. Sandy held up his small fly net. He had the cane he used for the first time in Naples. We walked slowly. The surroundings were impressive. We were in a valley surrounded by mountains. Whenever we left the coastal areas the Appenines seemed to be ever present. The hotel is on the stretch of the river where it is possible to keep fish. Further downstream there is a no-kill stretch where both fly fishing and spin fishing are allowed.

“Have you ever fished in England, Nicklas?”

“No. I never really thought about it either. It seemed to me that it was a place where rich people fished and there were a lot of rules that had to be followed. It didn’t seem like it was a place I would enjoy.”

“Not all of the rivers in England are like what you have described. The Test and the Itchen are the classic chalk streams where traditions of what and how to fish have been created, mostly due to one man: Frederic M. Halford. He and his companions fished the Test according to *The Dry-Fly Code*, which is to only fish upstream to a rising fish with a dry fly that as closely as possible approximates the insect the fish are eating.”

“Exactly! That’s what I mean about rules.”

“The *Code* was meant to benefit the fishers and the fish. One fisherman could put down all the fish in an entire stretch of the river by swinging wet flies downstream. By dividing the river they owned or leased into sections, each member could fish his section without disturbing the others. I have read Halford’s books, and I don’t think he would recommend trying to apply *The Code* to many other rivers.”

“I don’t think it would work too well on my home waters. It probably costs a thousand shirts to fish there as well.”

“I suppose your expression, ‘a thousand shirts’, is Swedish for saying that it is expensive,” answered Sandy with a laugh, “Yes, it is expensive, but not as dear as the Kolla Peninsula in Russia. They say that if you have to ask what it costs, you can’t afford it.”

“Have you fished the Test or Itchen?”

“Once on the Test, with a good friend who insisted on paying all of the costs. He is gone now. He wanted to go there with someone who could show the snobbish ghillies that Italians could catch fish as well as an Englishman.”

“Did you?”

“Yes, and the ghillies were not at all snobs. They were excellent fly fishers and appreciated anyone who truly enjoyed fishing their rivers. We fished at Mottisfont and Oakley, the places where Halford returned after the Houghton Fly Fishing Club was disbanded at the end of 1892 and all the members had to find new waters. It was a wonderful experience, and when the first trout rose to one of my flies I felt like everything I had learned during my years of fly fishing had made that moment possible.”

Have I ever had such an experience, I thought. Is there one moment when everything I have learned made the cast or presentation or fly

selection or the right pressure on the line or the landing of a fish just right?

I never thought about this. Before this trip, my most memorable fish was my first caught on a fly, an *abbore* in a pond close to *morföräldrars* farm. Now it is Bruno Jr.

“How long ago were you there?” I asked, needing more facts to decide whether I still had time to begin thinking about my fishing rather than simply going through the motions.

“It was twenty-two years ago almost to the day. You know, the *Fibreno* is not so dissimilar to the Test. It is a chalkstream with similar gin-clear water, even flow and constant temperature, and underwater growth to provide cover and food for the trout. It has its own strain of trout called *Macrostigma*, or ‘green trout’. Shall we try to fish by *The Dry-Fly Code* while we are here?”

“Dry flies only, upstream to feeding fish?”

“*Si*. We can try it for a few hours this afternoon and see how it goes. Shall we try to find out if there are any insects that the trout might be feeding on?”

We found a place where we could sit and scan the water. I took out my Bushnells. As I did, Sandy pointed to a rise. I aimed the glasses at the dimple on the surface and saw a good hatch coming off the water. Luckily, a slight wind was blowing in our direction. I followed a small swarm that came toward the bank where we were sitting, handed the glasses to Sandy as he handed his fly net to me, and I ran toward a bush where it looked like a few were landing. With a swing of the net I captured a couple of specimens to take back to Sandy for analysis. Sandy was holding a book when I arrived back to where we were sitting.

“I had this in one of my bags. I thought it would be useful for just this occasion.”

It was a hardbound book titled Trout Stream Insects: An Orvis Streamside Guide by Dick Pobst.

“It was given to me by one of my American friends twenty-five-or-so years ago. I have really never used it because it seemed too complicated, but let’s see if we can find a photo that resembles what you have in the net.”

“I think it looks like a caddis.”



“I believe you are right. Here it is. What I know about caddis hatches is that when you see them in the bushes, the action by the trout is mostly over.”

“I have heard the same, but have never taken the time to find out why.”

“It has something to do with how quickly they can get their wings working and fly off the surface. Their wings are dry when they shed their casings, which they can do quickly once to the surface. Mayflies take longer to get their wings dry and that is why they are more successfully fished as dries. It is when the caddis are *pupae* on the way up to the surface that they are most vulnerable and when the trout feed on them.”

“So we should be fishing nymphs if we want to catch fish?”

“It says here that the caddis live for about a month and then return to the water to hatch. Either they lay their eggs on the surface by bouncing down to the water, or they dive down to the bottom, lay their eggs and they swim back up. Some are able to fly away to die another day, or they drift as spinners. It seems that when they return, rather than when they emerge, they are better prey for hungry trout.”

“Maybe that’s why we are not seeing much action. It’s not yet time for them to return to the water.”

“Apparently, they do that earlier in the morning or later in the afternoon. It looks like we have a chance to see whether either time works. We can come back in a few hours and early tomorrow morning.”

We sat for another half-hour without seeing more than a couple of rises. We walked back to the hotel and went to our rooms. Sandy said he was going to read more about trout stream insects. I had not checked my e-mails in a few days. We agreed to meet in two hours and try our luck with following *The Dry-Fly Code* on the *Fibreno*.

Sandy was already down when I arrived. He was dressed as usual, in his tweeds with bow tie, and had on his Muck Boots. I wore my waders. He was talking to a young man while a beagle with black, red and brown spots on a base of white sat quietly at the young man’s side. The man was tall and muscular and looked to be my age. He was wearing a black and red wool hunting jacket with a matching hat, heavy woolen pants and high, lace-up boots.

“Nicklas, this is Giacomo Aloï who lives here in Broccostella. He also a fly fisher who fishes the river most days of the year! And this is his dog, *Stracci*.”

“Pleased to meet you, Giacomo. Pleased to meet you, too, *Stracci*.”

“Nice to meet you, Nicklas. *Signore* Carlotti was telling me you were going to try to bring up the fish with some caddis dry flies.”

“Did he tell you why?” I said with a smile.

“Yes he did, and I must say I never heard about this ‘code’ he mentioned. It sounds like it is meant to preserve the fishing. If I were fishing right now I would be using weighted nymphs. The caddis have been emerging for the past few weeks and some of them are going back to lay their eggs. I think there might not be enough of them to get the trout moving for another few weeks. I would like to be proven wrong because it is always more enjoyable when visitors catch fish than when they don’t catch fish. Do you mind if I follow along to watch?”

“Please do join us, Giacomo, and call me Alessandro.”

The three of us walked back to where Sandy and I had observed the pool earlier in the afternoon. We stayed back from the bank in order not to frighten any fish that might be lurking there.

“Nicklas, why don’t you go first and I will stay here to watch as well. I think this is going to be a good lesson in the art of fly fishing.”

“Sandy, I think I need a lesson from the expert, so I would like you to go first.” He nodded and smiled, enjoying the compliment.

“Dark, medium or light colour, Giacomo?”

“I would start with a light colour in a #16 size.”

“The water is moving quickly,” I said, “so there won’t be too many drag-free metres.”

“We have to wait until we see a fish if we are going to follow The Code.”

No sooner had he gotten out those words when a fish of good size broke the surface a few dozen meters upstream. There was not much room for a back cast, and there was heavy tree cover overhead. This would be a challenge. Sandy moved a bit closer to the bank, pulling line from his reel as he walked. He was limping and he had left his cane on the ground where we had been standing. He stopped a few metres from the bank and watched. The fish appeared again in the same spot. He looked back to gauge the distance he needed for a back cast to deliver the fly far enough above the fish to get it over him without drag. He moved a few more steps farther upstream. The fish rose a third time. Sandy gave him time to return to his lie and then released his cast. *Impressive*, I thought. It was a perfect cast. The fly landed above where the fish had appeared and drifted slowly right over him. Nothing happened.

“I’ll try something a little larger and a little darker,” said Sandy in a hushed tone. He retrieved his line and went to work on the fly change. The second cast produced the same result. Nothing happened. He turned and started toward us when Giacomo shouted to him.

“Try a half hitch over the eye of the fly,” recommended Giacomo. “If they are spinners, sometimes they try to get off the water.”

Sandy stopped, turned and went back to his position. *Is this allowed by The Code*, I thought. He looked down for a few seconds and then prepared for another cast. The cast was another perfect delivery. I could see there was a small wake around the fly as it floated down to the point where the rises had been. Suddenly, the surface erupted and Sandy’s line was moving at breakneck speed upstream.

“Got him!” yelled Sandy.

Maybe that fish had seen lures and worms and lead-heavy nymphs, but he had probably never seen a caddis that he took for granted was an easy morsel

for supper suddenly sprout a hook. He took Sandy to his backing twice before he was ready to come to the net that I stretched out from the edge of the river after I had eased myself in. It was a beautiful native brown trout, over two kilos.

“We can cook him at our house if you like, and you can join us for dinner.”

“He’s partly yours, and we would be pleased to take your invitation. Nicklas, let’s see if we can add one more to the table.”

I let the pool calm down and waited for another fish to show before I cast the same pattern and size as Sandy had used, along with the half hitch of the leader over the eye, and produced the same result on the first cast. It was nearly the same size as Sandy’s.

“Are you sure you have never used this technique before?” I asked Giacomo.

“You have my word on that. It was my grandfather who told me once: *When everything else fails, try a half hitch around the eye.* A half hitch doesn’t do much good when you are fishing a nymph, and that is what I always fish. After seeing you two, I am going to start to use all those dry flies my grandfather left to me, God rest his soul. Leave the fish with me. I’ll take care of them. Come up around seven. Turn left out of the hotel drive and we’re the first house on the right.”

There was no chance we would miss Giacomo’s house. *Stracci* was greeting everyone at the entrance to the drive, and there were at least two dozen people gathered around a grill that Giacomo was working in front of his house. We were welcomed like long-time friends by Giacomo and his wife, Louisa. She was as tall as her husband. They both looked like well-trained athletes. There were family and friends of all ages, including the

baby who Louisa was carrying. The in-ground, brick-sided grill held what looked like a lamb. Sandy confirmed this when I asked. There were two foil packets on the side of the grill waiting to be placed on the grate, probably the two trout. It was dark and the air was cool, but the glow from the fire and a string of lights that Giacomo had placed between two trees gave enough warmth and light to make it feel like a late summer evening at an amusement park, like *Lisseberg* in Göteborg.

While Giacomo carved pieces of meat from the lamb and placed them on oversized serving plates, he watched over the cooking of the trout. Gradually, the guests began to filter through the front door of the Alois house. It was as rustic inside as out. Just inside the door was a large room with exposed beams and open to the roof. A long, rough wooden table was set with plates and cutlery in the middle of the room. Louisa directed me to one side of the table and Sandy to the other, across from one another. She and Giacomo placed themselves at opposite ends of the table. The plates of meat were spread along the center of the table along with three large baking forms covered with aluminum foil. There were two plates with a trout on each. The heads were still in place. On each plate, one fillet had been removed and placed on one side of the plate. The fish was turned over and the other side was filleted, but left in place. Sections of lemon and sprigs of parsley decorated the plates.

What would we have as the *piatto primo*, I wondered. I thought of the spaghetti with a clam and tomato sauce we had eaten the evening before in Naples. The answer to my question came as we sat down at the table. The aluminum foil was taken off the forms by Louisa's helpers. What was in them looked familiar, like lasagna, but I could see that it wasn't.

"*Cannelloni*," said Sandy across the table. "It's the perfect combination of *lasagna* and *manicotti*."

I had tasted the Swedish version of the former, but I had no idea what *manicotti* was. Three of the women, including my *bordsgäst* as we say in Swedish, to my right, served up the filled tubes covered with a combination of a cream and tomato sauce. As usual, there were pieces of bread on the table. Our glasses were filled with red wine from ceramic pichers. Before we took our first bite, Giacomo welcomed us all, thanked everyone for coming and Sandy and me for providing the fish. After the first bite I decided this *cannelloni* would become one of my favourites.

“What is in this delicious dish? I am Nicklas, by the way.”

“My name is Carmine, Giacomo’s youngest sister.” Carmine was in her late teens with long, dark brown hair braided into a single tail that reached the middle of her back. She was dressed in jeans and an over-sized, red hooded sweat shirt. She was almost as tall as her sister-in-law with a similarly athletic appearance. She spoke English like an American teenager. “This is Louisa’s mother’s specialty. She is sitting across from me talking to your friend.” I looked over at Sandy, who was totally engrossed in conversation with the woman to whom Carmine referred. “*Zia* Emilia’s secret is to take time to make the tubes like crepes rather than from *pasta*. The filling is beef, chicken livers, spinach, garlic and onions, sautéed, ground up and then combined with different spices, *parmigiano* and cream. There are two sauces, *pomodoro* and *beciamella*, tomato and cream.”

“When I hear these recipes, it sounds so simple, but dishes with the same ingredients taste so different!”

“*Zia* uses the same for her *manicotti*. That’s the cheese variation of *cannelloni*. If you are staying for dinner tomorrow you will have a chance to make a comparison.”

“I think our plan is to drive to Sandy’s—Alessandro’s—cousins in Bologna to spend Easter there,” I answered just before placing a morsel from

the second of one of the three *cannelloni* I had been served. There was silence. When I looked over at Carmine she was looking at me, smiling. “Have I used the wrong utensil?” I said jokingly.

She laughed. “No, you just look like you are enjoying yourself so much with all of these strangers you have met for the first time.”

“I have sat down to dinner and lunch and breakfast with more strangers during these past three weeks than I have in all the years of my life, and I have enjoyed every one of my meals. Before I started this trip, if I talked when I ate, I talked about anything except the food. Here, food is the conversation.”

I looked over at Sandy. He looked like he was really enjoying both the *cannelloni* and its maker. The empty forms were removed and were replaced with plates of steaming hot round croquettes and bowls of peas with strips of ham. Sandy and I were served generous portions of the trout and then the dishes were passed around the table. Two croquettes and a large spoonful of peas were placed on my plate.

“Be careful!” warned Carmine. “The *suppli al telefono* are very hot inside and can burn your mouth.”

“What’s inside?”

“*Risotto* and *mozzarella*. A cube of mozzarella is placed in the middle of a ball formed by risotto that has been combined with eggs. The balls are rolled in breadcrumbs and then fried.”

“What does the name mean? It sounds like ‘telephone’.”

“Watch,” she said, and she picked up one of the croquettes on her plate and separated it in the middle and pulled the two pieces apart. Strings of cheese formed between the halves. “Telephone lines.”

I took a bit of the trout. Giacomo had filled the cavity of the fish with fresh fennel. It had a wonderful aroma and a rich taste. The fennel did not overwhelm the delicate taste of the trout, but seemed to bring out the special flavor of the fish.

“Is this your brother’s specialty?” I asked Carmine.

“Our father’s family has cooked fish with fennel for many years. They have lived here next to the *Fibreño* for many centuries, and fish from the river has always been part of their diet, and so mine.”

The peas were passed to me from the guest on my left, Giacomo’s and Carmine’s father’s sister, Giovanna. We had exchanged a few words before my conversation with Carmine absorbed me.

“My goddaughter will keep you occupied all evening,” she said. “Would you like some *piselli al prosciutto*?”

“Two of my favourites in one dish. *Si, grazie.*”

“*Prego. Parli italiano?*”

“No, but I would like to learn.”

“Marry an Italian girl who does not speak English or Swedish,” she advised and then laughed. “Carmine is too young for you, but I don’t think she thinks so.”

“I think I have found my Italian girl. I’ll find out tomorrow.”

“*Bene! Eccellente!*”

“What’s so good, *Zia*?” asked Carmine, leaning over my shoulder.

“You’re going to have to marry Antonio afterall,” answered Giovanna. “Nicklas is already taken.”

Giovanna said this loud enough for most of the table to hear it. Both I and Carmine blushed a dozen shades of red, and then laughed as much as the rest of the guests. Sandy was smiling broadly on the other side of the table. When we left late that evening, I was given big hugs and kisses from every girl and woman in the room, especially Giovanna and Carmine. Emilia walked with Sandy out through the door, and their good-bye handshake seemed to last for quite some time.

“Did you have a good time, Nicklas?” asked Sandy when we had reached the road leading back to the hotel.

“I had a great time. I think we made some new friends, and I have a new recipe for cooking trout. How about you?”

“Once I started talking with Emilia, I didn’t want to talk with anyone else.”

“Yes, it looked like you two hit it off very well. Will you see her again?”

“We did not make any promises. We’ll see.”

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It was Good Friday, *Venerdi Santo* in Italian or ‘Long Friday’ as we say in Swedish. Sandy was fasting from food until the evening meal. I had brewed coffee as usual and asked for a cheese sandwich at the hotel. We drove down to the catch-and-release section of the river and parked as close as we could to the water. We got out our rods. I pulled on my waders, even though I would not be wading, and Sandy pulled on his Muck Boots. It was drizzling, so we had on our rain jackets and Sandy his rain pants as well. We walked to the water and found a place to sit to drink coffee and see if there were any rises. I took a bite of my sandwich. Dry as dust.

“Sandy, I understand why people don’t eat cheese sandwiches in Italy. I long for my *grevéost on mörkt rågröd*.”

“I do understand, Nicklas,” commiserated Sandy. “When I am away from Italy for more than a few days it is my stomach that forces me to come home. What would you do without your coffee?”

“Maybe I would start drinking Coca-Cola like the young kids do.”

A splash caused us to drop the subject of food and concentrate on our fishing. The rings were still visible. Several seconds later there was another splash in another spot.

“If the fish are coming out of the water, so are the flies,” offered Sandy. “We should be able to see what they are.”

I took out my Bushnells. They were coming in handy on the *Fibreno*. I looked at the spot where the first fish had shown. There were definitely flies on and off the water. I gave the glasses to Sandy.

“It looks like the fish are taking emergers, not spinners,” said Sandy, “and if I am not mistaken, they are mayflies.”

“Are we still fishing *The Code*?”

“It worked fine yesterday. Let’s see if we can continue. I’ll pull out some flies.”

He took out a Wheatley from his jacket’s breast pocket and I handed him my fly box. He picked out a selection of imitations in different sizes and colours and placed them in my box.

“That should hold you until you catch a few fish.”

“I’ll walk downstream a little way while you fish here, o.k.?”

Sandy nodded and smiled as he usually did when we started to fish. I walked downstream. The edge of the stream had been fortified in some places and the brush along the shore removed. This part of the river must be maintained by a club, I thought. I stopped at a spot that looked like it would

hold fish and just watched the surface. After a few minutes I saw rises similar to those I had seen with Sandy. The flies were light in colour tending toward yellow. My first choice of fly was one of my own, a favourite, called a Catskill. It has a peacock body covered with a glue hardened with UV rays. Its tail is from a *Coq de Leon* in olive-gold colour, and its hackle is a combination of cock feather and grizzly bear fur. I dabbed it with a small amount of floatant and then set it in motion. It no sooner hit the water on my first cast than I had a fish on. After three fish, the fly was finished.

As I waited for the next rise I saw an object in the middle of the river. As it came closer I saw it was Sandy's Tyrol hat. *That belongs on his head, not in the river.* An image flashed of this same hat floating above the spot where Sandy had dropped below the surface the first time we met. It was too far to reach with my rod, so the only chance to retrieve it was with a cast. I cast the line directly at it so that the fly would land on the far side, and then mended downstream as the fly began to touch down. I knew I was only going to get one chance with this. When the hat made contact with the line I stripped in line slowly. I felt a tug and I knew that the hook had caught on the felt. Now it was a matter of working steadily while walking downstream so there was not too much pressure on the fly. It worked. I got the hat close enough to the bank to reach it with my extended net. When I had it in my hand, I thought, *What has happened to Sandy?*

I dropped my rod and net, but kept the hat and ran upstream toward the place where I had left Sandy. Running in waders is a challenge, but I moved as fast as I could. As I approached the spot, I saw Sandy sitting on the bank with his booted feet in the water. He held his rod at the grip, but I could see that the tip had snapped off and it was dangling on the fly line, extended over the water. He was wet from head to toe.

"Sandy! Are you all right?"

“Nothing broken, just some bruised pride. My hip didn’t hold me when I tried to get into the water to land a fish.” He looked up and saw that I was holding his hat. “Thank God you saved my prized possession once again. Both Francesca and I thank you.”

“Maybe it’s time to think about that operation.”

“The pills aren’t working anymore and the pain doesn’t quit. My martinis no longer help either.”

“Then it must be serious.”

“I was hoping to make it through the fishing season and then have another talk with my doctor. It doesn’t look like I can put it off any longer.”

“I think it’s good timing,” I said in an upbeat way. “If you can have it done quickly, you should be back for the autumn fishing. It’s time for me to get back to the real world and to put my life in order. I have really enjoyed these four weeks, Sandy, but I believe I have imposed on your generosity far too long. When we fish again together—and I feel certain we will—I will pay my own way.”

“You have been the perfect companion, Nicklas. This has been the best fishing I have ever experienced, and I have done it with almost all of my old fishing friends, my wonderful goddaughter, and a person I hope will be part of my life and family as long as I have left on this earth.”

“It has been full of a lot of firsts for me, Sandy, like wading over my waist and fishing in the dark, not to mention all of the foods. How many of Italy’s regions have we fished?”

“We have fished in six and eaten in ten out of twenty.”

“Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Veneto, Emilia-Romagna, Umbria, Campania and Lazio are the ones where we have fished, correct?”

“Yes, very good.”

“And the rivers are the *Torrente Torre*, the *Isonzo*, the *Piave*, the *Tevere*, the *Nera*, the *Volturno* and now the *Fibreno*.”

“Correct. Three of the remaining ten regions, the ones in the south, Calabria, Basilicata and Apulia, are not known to have the best fresh water fly fishing, but there are places we can try even there. We should start with the *Scoltenna* close to Bologna, but that will depend on the time, weather and conditions.”

“So, we have something to look forward to after you have had your operation and you don’t have to limp around anymore, and after I have decided what I will be doing for a job and a life. Shall we get ready for the drive to Bologna?”

“Yes. I think we can give the fish a rest. We’ve done pretty well for the start of the season, don’t you think? I know just the place where we can stop for lunch along the way.”

Just then my phone rang. It was my boss. “*Hej*, Lasse.”

“*Hej*, Nicklas. Come back to work. We need you.”

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Chapter Eight

Reunited

Ett-ett tusan; två-Ett tusan...My rule is to count thirty seconds before sending back a fly to a fish that has come up for it but has not taken it. If it does not come back, I'll change flies. If it takes it and spits it out, I'll move to another fish. These are simple rules, but they have worked for me. As I counted, I looked downstream at Sandy. He was facing upstream toward me, directly into the afternoon sun. He had his rod resting in the crook of his left arm folded in front of chest, waiting for a rise. It was the same position he was in when I first saw him back in March on the *Torrente Torre*.

On our first morning of fishing since his operation, Sandy caught and released only one small brown trout, one more than I managed, and I could see by the expression on his face that he was totally satisfied with his accomplishment. The limp in his gait was gone, and the wrinkles at the corners of his eyes caused by wincing at the constant pain he had felt when he walked had almost disappeared. There were faint traces of them, the wrinkles, like stretch marks on the underarms of weight training athletes or on the stomachs of mothers, reminders of burdens they have borne.



He is a Great Blue Heron, I thought. Slow fishing. I had seen them during the summer when I visited Sandy during his recuperation. They were

wading in the *Adige* in the middle of Verona. The *Adige*, the river in which we were now fishing many kilometres north of Verona, snakes through that city, following the curve of a heron's neck, poised to capture its prey at just the right moment. Our plan for re-starting our fishing after his operation and recuperation, the one that Sandy and I had discussed on our way to Bologna from the *Fibreno* in Broccostella, was to begin in Toscana, just south of the border separating Emilia Romagna and Toscana, and fish the *Torrente Veccione – Firenzuola*. But weather and tips from friends on where the fishing was good at the moment, are enough to change plans. So we are now on the *Adige*, north of Bolzano, the capital of the Province of Alto Adige in the Region of Trentino-Alto Adige. We are staying at the Pension Sonnheim in Gargazzone, which is about half way from Bolzano to Merano.

Sandy had explained on the drive up that the provinces of Trentino and Alto Adige that make up the *Regione Trentino-Alto Adige* are two very different places. Alto Adige translates to 'Upper Adige', but since almost seventy percent of the inhabitants of the region speak German, it is more commonly called *Südtirol*, or South Tyrol in English. Both Italian and German are official languages. In Trentino, in the southern half of the Region, Italian is the mother tongue of the majority of residents.

"This *Regione* is part of what Italia received for fighting in the *Prima Guerra Mondiale*. It was ceded by Austria-Hungary in 1919. Mussolini tried to 'Italianize' the northern part before the war broke out in 1939, but he did not make much progress. The Nazis occupied it between 1943 and 1945, and then Italy retook possession. During the '50s and '60s there were bombings and sabotage by those who wanted the region to have greater autonomy or to be totally separate from Italia. The violence ended in 1971 when a treaty was signed between Austria and Italia giving the region much more autonomy than it had before and guaranteeing the rights of the German-speaking population to their language and culture."

“I guess that extends to the food?”

“*Jawohl*, as you will see.”

We were in the Saab. I had added quite a few kilometres to the odometer since I became its owner on Easter Monday, *La Pasquetta*, as I learned it is called in Italia. Between the time when we ended the first part of our fishing tour of Italy and when we resumed it, four-and-a-half months had passed. Life had changed substantially since Bologna where we would celebrate the holiday with Sandy’s cousin, Giuliano Carlotti and his wife Livia. Raffaella and her parents were there. They had driven down together in Michele’s Range Rover. Sandy’s son, Jacopo, and his wife, Annamaria, with their son, Alessandro, were there. Annamaria was in her eighth month of pregnancy. Sandy had called his cousin to rearrange their Easter plans, and then he called Jacopo to tell him about his decision to return home to take care of his hip problem once and for all. I had called Raffaella to give her the news, and Sandy had called Michele and Gabriella to invite them for Easter. So everyone descended upon Giuliano’s and Livia’s villa on Easter Saturday. There were at least a dozen bedrooms in the house where Giuliano and Livia lived so there was plenty of room for all of us.

As soon as I saw Raffaella I froze in my tracks. I knew what I wanted to do, but my fear of making a fatal mistake of timing stopped me from moving forward. Raffaella solved this problem by walking across the room when I entered and kissing me right on the lips. This was before I was even introduced to Jacopo and Annamaria or before I could say hello to Giuliano, Livia, Michele or Gabriella. When she finally released me, it was clear to all that something had happened between the time we had parted at Michele’s and Gabriella’s home and this moment. There was no need to go into any detail; that would happen later.

It was a magical two days. When we weren't sleeping, we were either eating or walking around the city, taking a *passeggiata*, 'a little walk'. The leg of lamb with rosemary, *cosciotto d'agnello al rosmarino*, was outstanding, as was the soup, *tortellini in brodo*. As I came to understand, this soup dish is a staple in Bologna. But best of all was the *Lasagne Verdi alla Bolognese*. It is layers of flat noodles made with spinach, so they are green, a white sauce and then a red sauce, the famous *bolognese ragu*. I wondered if Italia's flag colours followed the dishes or if it was the other way around.

After our first encounter, Raffaella and I were constantly chaperoned and didn't have a minute alone. On the other hand, I had time alone with both Michele and Gabriella, and also with Jacopo and even Annamaria, when we talked about what was happening between Raffaella and me. "She is strong-willed," they all warned, "but...", and then they would list all of her positive traits. I listened, politely. Sweden is the home of strong-willed women. The difference with our strong-willed women is that they tend to have soft elbows. What I was hearing from all of those who knew Raffaella far better than I did at that point was that she had soft elbows as well. I had already sensed that.

It wasn't until we were in the car together on the Tuesday after Easter, when we were alone for the first time, that we had a chance to really talk. It is normally a two-hour drive from Bologna to Milan, but with stops for coffee and to switch drivers, it took us four. Sandy drove back to Verona with Jacopo, Annamaria and their son. Michele and Gabriella drove home in Michele's blue Range Rover to Castello Lavazzo, and Raffaella and I drove the Saab, which I had agreed to buy for one Euro from Sandy, back to Milano. When we left Giuliano's and Livia's home and said good-bye to everyone, I could see by the look in Michele's eyes that he was hoping his daughter would be happy at the end of the journey.

Raffaella took the wheel to get us out of the city and onto the A1/*Autostrada del Sole*. We pulled into the first rest stop to top up the tank and have a coffee. I had not brewed my own that morning, so it was a *caffè lungo* for me. We sat across from each other at a small table, our hands around our cups just a few centimetres from the other. She put one of her hands on my arm.

“Nicola,” she said softly, “Before we start a relationship, and I hope we do, I would like you to be sure you are finished with the relationship you are still in.”

“You mean with Sofi?” I said, more as a statement than a question.

“Yes, with Sofi.”

“The last time we talked she said we should agree on how to get on with our lives. It’s time we did. What would you think about living in Sweden if Saab stays in business?”

“We can cross that bridge when we come to it, Nicola.”

And so there it was. Raffaella’s view on life. Don’t try solving every problem all at once. Solve the most important one first, and then move on.

I stayed at Raffaella’s apartment that evening—on the couch. The next morning we went together in the Saab to Carlo Savino’s laboratory. I wanted Raffaella to meet Carlo. The evening before we had agreed that after the meeting with Carlo I would drive Raffaella to her office and then begin the trip to Kungälv, stopping first to see Caro and her family. The route we had charted with *Bingmaps* was a fairly straight shot north through Switzerland, just to the east of Lake Geneva, then passing Hannover and Hamburg. I decided to take the short ferry across to Själland, Denmark and then *Öresundsbron* over to Malmö. It was calculated to be around 1800 kilometres and to take about seventeen to nineteen hours, depending on

traffic, driving without any stops. I figured I would find a hotel around the Hannover area and do the trip in two legs.

Carlo was obviously pleased to meet Raffaella. I guess he saw it as a positive sign that I came to our meeting with an Italian woman who lived in Milano. He said he had thought more about what I could help them with, and it still sounded very interesting. He said I would need to study Italian because it would be much easier to communicate with the eventual members of the team I would help to hire. I should also take time to learn as much as I could about 3D printing. He was in the process of putting a group of new investors together and he expected to have his next round of funding ready by September or October. I explained that I would need time to think about it, and in the meantime I would be going back to Sweden and to Saab. I also told him that when Sandy was ready, we would complete the fishing trip we had started together, which would take a few weeks. We agreed that I would let him know what I decided by the end of June, and he said as Raffaella and I left that I would be a very welcome addition to the Savino team.

Raffaella and I found a café close to Carlo's lab and we sat close together, side by side in a booth.

"I can see why you liked Carlo," she said with a smile. "He is someone you can trust."

"I think so, too. I don't know what I am going to find when I return to Saab. Lars said there was a new agreement in the works with a Chinese car maker called Hawtai, and that is why we are being called back. GM has to approve any deal we make, and I don't see them giving away technology to a Chinese competitor if they are not forced to do so."

"No matter what you decide, Nicola, we will always be friends."

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It was late in the afternoon on Thursday that I pulled into Caro's and Rikard's drive in Åsa, a village in the southern part of Kungsbacka. The drive is a perfect circle. An ash tree had stood in the middle of it when Caro and Rikard bought the house a little more than a year before. It was quite dead, so they removed it. Large, square cobblestones separated the gravel from a planting bed in which lavender plants grew to form the edge. When they flowered the aroma was wonderful. Their house was once an inn, a *gästgivari*, in what was the old center of Åsa. The address is *Gamla Gästis*. A few hundred meters further up the road is the former train station, and the train right-of-way can still be seen clearly right behind the house. Caro and Rikard had bought *Gamla Gästis* from a couple who had spent the previous eighteen years renovating it. The husband, an American, is a well-known consultant in the car business. His wife is Swedish, from the Stockholm area, and, according to Caro, the designer and manager of all the renovations inside and out. They decided to turn over the house to a younger couple who would be willing to carry on the work they started. They chose a good pair in Caro and Rikard.

Caro and Anna Britt came out to greet me. Even though I had called ahead and explained to my sister what car I would be driving a Saab 900 to their home, Caro still had a hard time looking at it. She hurried us into the house as quickly as she could. When we finally were sitting down at the

kitchen table with cups of freshly brewed coffee, she asked, “What happened to you in Italy?”

“To start with,” I said, smiling, “I learned how much I was missing in life.”

I told her everything, from Lasse’s call while I was having breakfast in Trieste to meeting Sandy and then Raffaella, and all the way up to the drive that brought me to her kitchen table. An hour had passed and we were into the second pot of coffee.

“What about Sofi?” she asked with a sad look in her eyes.

“I will meet her tomorrow. We talked often while I was away. I think we both have come to the conclusion that we are not right for each other, except as good friends. She said we should meet as soon as I got back to talk about how we can get on with our lives. I hope we will stay friends.”

“I am sure you will. She can still come to the wedding, unless you are planning to ask Raffaella.”

“I’ll have to think about that.”

I drove out of Åsa, along the road where the accident happened almost half my lifetime ago. The sun was still high when I passed Ölmavallaviken in Kungsbackafjorden. *It won’t set until around nine, I thought. In two months it will be full daylight until eleven here on the West Coast. I’ll miss that.*

I drove to my apartment in Kungälv, passing through Göteborg and through the tunnel under Götaälv along the way. Rush hour had already ended. My neighbour, Gunilla, had the keys to my place and my telephone number if there was any kind of emergency. She had not called during my absence, and there was no sign she had been in my apartment. There were several pieces of mail on the hallway floor below the post flap in the door.

The apartment smelled a bit musty, so I opened windows in the kitchen and the main room. It looked the same as it had looked for the ten years I had lived there.

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Sofi was sitting at our favorite table at Ahlströms when I arrived at eight in the morning. She got up and gave me a warm hug, and then we went to the counter to pick out our favorites. Ahlströms is one of the only places in Göteborg that makes what is called *Dansk wienerbröd*. It's a highly compacted version of the Swedish *wienerbröd*, and sweeter. Sofi chose her favorite, an *äpplemazarin*, which is also a specialty of Ahlströms.

"You look very healthy, Nicklas," joked Sofi.

"You mean I have gotten fatter! I certainly have put on a few kilos, and this little treat is not going to help me lose them."

"Sassy sends her love." I could sense that she was going to take some time to arrive at the point of our meeting, and I was in no rush either. I had phoned Lars and told him I would be in Trollhättan after lunch, around 12.30.

"I've missed seeing you both," I said. She asked about the places I most enjoyed seeing and the foods I most enjoyed eating. Finally, after a long

silence when we both sat looking into our coffee cups, she cleared her throat and said what she had intended to say.

“I’ve met someone. I would like to learn to know him better, but I can’t do that as long as I feel there is a chance we will be a couple again.”

For a moment I thought about saying *I’ve met someone, too*, but I caught myself. “Do I know him?”

“No. He’s a colleague at work. He started a few weeks ago. He was working in the Södertälje lab for a number of years. His name is Anders.”

“Sofi, I had my chance to be the person in your life, but I gave that up five years ago. I didn’t feel I was strong enough to be a father and your husband at that time.”

“We are too much alike, Nicklas, which is why we have been such good friends. We are both very good at making the small decisions, but terrible at making the big ones. I could have gotten pregnant and decided for both of us, but I couldn’t.”

I thought about what Raffaella had said. *Don’t ask for permission; ask for forgiveness*. Sofi was right. We are very similar. We both need to be with people who take command. Hopefully, Anders will turn out to be that person for Sofi.

“What about your Italian fisherwoman?” she asked with a smile. “Did you meet her after that first time? What is her name?”

Should I tell her? Wouldn’t it be better to just leave her with the thought that she had finally taken the step that one of us should have taken years ago? But then, I have never been able to lie to Sofi.

“Raffaella. We met again over the Easter weekend. She came to Sandy’s cousin’s place in Bologna with her parents. I guess we will see what happens now with Saab and take it from there.” One step at a time.

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The drive to Trollhättan from Göteborg takes a little over an hour. It takes twice as long during the morning rush hour on a good day in the opposite direction. The parking lot at Saab was less than half full when I pulled into it around noon. Lars had organized a meeting of the department at 13.00, so I went into the canteen where I knew everyone would be eating. They were there—most of them, at least—at our usual table. They had finished eating and were drinking coffee when I arrived. It was a noisy reunion. Questions came flying at me from all directions. We drank our coffees and then moved to the conference room. Lars got right to the point.

“The deal with Hawtai is coming apart, and some of our suppliers are still not making deliveries. Another Chinese carmaker named Youngman and a Chinese automotive retailer named Pang Da are now in talks with Victor. The official line is that they will jointly take over Saab Automobile and the UK dealer network, with Youngman owning sixty percent and Pang Da taking forty.”

“What are the chances that this will go ahead?” asked Henrik, the lead for the safety and security systems.

“GM has already signalled that they don’t support it,” answered Lars, “but Victor says he has talked with our lawyers about how to structure the deal so that it will be acceptable to them.”

“What’s the main problem?” asked Kent, who worked on my navigation team.

“Patent licenses and all the technology that we have developed while we were owned by GM,” replied Lars. “So now to the main point of this meeting. Management has asked all group leaders to evaluate whether it would be possible to come up with new alternatives for navigation, advanced

driver assistance, infotainment and telematics within the next six months. If we can, we will have a chance to leave behind the patents and technology that GM says it owns.”

The room was quiet, as only a Swedish conference room can be. We were all doing the calculations in our heads for our areas of responsibility. Could my team create a totally new navigation solution in six months? Could Henrik and his team put together a completely new safety and security system in that short time? We would need the full cooperation of our suppliers if we were to have even the slightest chance, and our suppliers were no longer cooperating because we weren’t paying them.

“You don’t need to give me an answer right now,” said Lars in his most consoling voice and sincere manner. “Take two weeks and give me your best and worst case scenarios.”

For the rest of the afternoon we sat huddled in our groups discussing the options and possibilities. Each of the team leaders had prepared a plan of action for the coming two weeks when we left the office around 4.30 p.m. on that Friday afternoon. We all agreed that we were going to have to work through the weekends if we were to have any chance of making the deadline. My idea of sea trout fishing in the waters bordering *Kosterhavets nationalpark* went out the window. There will still be time after this drill is finished, I thought.

The evening before I had cleaned out the refrigerator. There had not been much in there, but what was there had spoiled during the five weeks I had been away. I stopped at the local ICA and bought the provisions I would need to get me through the next two weeks. I poured a *Falcon Bayerskt mörk lager*, sat down in my one lounge chair and phoned Raffaella.

“Ciao, Nicola.”

“Ciao, Raffi.”

“It’s good to hear your voice.”

“It’s good to hear yours as well. It’s been a busy day.”

We talked for over an hour, starting with the drive to Sweden, my visit with Caro, my talk with Sofi and the situation at Saab.

“What are the chances you will be able to come up with new technology designs?” Raffaella was moving to the next *milstolpe*, as we say in Swedish; the start point for the next leg.

“Close to zero. Lars just wants us to all feel we went out fighting. He will deliver the reports to management, who will probably bury them while they keep trying to convince both GM and the Chinese that everything will be fine in the end if they cooperate. I have already decided to resign after we finish this exercise. There is a classmate of mine at my old university in Göteborg who is working in the 3D printing lab. I am going to do my best to convince him to let me hang around his lab long enough to learn something. I guess I will stay here up to my sister’s wedding at the end of June.”

“I don’t think I can wait until the end of June to see you, Nicola. Either you come here as soon as you can, or I am coming there.”

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Four boxes, one suitcase, one duffle bag, a rod carrying case and a backpack. That is what I loaded into the Saab in early June for the return trip to Italy. I couldn’t wait either. One box contained my treasures, including photos, paintings, medals I had won in sports, my favourite cups and cereal bowl, my coffee brewer and coffee bean grinder and a Swedish flag that had belonged to *farfar* and then *far*. The second box contained my books, the ones that had meant something to me when I read them and might one day be read again. The third box contained my fishing log books, fly

reels, flies and fly-tying tools and material, and the fourth box held my computer and video equipment. The duffle bag was stuffed with sports clothes and shoes, my waders, wading shoes, hats and miscellaneous other gear. The suitcase contained my total wardrobe and the single pair of dress shoes I owned. The backpack was for whatever legal papers I had, my passport, my laptop, iPad and iPhone.

I had rented a trailer the day before, cleaned out the apartment and took everything to the Red Cross. What they did not want I took to the recycling center. There were three months left on my rental agreement with HSB, but I had no problem finding someone to take it over and move in as soon as I had left. HSB transferred my three months security payment to my account, so with the money I had gotten from Saab, I had a good buffer to take me through the summer and early autumn before I started working with the Savino brothers.

I drove straight through, from Kungälv to Milano, with a stop in Åsa for coffee with Caro and to give her my keys and ownership papers to Benny. She finally got her wish. I made a few pit stops along the way. The trip took twenty-four hours in total, with twenty of those hours driving. I phoned Raffaella when I was a few minutes away, and she was waiting outside her apartment building when I arrived. She got into the car and we drove into the courtyard where her car was parked. I turned off the motor and looked at Raffaella. She had a very big smile on her face. So did I.

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It was on September 12th that Raffaella and I drove in her Land Rover Defender to Verona to restart what Sandy and I had put on hold in order for Sandy to have his hip operation. I was now used to seeing what looked like the Swedish flag flying in front of public buildings. Raffaella had joked the first time we drove into the city, in early July, that Sandy had organized the

special welcome by asking the city to fly the Swedish flag in my honor. “His great-great-grandfather was the first mayor of the city, you know,” she had said in a very serious voice, “so he has plenty of influence.” It took a few more flag sightings before I realized that it was not exactly the Swedish flag; it was Verona’s own flag. “Well, I wasn’t kidding about his great-great-grandfather,” she admitted, and we both laughed.



Flag of Verona



Flag of Sweden

We flew to Göteborg for Caro’s and Rikard’s wedding. Caro had asked me whether I would mind if she invited Sofi. “It’s your wedding, Sis,” I had said. Sofi came with Anders and during the reception following the ceremony I found myself talking to Anders while Sofi and Raffi were having what seemed to be an enjoyable conversation. Anders and I talked about everything except Sofi. He said that his dog and Sassy were gradually coming to terms with one another. Raffi never told me what she and Sofi discussed, and it’s just as well.

During the two months after we returned together from Sweden following Caro’s wedding we visited Sandy almost every other week. His operation turned out to be a double hip replacement. I had gotten to know Sandy’s son

Jacopo and his wife Annamaria very well during this time. Their house was much larger than I had imagined from Sandy's description of it, and there were plenty of extra rooms for guests. Raffaella and I always had separate rooms when we visited, as we did when we were at her parent's home. We were now a couple, and while we certainly did not have separate rooms in Milano—Raffaella's apartment had only one bedroom where we spent most of our time when we were home making up for the many years when we lived in celibacy—we followed the rules of decorum when we were visiting.

In between my Italian language classes in Perugia, which started in July, I took cooking lessons in a small private class run by one of Raffaella's college friends who lives just outside of Perugia in a small farm inherited by her husband. They have converted it to a hotel and weekend restaurant. During the week, Josefina teaches the art and science of cooking the dishes of Umbria, The Marches, Lombardia, Toscana, Emilio-Romagna, Lazio and Abruzzo. Her specialty is using *tartuffi*, the black truffle that is so abundant in her part of Italy.



That summer, in late August when Sandy was walking with almost no hint of having his operation, I attended my second opera. It was *Tosca* by Giacomo Puccini, and it was in the Verona Arena. Jacopo drove us to the piazza where the Arena is located, called *Piazza Bra*. As far as anyone knew, it was not called 'bra' because there were Swedes in Verona a few thousand years ago, since *bra* means 'good' in Swedish. The Arena is huge,

the third largest Roman arena in Italy after Rome's Colosseum and the arena in Capua, explained Sandy. "We were very close to Capua when we drove from Napoli to Broccostella. We should have stopped. We will have to go back to see it."

The opera started at nine, after it was dark, with the orchestra playing an introduction. Within a few minutes I felt some drops of rain, and then the conductor stopped the orchestra and all the musicians walked out. An announcer explained that the instruments are very sensitive to water and would be ruined if they got wet. Ten minutes passed, the orchestra returned, started playing and then the rain started again. They left, returned, left, returned, left and after another fifteen minutes returned again. It was now ten o'clock. This time the clouds had passed, the stars were shining and the performance began. With one pause, it lasted until almost one in the morning. I was really surprised at how much I had enjoyed it. I understood enough words here and there to grasp the plot. My Italian classes were beginning to pay off.

Jacopo and Annamaria were waiting for us at the appointed spot, just at the corner of *Vicolo Tre Marchetti*. We were going to have a very late night dinner at one of Verona's most touristic restaurants, *Trattoria Tre Marchetti da Barca*.

"It is owned by a good friend, Roberto Barca, whom I have known all my life," explained Sandy. "His son is now in charge, and he has made it more of a tourist restaurant than it was. You will see. The food is good. To make it better he would have to slow everything down and serve fewer people. We will order the dishes that do not take too much preparation and enjoy the show."

It was between the *antipasti* and the *piatti secondi* that I understood what Sandy had meant about 'the show'. We all ordered the *carpaccio di manzo*

affumicato con rucola, parmigiana e noci as our *antipasto*. “At this time of night we should have something light,” suggested Raffaella. We skipped the *primi piatti* and moved straight to the *secondi*. I had grown fond of *gnocchi* and *tortelloni*, so I had to ask about two of the *primi piatti*.

“What are the *gnocchi di patata con gorgonzola , mascarpone e noci* and the *tortelloni al sedano bianco di Verona*, which it says is *Piatto tipico Veronese*? If I guess correctly, the *gnocchi* are with a *gorgonzola* cheese sauce and the *tortelloni* are something typical for Verona.”

“Correct,” replied Sandy. “*Mascarpone* is a creamy soft cheese made with cow’s milk, and *noci* are nuts, in this case, walnuts. This is one of my favourites, but it will probably be a bit overcooked now. *Sedano bianco* are white celeries. The filling for the *tortelloni* is made with celery, eggs, half-grated *parmigiano*, breadcrumbs and nutmeg. The celery is sautéed in butter, chopped and whipped with the other ingredients. It is wonderful! We will try it another time.”

Suddenly, someone was singing in an opera voice. I looked up and saw the young owner. He was soon joined by one and then two women, who were singing songs that I recognized from *Tosca*. All service stopped, and most of the guests paused their dining to listen politely. The women were professionals, but the leading man had a good, strong voice. He looked very happy and his enthusiasm filled the room. Loud and genuinely felt applause followed their performance. There were several ‘Bravos’.

“He has the best of both worlds,” said Sandy as we returned to our dinner. “He continues the restaurant that puts bread on the entire family’s table, and several times each evening he is the star of an opera.”

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A few weeks later, after we had finished eating dinner and were sitting close to each other on Raffaella's well-worn couch, she told me she was pregnant. I had already rehearsed my proposal over and over in my mind, but at that moment all I could say was: "Let's get married tomorrow." And we did, in a simple civil ceremony at the city hall, officiated by the civil registrar. Our witnesses were Carlo and Adelina Savino. We phoned everyone that evening and gave them both pieces of good news, and promised that we would have a real wedding celebration after our first child was born.

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I was wearing my old waders and wading shoes and casting with my Temple Fork Outfitters Lefty Kreh Signature Series I Graphite 9 foot, two-piece rod for a 6 weight line. It had all the power necessary to cast a long line when I had to, but its flexible tip was really great for the kind of nymph fishing I was doing right now on the Adige. I had on my favorite trout reel, one of the two Stream Line reels *morbror Micke* had given me. The other one was larger and for salmon. The Adige is the second longest river in Italy, after the Po, I learned from my Internet search. It is 410 kilometres long, starting around 70 kilometers north of Bolzano in the Reschen Pass in Curon Venosta, or Graun im Vinschgau in German, and ending in the Adriatic Sea.

At this time of year the water level in the Adige is low. As we approached the river I could hear in my mind the roar of water tearing down the valley after ice out in the spring. The sound it made now, a muffled gurgle, came from its waters flowing over and around the different sized stones covering the bed. Even with the low water, the flow is relatively fast on the stretch where we were fishing because of the drop in elevation. There are some deep pools along the banks where the river bends, and this is

where we concentrated our efforts. I fished nymphs while Sandy fished dries. The pool I fished was long and deep, but it was narrow, only about three meters wide. I had to fish it from the side, far enough from the edge so that I did not spook the fish.

This was one of those times I felt a strike indicator would make a good addition to my rig, so I tied one on. I needed to keep the fly in the pool and drift-free, so I had to mend often. A strike indicator gave me a better idea of where the fly was in relation to the surface. I used the vertical mend, rather than the more common side-to-side mend. With a vertical mend, the motion of the rod tip is an abbreviated version of a roll cast. The idea is to keep the fly indicator on the surface and flip out line above it. My technique was working fine, but at first I was not getting any strikes. I adjusted the location of the fly indicator until I was hitting bottom, but there were still no takers. There were fish in that pool. I just needed to find the right combination of fly and depth to connect with one of them. Sandy's voice broke my concentration.

"Time for coffee," he shouted from the shore behind me. I walked carefully from stone to stone until I was standing next to him. "It's not easy fishing, is it?" he said in a consoling way.

"There aren't that many variables. It's depth and fly selection, and then it's up to the fish. Maybe they had a big breakfast."

"Surely not as big as ours."

That would have been difficult. It was not that we ate a lot of food. It was just that the food was so filling, especially after the late dinner we had the evening before. We had arrived to the Pension Sonnheim around seven in the evening. By the time we unloaded, checked in and freshened up, it was eight. Sandy was determined not to miss his first post-operation fishing trip martini—and it was a solid Swiss portion—so it was nine before we sat

down at dinner. Sandy asked me if I wanted to sit out on the terrace, but even though it had been a warm and sunny twenty-five degrees during the day, the mountain air was cool. The sun had set an hour-or-so earlier. “Let’s save it for breakfast tomorrow morning,” I suggested. We moved from the lounge to the dining room.

Our waiter, Aldo, of course had served Sandy on previous visits. He showed us to our table and handed us each a menu. I didn’t recognize anything, except the apple strudel for dessert and the priest chokers, *strangolapreti*, which Elena had prepared for Raffaella and me when we returned home from our evening fishing excursion.

“May I offer my suggestions?”

“Please do. As long as we end with the apple strudel.”

“We should start with *radicchio con speck*. It is a warm salad made with the region’s special smoked ham, called *speck*, the red radicchio, garlic, balsamico vinegar and olive oil. The radicchio leaves are cut into strips, coated in olive oil, sprinkled with sea salt and cracked pepper and then roasted in an oven until they are slightly charred. The *speck* is cut into small cubes and sautéed until crisp. The cubes are removed and drained while the chopped garlic is placed in the same pan and fried until golden. Everything is tossed together and a bit more balsamico vinegar is sprinkled over. It is wonderful!”

“Sounds like a meal,” I said with a laugh.

“We shall ask for a small portion,” answered Sandy with a wink.

“For our *piatto primo* I think we will save the *strangolapreti* for tomorrow after we have worked up a really good appetite on the river. I suggest we take a nice soup made with a beef broth and *canederli*, a bread *gnocchi*. In German they are called *knödel*. They also include pieces of

speck. The secret spice is nutmeg. For our *piatto secondo* I recommend the *filetto di manzo all griglia*, a grilled beef tenderloin with a crust of walnuts. It is best medium-rare. They make a wonderful baked sweet potato to go with it. The local *Lagrein* wine is perfect for all of these dishes.”

Aldo smiled and nodded his approval of Sandy’s choices. We ate slowly. My practice with Raffaella was finally showing results. Our *strudel alle mele* came at the end, this time without vanilla ice cream. “The *Renetta Ruggine* apples should get all our attention,” explained Sandy. Coffee came and neither of us felt the slightest urge to move. We sat quietly with our thoughts.

After a few moments, Sandy said, “While I was recuperating from my operation I received a letter from a friend I have not seen for a few years. His name is Enzo Annoni. He lived most of his life in Torino, but when he retired he moved to his family’s farm close to a town called Borgosesia, which is on the Sesia River in the Province Vercelli in the Region of Piemonte. Enzo is a mechanical engineer. He and I collaborated on several buildings my firm designed in Torino and we became good friends. His wife passed away just before I lost Francesca and with his move and my, shall we say, deliberations, we just lost touch. In any case, he wrote and said it was time we went fishing together. We share an interest in fly fishing, but Enzo uses a very special technique when he is fishing on his home waters. It is called *alla Valsesiana* by the local people. Have you ever heard of it?”

“Can’t say that I have,” I replied, wondering where this conversation was taking us.

“Have you heard of ‘tenkara’ fishing, a sort of fly fishing without a reel that started in Japan a few hundred years ago?”

“I read about it in a British magazine some time back, but it seemed like it was the kind of fishing we did when we were young, with a long bamboo

pole, nylon line tied to the top of the pole and a big, bushy fly tied at the end of the line. It was deadly for abborre.”

“Well, I can attest to the fact that *alla Valsesiana* is deadly for trout. It is very similar to the Japanese tenkara technique. Are you interested in trying it? I thought I would tell Enzo we would visit him after we have been to Aosta.”

“I have two weeks before I will start my new job with Carlo and his team, and start taking lessons in natural childbirth and fatherhood, so wherever you take me I will follow. What’s special about the *alla Valsee*...”

“*alla Valsesiana*,” offered Sandy.

“What’s so special about the *alla Valsesiana* technique compared to *tenkara*?”

“When it comes down to the basics, there is no difference. Both use a long rod with a fixed line attached at the top and a fly or multiple flies tied at the end of the line. The purists stick to horsehair lines in Valsesia and bamboo rods in Japan. They both tie their flies with hackle pushed forward so that it pulses in the water, instead of lying flat.”

“I think it will be fun to try it,” I said, and with that, we rose up from the table and found our way to our rooms. I checked my iPhone, and there was a mail from Raffi: *I hope you enjoyed the strudel alle mele. We are fine. Sleep well amore mio.*

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At breakfast, I followed Sandy’s lead in loading up my plate with a piece of the apple and walnut cake, four dumplings made with ricotta and ground hazlenuts, a small almond tart called *torta fregolotta* and a few fried dough angel wings. “You don’t find these treats anywhere else,” offered Sandy, urging me to fill my plate. This was after my normal breakfast of hard

boiled egg and *Kalle's Caviar* with a cheese sandwich. The climbing over slippery rocks and the morning of constant casting had helped me to work off the feeling of being overly full, so I promised myself to stick to just coffee for the morning and mid-day breaks.

"Let's have a look at what you have been using this morning, Nicklas," said Sandy after we had finished our coffee. He took out a small zip-lock bag from his vest pocket and put it down on the groundcover tarp we had used for our *fika*. I picked up the bag while I handed him my foam fly-drying patch.

"Caddis," I said after examining the contents of the plastic bag.

"Sedge flies, the order *Trichoptera*, if I remember correctly from the lesson Alberto gave us."

"We call them *Nattsländor* in Swedish. Before fishing with you, I never gave them too much attention."

"I used some of my recuperation time this summer to read up on them, and you will be very interested in what I used as an information source."

Sandy took out a small booklet that looked at first like a leader wallet. It had a green leather cover. He opened it and there was a hand-drawn picture of a brown trout about to take a fly from the surface. It was signed K. Boström '81. Under the image was the title *Caddisflies in Brown Trout Water* by Kenneth Boström.

"Kenneth Boström is a Swedish fly fishing legend!"

"This was a gift from one of my Swedish architecture friends who translated it to English for me and several other good friends. I had forgotten that I had it and found it in my fishing library. Have a look through it."

I turned the pages slowly. In the introduction he explains that he had a difficult time collecting information because there was so little written about

caddisflies. He had written a similar book on mayflies and was going to apply what he had learned with that book to make this one even better, he wrote.

“It looks like your friend has used the original pages and pasted over the translations. The photos are terrific. Look at this one with two of them on a stone, one still in his puppa skin and the other one fully emerged.”



“The nine diagrams showing the different hatching procedures are priceless. He says that the form varies according to the species, but also the conditions.”

I flipped the pages and we read them together. “He couldn’t have been doing much fishing when he was making these observations. It must have taken him hundreds of hours standing in the water with a magnifying glass to be able to see these different hatching forms,” I said. Boström writes that the most common method is for the pupa to eat through the house it has been living in on the bottom on the stream. The air between its body and outer skin acts like a life vest, floating him quickly to the surface. Once there, he leaves the outer skin and the wings emerge. This can take some time, and it is then he is most exposed to hungry trout. The caddis flaps its wings and hops on the water’s surface to get the wings ready to fly, and finally lifts off.

“I never thought about the possibility that there might be more than one way these little bugs come out of the water, and certainly not so many different ones. I’m beginning to think that trout must have to get a degree in entomology just to be able to keep themselves fed.”

“Would you like to watch with me for a bit before you go back to fishing?” asked Sandy, with the answer he wanted clearly expressed in his smiling face.

“Sure. We can always catch fish, but how often do you get to sit by the side of a stream and watch caddis flies?”

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We were on the road by 9.00 the next morning on our way to Valle d’Aosta with me behind the wheel of the Saab. Before we left Verona we had talked about how we would share the driving, and we came to an agreement that I would do most of it. There was no point in stressing Sandy’s new hips since he would be getting plenty of exercise when we were fishing. There were now almost five hundred kilometres ahead of us to Valle d’Aosta, and following the route Sandy chose would take a minimum of nine hours. The fastest route would take four hours. “It’s the journey that matters,” Sandy would say. “There is so much to see when you are not driving at breakneck speeds on the *Autostrada*.”

We drove north toward Marano on the SS38. “One day you have to come back here to the *Museo Archeologico dell’Alto Adige* in Bolzano. That is where you will see Ötzi, the Iceman.”

“I think I remember hearing about him in one of my natural science classes. He was found by hikers, wasn’t he?”

“A German couple found what they thought was the corpse of a recently deceased hiker who had been buried by an avalanche. It turned out that the Iceman had lived over five thousand years ago and had been almost perfectly preserved in the ice for all this time. He predates the pyramids in Egypt and Stonehenge in England. And what made the find even greater was the fact that he was perfectly preserved. He was deep frozen. If the German couple

had not decided to take a detour and wandered off the main path, he would have decomposed.”

At Merano, the SS38 turns to the east and is called *Strada statale dello Stelvio* with the Adige flowing alongside. We drove until we came to Spondigna, where the SS38 breaks off to the south and the main road continues as SS40. “If we stay on the main road we will have to drive through Switzerland and then out again, and I would rather like to avoid international passport checks,” laughed Sandy. It was a tortuous, zig-zagging mountain road through the Passo Stelvio and continuing down to Bormio. At some point along the way we had passed into the Region of Lombardia. We had only driven about seventy kilometres, but we both felt we needed to stop for a rest.

“There’s a thermal spa here in Bormio that has been in use since Roman times, and probably before. Today, it is mostly known as a ski resort. The hot baths make it even more attractive.”

We found a place at the edge of town where we parked the car and enjoyed our coffee. There was already a hint of winter in the air. The view of the Alps was spectacular with snow already covering the highest peaks.

“Sandy, have you ever thought about whether the fish enjoy being caught as much as we fishermen enjoy catching them?”

There was a long pause. Then he said, “Yes, I have, especially when I first started fishing.”

“What did you decide?”

“I decided that I could never know what a fish was thinking or feeling, and that my chief reason for fishing was to eat whatever I caught. It is not so many years since most of us humans left our daily tasks to a very small number of others who would do our hunting and gathering and growing and

slaughtering. I think we have to consciously turn off the traits we have built into our DNA by denying they still exist. Maybe one day we will have to use these skills again and it will be good to have a few of us left who remember how to use them.”

“You mean like in the *MAD MAX* movies when only a few survivors are left after a nuclear holocaust?”

“I mean when robots are running the world for robots and we humans have to fend for ourselves as best we can.”

“I’m seeing a side of you I have not seen before, Sandy. A little cynical.”

“We haven’t discussed the Big Questions, Nicklas. But you asked the biggest question of all for a fly fisher. What do you think?”

“I always thought of fishing as a game of tug-of-war. The fish had as much chance of winning as I did, and when it was all over, even if I won, the fish got to just swim away.”

“I hope I am long gone when the day finally arrives when laws are passed that make fishing illegal. That will happen just before we turn over everything to the robots.”

“I think we can be fairly certain no one will ever make a fly fishing robot.”

“Why, because people who design robots are not fly fishers?” quipped Sandy. “If I were a robot designer this is precisely the type of challenge I would want to take on.”

“You know what, Sandy, I am going to go out on a limb—do you know that that means? Yes? O.K.—I am going to go out on a limb and say that if there is one robot that can never, ever be invented it is one that can fish with a fly.”

“You know what, Nicklas?” That is enough of a reason for us to continue fishing, don’t you think?”

“Affirmative.”

&

Epilogue

We gave our daughter, Michaela, her first fly rod and reel this year for her fifth birthday. Gabriele, her younger brother by two years, will receive his at the same age. They are always with us when we fish, which is just about every weekend. We modified two back pack frames so each child fits inside a waterproof hut that also protects them from a fly that has gotten off course. *Morfar* Michele thinks we should patent the design, but we are not so sure how many other parents would be interested in taking their young ones on the river while they fished. We have found a few local streams and ponds that are well stocked and where we can keep our casting arms in shape for the real tests, when we join Sandy somewhere on the peninsula or on one of the islands. The last time we met him to fish was six months ago in Abruzzo on the *fiume Sangro*, the river we had seen during our visit to the Museum of Fly Fishing. Of course we passed by Pescara for lunch at *La Vongola*, where Giacomo saw to it that we had the usual splendid meal. We agreed then to meet in Sardegna for a week in the area of the Sadali in Barbagia.

Michaela is a copy of her mother but with my blue eyes. Gabriele is a blond, big-boned Swede with his mother's dark brown eyes. They are both happy kids, always smiling except when they are tired and can't get into bed fast enough to fall asleep. That's when Raffaella has to work her magic. She wraps herself around our cranky child, whispers their favourite story into their ear and within minutes they are in dreamland. She has used this trick on me on the rare occasion that I have been out of sorts, and it always works like a charm.

We share the cooking and household chores. One week I'm on full duty and the next week it's her turn. That means that there is only one captain of the ship at one time. The one who is off house duties has child duties. Since

neither of us travels that often for our work, it has been easy to keep to this schedule. From the day we began living together we have eaten dinner at the same table between six and eight. We are frequent restaurant visitors, but our meals at home are as good or better as anything we can eat out. Raffaella was always interested in cooking and is masterful at creating the most delicious meals with a minimum number of ingredients. Cooking has become one of my two new hobbies after the six weeks I spent with Sandy fishing the fresh waters of my adopted country.

Raffaella has tried to teach me how to clean house properly. She is an excellent teacher, but I am a very poor student. I have never known anyone with as much patience as my wife. I saw it for the first time when we fished together on the *Piave*. She never shows the slightest sign of being irritated with me or the children or anyone who has difficulty with the simplest instructions. Happily, we have an apartment and not a house. We decided to live in the city rather than buying a house so we could be close to our work and avoid all the driving around that people do with their children. Storing our cars, the Defender and the Saab, was a problem. We solved it by renting two spaces in an underground garage close by. It was expensive but better than all of the alternatives, including regular bills for cleaning graffiti off the Defender.

Raffaella's apartment served us well until Michaela came along just about nine months after I returned from my drive to Sweden. Then we needed more space. Michele's older sister, *Zia* Rossana, whose husband had died and who had no children, no longer needed her two hundred square meter, three storey apartment in the building that she owned within a short walking distance of the opera house, *La Scala*, so she moved into one of the smaller apartments and we took over hers. The third floor is in the attic, with just one room. It has two windowed dormers on either side. It is my workshop. *Zia* Rossana now eats dinner with us on most evenings and

minds the children when Raffaella and I have an evening out on our own to attend the opera or our fly fishing club meetings.

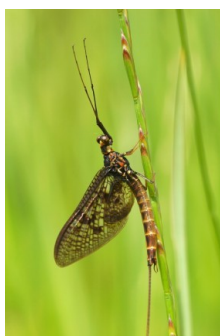
Once every month we drive up to *Castel Lavazzo* and the farm, leaving on Friday after lunch and returning on Sunday evening. We used to alternate between Raffaella's Defender and my Saab until Gabriele arrived. After that, the Defender was the clear alternative. As with everything, we take turns. Whoever isn't driving is sitting in the back seat with the children, reading or playing games or telling stories. Depending on the weather, we take a walk, all six of us retracing the steps Raffaella and I took on our first walk together. We sit in the same room and talk before dinner, and we eat in the same dining room where I shared the first meal with my future wife and her parents. Elena's cooking only gets better. Anna is now a teenager and studying hard. She wants to become a doctor. She always speaks English with me. She says that I am the reason why she gets good marks in her English courses. I tell her that I had the worst marks in my English class when I was studying. She laughs in disbelief. Anna adores Raffaella and Anna will never see me as anyone more or less than Prince Charming who fell in love with Cinderella.

Preparations for our drive to Sardegna were going well. Raffaella was tying flies every evening for the past week after the children fell asleep. Sandy took the ferry over to the island a week earlier, landing in Cagliari. He started fishing in the south, working his way toward Sandali. He has been sending daily reports of the fishing. We gave him a Picture Post Card device last year for Christmas and he has used it faithfully ever since. The children look forward to his monologues, delivered standing in a forest or the middle of a city dressed in one of his vested suits and wearing a bow tie. He always has something to say directly to the children, and he inserts clips he has made casting for and catching a fish.

“Zio said the flies made with hare’s hair were out-fishing the feathered ones ten-to-one,” said Raffaella when she came up the stairs into my workshop. The printer was just finishing up the outer casing for a Hardy Prince reel. I was filing and polishing the inner spool. Also on the desk was a 1:50 scale model of *Arco di Traiano*, which I had made for Sandy to add to his collection. I could not think of a way of turning one of my hobbies into a profession, so I turned my profession into one of my hobbies.

Sandy and Emilia Fidele from Broccostella have become good friends. We are all invited down to Giacomo and Louisa Aloï’s house during Easter week, and we fish the *Fibreno*, always with a half-hitch on the flies. Sandy and Emilia sit together at dinner and take long, slow walks together when we are not eating or fishing. *Cannelloni* has become his favorite dish.

Sofi and I are still good friends. I don’t phone her anymore like I did before meeting Raffaella, but we do talk from time to time. She and Anders came to our wedding celebration that we had in the summer after Michaela was born, and we see them during the annual trips we make in June to Sweden to visit Caro, Rikard and Anna-Britt, which we time to coincide with the major emergence of the *Ephemera Vulgata*.



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The Rivers

Torrente Torre – Percoto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia

Isonzo – Gorizia, Friuli-Venezia Giulia

Piave – Belluno, Veneto

Tevere – Sansepolcro, Toscana

Nera, Terni, Umbria

Volturno, Castel Campagnano, Campania

Fibreno, Broccostella, Lazio

Adige, Trentino-Alto Adige

The Cars

Black 1983 Saab 900 Turbo in Verona then Bologna then Torino

Black 1960 Volvo PV210 in Torino then Sardegna

Red 1973 Volvo 1800ES Sport in Bologna then Benevento

Two-tone orange and white 1953 Volvo PV445 Duett in Benevento then Bologna

White 1967 Volvo 145 in Sicilia

Red 1962 Volvo P120 estate in Sardegna

The Names

Raffaella – Italian feminine form of the male name *Raffaele* or *Raffaello*, meaning ‘God has healed’.

Michaela – Italian feminine form of the Hebrew name *Michael*, which means ‘Who is like God?’ Italian masculine form is *Michele*.

Gabriella – Italian feminine form of the Hebrew name Gabriel, which means ‘God is my strength’. Italian masculine form is Gabriele.

Nicola – The Latinised version of the Greek name derived from Nikos, which means ‘victory’ and laos, which means ‘people’. So Nicola means ‘winner of the people’. Forms of the name include Nicklas, Niclas, Niklas and Nicholas.

Allesandro - The Italian form of the Greek name Alexander, Alessandro means "man's defender, warrior".

Italy’s Important Dates as Street and Plaza Names

Riva 3 Novembre – The World War I Battle of Vittorio Veneto was fought from 24 October to 3 November 1918 near Vittorio Veneto on the Italian Front. The Italian victory marked the end of the War on the Italian Front.

Piazza Unità d’Italia – Unity of Italy, 17 March 1861, when the new Italian Parliament proclaimed Victor Emmanuel King of Italy. On 27 March 1861, Rome was declared Capital of Italy, even though it was not actually in the new Kingdom and would not be until 20 September 1870.

Via XX Settembre – September 20th is Rome’s Liberation Day. On that day in 1870, General Raffaele Cadorna led the Italian army into Rome, bombed the city for several hours and then declared it to be the capital of the unified Italy.

Piazza IV Novembre - It commemorates the end of the war with Austria-Hungary in 1918. On the 4th of November, Italy celebrates the “National Unity Day” and the “Armed Forces Day” in remembrance of the end of World War I. On the 4th of November, 1918, with the entry of the Italian

victorious troops into Trento and Trieste and after almost three years and a half of fighting, the "Great War" ended.

Via XXV Aprile – The 25th of April when the end of the Second World War and the end of Nazi occupation is celebrated. The date was chosen because it was the day Milano and Turino were liberated. It took another week before the whole country was free.

The Author and Acknowledgements



We all have our reasons for fishing. Writing this book helped me to understand mine. I caught my first and second fish on a fly in April, 1975 at the age of twenty-seven, a few months after a failed, three-year marriage ended. The fish (pictured above with their captor) were salmon, and the river was the Miramichi in New Brunswick, Canada. The trip to Clayton Stewart's Camp in Boiestown was arranged by Andrew S. Krotinger, Esq. Andy taught me most of what I needed to know about fly fishing, and he and I have been fishing together ever since. During the first nine years I first fished I was a bachelor and I fished incessantly. At the time, I did not know why this was so, but I was thankful for having a pastime that could occupy mind and body so completely. During the following thirty-three years after I married, I have fished mostly in my head, with a week on a salmon river here and a day on a trout stream there. My Hardy reels and Orvis gear bring curious stares when I show up on the water, but I still catch my share of fish, and return them to be caught (or not) another day.

I learned about Italian food by growing up in a family in which both parents were the children of Italian immigrants. My grandparents came from different regions of Italy (Umbria on Mom's side and Campagna on Dad's),

settled in Scranton, Pennsylvania—where I was born—and raised families in their respective region's food and cultural traditions. My first encounter with Sweden was in April, 1977, the year I left a promising career as an architect and began working for a Swedish map-making company. In January, 1984, Britt Marie Christina Borg and I were married in Sweden. We lived first in the U.S. then moved in January 1992 to the Gothenburg area of Sweden where I was employed by Volvo for four years. Since then, we have lived, worked and fished together in Sweden. The first eighteen of those years were in West Sweden, the heart of the Swedish car and truck industry, and since 2010 in Strängnäs, a small city close to Stockholm.

The characters in this book are all fictional. Any resemblance to actual persons or names is purely coincidental. The rivers and information about these rivers is factual, gathered either in person or from reliable sources. All of the places mentioned by name in this book exist. Those establishments which are not named are fictional. All of the food dishes mentioned are definitely real and have been tasted by the author at one time or another.

I would like to thank my reviewers: Barbara Petersen, Richard Lettieri, Dr. Michael Dobson, Bruce Rosenberg, Barry Siegel, Alistair Dinwiddie and Dr. Paulette Merchel. Their helpful comments and support along the way kept me on track or, in many cases, caused me to rethink and revise when needed. Without the editorial assistance from Paolo Abbate, this book would be full of Italian language misspellings and erroneous information about Italy. He has been a tireless editor of all three of my books about the foods, culture and history of his homeland, and I have learned greatly from my working association with him.

The map of Italy with the locations of the rivers fished by Nicklas and Sandy is the work of master cartographer Alistair Dinwiddie. Alistair was the first true cartographer I ever met when I arrived at the offices of Esselte

Map Service in Stockholm in April, 1977, and he has been a true friend ever since. The cover photograph was taken by Marta Abbate, Paolo's daughter. She provided a number wonderful photographs to choose among; this one seemed to capture the essence of the rivers of Italy. The stylized version is my own work.

Finally, I would like to thank my dear wife, Britt Marie, for her patience and encouragement during the almost six years that I have been engaged in this project. She is my partner in all things, including slow fishing.

I really appreciate that you have read my book! Visit my website where you can join the Slow Fishing Club:

<http://www.michaellsena.com/slow-fishing>

THE SLOW FISHING CLUB.



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Conversions

Wars, Cultures, Religions and a Family Name

Francesco

A Man and His Family's Journey Through Life

Michael L. Sena

Vadstena, Sweden

11 October 2017

