

**“All The Details In The Crime Section”
by Antonio Manzini**

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Extract from pages 25-41**

Monday, February 5

I went to the scene, of course I did. What did I see?

A car with its doors open and the front pointing toward the thicket. Inside the vehicle, a sheet covered the body.

I couldn't get closer, that much was clear. The forensic team was there in white suits, looking like condoms. They were taking pictures, dusting the car with brushes, and stuffing papers and objects into clear plastic bags.

What else can I write? I don't know a damn thing, just the scraps of information the Carabinieri captain, Ossola, told us:

"Adult male, forty-four years old, identified as Flavio Zigon from his ID card found in his wallet, along with a hundred euros in cash and a credit card. Two gunshot wounds, one to the temple and another to the face. He was with a prostitute—we found a tissue with a used condom inside."

"Well, obviously. I don't think he came here to jerk off," said Salvo Parodi, the sixty-year-old reporter from *Il Resto*. He knows all about these things. I don't. I've been on the crime beat for seventy-two hours and can only follow the veterans around.

It's no use. The Bitch doesn't understand.

"Dig, investigate, chase the story," she says, acting like she's in an American movie.

"What story does she expect me to chase?" I have to go to the station, try to talk to someone, and then the Bitch wants a piece on the victim's life. She even gives me the father's address with a smug little smile.

"Here you go, Andretti. I'm sparing you the effort."

I've never heard of the street before, so I have to use the GPS to find it. When I arrive, I expect, like in an American movie—always thanks to the Bitch—to see dozens of colleagues. But there's not a soul in sight. I ring the bell, and an old man answers the door.

Maybe he's not even seventy, but he looks terrible.

"Did Flavio Zigon live here?" I ask.

He takes off his glasses and looks at me. His eyes are a faded, distant, defeated blue.

"Who are you?" he asks.

"Andretti. I work for *Il Gazzettino*."

He knows the name of the newspaper and nods.

"I identified my son at the morgue, even though there wasn't much left of his face," he says, not giving me any room to step inside. "He lived here, with me. Flavio was always unlucky."

His eyes grow moist, but I can't tell if it's from emotion or the early stages of cataracts.

"Was he... was he married?" It's the first question that comes to mind.

"He was married, yes. Years ago," he says softly, "but you must have heard about her, right?"

I shrug. He continues.

"His wife... she was Laura Faruk. Remember the Piazza dei Colori murder?"

I should, or at least that's what he expects from a crime reporter.

"Honestly, no. I used to cover sports."

His eyes show a flicker of interest.

"Who do you support?"

"Inter."

"Verona," he replies. "Not Chievo, I mean Verona, Hellas, the real deal. I only eat pandoro at Christmas!"

He laughs, but the laugh turns into a phlegmy cough. His face reddens, and he doubles over. I glance around. I should probably get him some water, but it's hard to manage that while standing on his doorstep. He recovers.

"I was born in Verona, and now I have to die in this dump," he says before slamming the door in my face.

What should I do? Push harder? Is there a manual for how to behave as a crime journalist? I decide to leave.

Fortunately, I have a good memory. I'm not sure if I should keep writing this journal. Reading it back, it feels more like a venting session than anything else. But then, what is a journal, really? When I worked on the sports pages, I used to jot down dialogues, names, situations that bordered on the absurd.

Here, now, I don't know. I don't feel like joking.

Not at all.

Carlo settled in front of the television. On the tray was the dinner Ida had prepared: half a roasted chicken. The other half had been stored in the oven for the next day.

All the local channels were talking about the murder of Flavio Zigon. The journalists were coming up with the most far-fetched explanations. The most popular theory was that it was a settling of scores.

What scores? The victim had a hundred euros in his wallet and a credit card, so robbery was ruled out by everyone. The presence of the prostitute next to him was the most unsettling detail. Where was she? Who was she? Had she run away? Was she also dead and dumped in a stream? And what if the prostitute herself was the killer?

Carlo smiled.

"Idiots," he said to the TV. "He was shot on the left side of his face, the prostitute was on his right. Does she have a contortionist's arm? Idiots..."

On channel 124, he found a more interesting debate. A senior journalist from *Il Resto*, Salvo Parodi, seemed to have more information. Carlo had often seen him around; sometimes he came to the archives to gather details. Not that Carlo had ever spoken to him, but he had listened to what Parodi said to lawyers, clerks, and interns. That journalist knew his job, and Carlo respected him more than many judges or prosecutors.

"The Carabinieri aren't sharing the details," Parodi was saying. He was sitting in a swivel chair next to a couple of second-rate presenters and the token glamorous woman, looking completely at ease. "For instance, they're not telling you a crucial detail: the weapon used. Ballistics will make the final call, but I'd bet my salary it was a 9mm.

"Put the pieces together, and little by little, the truth will come out."

Cappai turned off the television and carried the tray into the kitchen. **And even if it does?** he wondered. Has the truth ever really helped anyone? This will remain an unsolved case, he reflected, like 80% of murders. And even if they catch the culprit? It'll just be another file in the archive, nothing more.

He walked into his study and locked the door behind him. He had at least three hours of work to finish. At midnight, he came out, eyes red and steps heavy. He was dragging two canvas bags filled with documents, which he left on the living room carpet.

Carlo Cappai's right arm had never been the same after the 1995 accident. By now, he had learned to use his left hand for almost everything except writing.

It took him ten minutes to light the fire in the fireplace. His parents had only used it on Christmas when the uncles from Milan visited or during dinners with colleagues from the courthouse and their spouses. Carlo kept wood in the kitchen pantry; getting firewood in the city wasn't as easy as it was in the countryside. What he had was more than enough.

The fire crackled, red tongues of flame licking the air as their reflections danced on the refractory bricks and the brass fireguard. A rich scent of chestnut wood filled the living room.

He opened the first bag, pulled out a folder, and threw it into the fire. The flames flared up, devouring the photocopies in seconds. He repeated the process until he had emptied the contents of both bags.

He waited for the fire to settle a little. That mountain of paper had produced a lot of ash, which would remain hot until morning. Ida would get suspicious. Carlo grabbed two glasses from the cabinet, filled them with cognac, and then poured them down the sink.

He left the bottle and the empty glasses on the coffee table, along with a bag of chips that he made sure to dump into the toilet. He fluffed the cushions on the armchairs, making it look as though he'd had visitors.

Finally, he took the two empty bags back to the study, locked the door, and went to bed. No dreams—those hadn't visited his nights in years.

Tuesday, February 6

"Can you tell me something about the murder of Laura Faruk?" I ask Filippo Lauretani, who's been with the paper forever and is known as Wikipedia around here. He closes his eyes, then looks at his computer, types something, and finally turns the monitor toward me.

"Here you go," he says simply, "all yours." He gets up and leaves.

"I'm going to the bar. If anyone wants coffee, speak now or forever hold your peace."

I barely manage to raise my hand before Filippo shouts:

"Too late, tough luck!"

I sit in front of the monitor. It's an article from our paper from a few years ago.

"Laura Faruk, 32, daughter of Giorgia Rebellato and Ahmed Faruk, a Lebanese shopkeeper, was found dead this morning in her apartment in Piazza dei Colori.

Investigators report ten stab wounds on the victim's body, at least three of which were fatal. The woman lived alone in the small first-floor apartment. Sources confirm robbery as the motive for the heinous crime.

Forensics experts from the RIS are on the scene.

Laura Faruk was romantically involved with Flavio Zigon, a 34-year-old entrepreneur. However, according to Marta Faruk, the victim's sister, the relationship ended more than six months ago. When contacted by our reporter, Flavio Zigon fell ill. He was rushed to Sant'Eugenio Hospital, where he was resuscitated in the ER. His recovery is expected to take a week."

That's it. There's nothing more. I keep searching.

Another article comes up, dated four months later, announcing the start of the trial against Flavio Zigon for the murder of Laura Faruk.

I've never been to that basement before. It's a maze of doors, smelling of damp, with eerie lighting. I complain about having a crappy job, but the poor guy stuck behind the archive counter reminds me of a guard from some medieval saga.

He's short, bald on top, and doesn't talk much. When I ask for the case file, he gives me a faint smile.

"It's in Purgatory," he says.

Spending so much time down here must've given him a warped view of reality.

He places seven massive folders on the counter, and as they hit the wood, a fine cloud of dust rises. Then he hands me a sheet to sign.

"You can use those tables over there to consult them."

In the corner, there are four tables with greenish laminate surfaces, surrounded by mismatched chairs. I carry three folders at a time to the table nearest the radiator. I don't know why I choose that one—maybe the warmth of the heater gives me a sense of security.

There are two high windows, letting in slivers of a grayish sky streaked with wisps of cloud.

I open the first folder. *Zigon/Faruk Trial. September 2007.*

I skim through the judgment. It's incredibly long, written in bureaucratic jargon, and unbearably dull.

What I gather is that Zigon had a rock-solid alibi.

"The time of death is estimated at 10 PM. At that hour, Zigon was at *Le Beffe* restaurant with his family, celebrating his father's birthday," said the defense.

What follows are testimonies from waiters, managers, and family members who miraculously remembered—something that always makes me smile when I see it in TV shows—events and details from an ordinary Thursday evening months earlier. One waiter even recalled the exact wine ordered. That detail already feels off, as does the entire slapdash investigation by the police.

The coroner, someone named Ferretti Tarquinio—what a name—states the time of death as being between 8 PM and midnight and adds, "It's difficult to be more precise." I'm no expert, so I have to take his word for it, but there's another detail in his deposition that stands out. Ferretti Tarquinio also says:

"The murder weapon is a single-bladed knife, 30 centimeters long," a standard kitchen knife.

At this point, the defense lawyer, Ernesto Guidi, jumped in:

"There's no premeditation," he argued. "The killer grabbed the first weapon available and struck the victim. He was there to commit a robbery, as clearly evidenced by the photograph of the kitchen's French door, which shows signs of forced entry.

Flavio Zigon still had the keys to that house. If, as the prosecutor claims, he entered to kill, why didn't he bring a weapon but instead used a kitchen knife found on the spot? Zigon would never have broken into the house by forcing the French door—what reason would he have had, owning the keys?"

It's a reasoning that seems bulletproof, I think.

I flip through the pages.

"If, as the prosecutor suspects, a fight broke out between Zigon and Mrs. Faruk, and Zigon then grabbed the knife and delivered the fatal blows, where are the signs of a fight? A struggle?

Faruk's body was found in the apartment's entryway, still wearing her coat, with her keys on the floor. This indicates she had just returned home, and the killer, caught in the act, acted impulsively. The evidence left by the body doesn't support the idea of a struggle.

What struggle? Three seconds long while she was walking through the door? No, Your Honor, it couldn't have happened like that. Flavio Zigon is not the murderer of Laura Faruk!"

I can almost feel like I'm in the courtroom during the trial.

I read the testimony of Marta Faruk, the victim's sister:

"Things between Flavio and my sister were awful. Flavio was constantly calling her."

I read a statement from the prosecutor:

"Your Honor, I present this document showing the number of calls made from the phone number 347 33 XXXXX, registered to Zigon, to 332 45 XXXXX, registered to Laura Faruk."

"The court takes note."

"He kept sending her text messages," adds the prosecutor again:

"Your Honor, this list shows all messages sent from Zigon's number to Faruk's."

Marta Faruk continues:

"My sister told me everything. She was afraid of Flavio. The messages she showed me prove what I'm saying. I advised her to go to the police, so they could keep him away, but she was afraid that doing so would only provoke Flavio further. If only she had listened to me..."

Here, I imagine the sister probably broke down in tears.

The trial, long and complicated, went on for days. I can't take it anymore. I skip straight to the verdict.

"Acquitted for lack of evidence."

So Guidi, the lawyer, managed to clear his name.

In front of me are the folders from the appeal trial. I start flipping through them, but the archivist appears silently beside me.

"We have to close," he says.

I smile at him and return all the documents to the counter.

"Can I come back to review them?"

"If we don't destroy them first, absolutely."

The archivist returned home after dark. From the street, he noticed the living room lights were on and felt a bitter taste in his mouth. Ida had skipped the morning and chosen to come in the afternoon instead. There was nothing wrong with that; she had the ability to isolate herself even in the middle of a rock concert. The problem was Anna, Ida's sister.

Sure enough, he found her sitting in the living room, in the armchair by the fireplace, her hands resting in her lap, her legs slightly to the side. She wore a blue sweater and jeans, sitting silently while her sister bustled about in the kitchen.

"Good evening," Ida greeted him, appearing in the hallway. "I couldn't come this morning, so..."

Carlo nodded as he hung his coat on the rack.

"Hello," he muttered to Anna.

"Good evening," she replied with a smile.

"One moment..." he said, heading toward his bedroom.

He took off his jacket and put on an old black V-neck sweater. In the bathroom, he washed his hands and then his face.

There was no avoiding this meeting. He didn't have a ready excuse, and even if he did, it would have been disrespectful to both Ida and Anna. Anna, who had been unlucky her whole life. Giving her half an hour of his time wasn't unbearable—more like a kind of tax to pay to ease his guilt.

She was a widow, unemployed, living in a 60-square-meter apartment with a sister married to a man on furlough, and who worked as a cleaner to make ends meet. And then there was him: a steady salary, a home in the city center. Half an hour a week wasn't too steep a price.

It was like visiting someone you barely knew in the hospital—a dull obligation—waiting impatiently for the nurse to announce that visiting hours were over so you could leave.

He returned to the living room.

"Did you have guests?" Ida asked as she came out of the kitchen carrying a tray with two cups of tea, a sugar bowl, and three pastries. "I noticed the ashes, the cognac... These pastries were brought by Anna."

"Thank you, Anna, you didn't have to."

"Oh, it's nothing."

"Yes, I had a friend over," Carlo replied evasively.

"You even lit the fire in the fireplace... Was it a high school friend?" the housekeeper inquired. It wasn't curiosity, perhaps more of a subtle anxiety that Carlo might have had an evening meeting with some old flame. Her lingering hope of marrying off her sister to Carlo hadn't quite died.

"No, a colleague..." He sat down on the couch as Ida placed the tray on the coffee table.

"Two sugars?" she asked, and Carlo nodded.

Ida added the sugar cubes and served the tea. "It's bergamot," she said. "I'm heading back to work," and she left the room.

Carlo Cappai leaned over to pick up his cup. He noticed Anna's hands—short nails, tired, and covered with spots.

Carlo rested his elbows on the armrests of the chair. "Would you like a pastry?"

"Yes, thank you!" she replied. Carefully, she picked up a small doughnut with her thumb and forefinger, while he held his cup and saucer on his knees.

"Tough day?" she asked after finishing her bite.

"No, nothing special."

Anna's eyes lit up, as though she'd just thought of a topic for conversation. "Have you heard about that murder? The one outside the city?"

"Yes, of course, everyone's talking about it."

"It's unsettling... I mean, two gunshots, and then, at least according to the newspapers, it seems the man was with... you know, a prostitute."

"Right. It's a grim story." Carlo took a sip of tea.

"Weren't you in the police once?"

"A long time ago. But I only lasted a couple of years."

"It must be a tough job, being a cop..."

"Tough and often pointless." He set his cup on the table. "All I got out of it was losing the use of my right arm."

Anna winced.

"...but I've gotten used to it. And yes, it's a grim story, that one by the lake."

"Do you have any theories?"

"No. I didn't know the victim. I don't think the prostitute had anything to do with it. They'll have to dig into that man's life to uncover something."

"Well, it clearly wasn't a robbery. They found his wallet full of cash and even his credit card."

Carlo smiled. "I see you're interested and well-informed."

"It's true. I like crime stories. I read a lot..." She gestured toward the bookshelves crammed with volumes. "...and you do too, clearly."

"Oh, those are my father's. All law books."

"Ah yes, your father. He was an impressive man..."

"No, he was a bastard."

Anna bit her lip and lowered her gaze.

"A real bastard, Anna, not your average kind. A coward, violent, depraved, and morally corrupt. Not that he stole money, mind you, but he was corrupt to the core. I was always ashamed to have him as a father. Don't feel awkward—it's the truth. I haven't spoken to him since I was twenty, and if you want to know, I made sure to avoid his funeral as well."

"I see."

"No, you can't possibly understand. You must have had wonderful parents who loved you."

"Yes... I think so. My father was a railway worker, always traveling."

"My grandfather was a railway worker too... I wish my father had been always on the move. No, he was always here, at home. You must be wondering..."

"No, I'm not wondering anything," Anna quickly replied, not wanting to seem nosy.

Carlo smiled. "I think you are. You probably wanted to ask: if I hated him so much, why do I still live in this house?"

"Well... it's a nice house in the city center and..."

"Laziness," he said. "And yes, it's a nice house in the city center. I wanted to renovate it, but there's no money."

"You could sell it and buy something smaller."

"For what?"

Anna didn't answer. Carlo decided to amuse himself by giving her an opening.

"I'm alone, Anna. There's no one for me to think about."

She blushed. Carlo merely observed her reactions. First, she touched her legs as though to dry her hands on her pants. Then she took another pastry and stuffed her mouth. But she didn't take the hint—not even remotely suggesting that she might be the person he could care for and share part of his life with.

"Don't... don't you have siblings?"

"No. And no nieces or nephews, either. When I die, all this will go to... I don't know, cancer research?"

"That sounds like a good idea."

He felt terrible. What right did he have to say such things to her?

"I'm sorry, Anna."

"For what?"

"Sometimes I can be disgusting. I make jokes because I can, and that's not okay."

"Don't worry, I understood. It slips out because you're very angry."

Carlo frowned.

"Yes," Anna continued, "it's not hard to see. You've been angry inside for too long." She squinted slightly. "I can feel it, that anger. Find someone to talk to about it. Let it out. It'll be painful, but little by little, you might start to smile again. I mean genuinely smile, not sarcastically or cynically."

"What makes you think I want to smile?"

"Don't we all want to smile? I do, my sister does, her husband does. And you're no different. But if you only listen to your anger, you won't see it."

"And where did you learn all these wise things?"

Anna gave a small smile. "From books. From television. And I have a good memory. I still remember a lot from high school. I'd better go now." She stood, and Carlo followed suit.

"Ida," she called loudly.

"Yes?" came the reply from the kitchen.

"I'll see you at home. Goodbye, Carlo."

She turned and headed for the door.

"We'll see each other again," Carlo muttered to himself, certain of the inevitability of another meeting.

She seemed not to hear him, pulling on a black coat and disappearing through the door.

Carlo remained staring at the fireplace. Ida had cleaned out all the ashes—it was spotless again.