



MURDER IN CHIANTI

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CHAPTER ONE

Monday, 5.13 a.m. The sun wouldn't show up for at least another hour, but Nico got out of bed, shrugged on a T-shirt, pulled on a pair of shorts and socks, and laced up his trainers. Bed had stopped being a welcome place, both back in the Bronx brownstone he and Rita had lived in for twenty-five years and here in this century-old, two-room farmhouse he'd rented since May.

He set up the moka and, waiting for the gurgling to start, made the bed. Since he'd begun making his own bed at the age three or four, he never walked away with it unmade. A neat bed started off the day with order, gave him the sense during childhood that all was well despite his father's drunken temper, his mother's fear. He knew it was all an illusion, but somehow it had helped then. And now, when he was trying to find order again.

A quick gulp of espresso shook him fully awake, followed by a forbidden cigarette that he smoked at the open window. Back in the Bronx flat, he had happily lived by Rita's house rules. Now he had the unwanted freedoms that came with being a widower. Bad language when he felt like it, dressing like a street bum, a cigarette after morning coffee. An extra glass of wine or two with dinner. A good night-time cigarette. Small stuff that would never be worth it.

The air was still chilly in the early morning, which Nico welcomed as he set off for his three-mile run along the winding road up to Gravigna. It was steep going and dangerous in the predawn light. And even at this hour, cars whizzed past in both directions, their drivers on their way to work. But Nico's morning run was like making the bed, a ritual that made him feel in control of his life, all the more necessary after the loss of his job, followed by Rita's death.

When the town appeared, perched on its own small hill, Nico stopped to catch his breath and take in the view of Gravigna, with its medieval castle walls, its two towers, the proud steeple of the Sant'Agnese Church. In the meagre predawn light Nico could, with the help of memory, make out the hundreds of neat rows of vines that covered the Conca d'Oro, the golden bowl below the town that had once only grown grain. He had marvelled at the sight the first time he'd seen it with Rita on their honeymoon. 'Our fairyland,' Rita had said then, and he had laughed, both of them dizzy with love.

Every three or four years, whenever they could afford the trip, they'd come back. It had been her childhood home town. Rita's parents, who had immigrated to New Jersey when she was six, had come back to die and be buried here. Rita asked to be buried next to them. He had obeyed, bringing her to her birthplace and immediately heading back. But he no longer had anyone in New York. An only child with parents long gone, ex-work colleagues who shunned him. And he missed Rita and her fairyland. He came back to be close to her and what family she'd had left – her cousin Tilde and Tilde's daughter, Stella.

A pink-grey light had begun to scale the surrounding hills. It was time to go back and prepare the tomatoes. No going off in his old Fiat 500 to the town's only cafe, Bar All'Angolo. The friendly bar owners; the schoolchildren, mothers and workmen crowding the counter; and the tourists sprawling over the tables made him feel less lonely, and the delicious whole wheat cornetti that came fresh from the oven made the place all the more tempting.

This morning, however, Nico was happy to break his routine. He had a job to do. Instead of his usual slow walk back, he started to jog home. Twin motorcycles rent the silence of the morning with their broken mufflers. A few cars passed, one honking loudly to announce its presence behind him. Another, a Panda, whizzed past, only a few inches away. Just another crazy Italian driver. Nico reached the stairs of his new home with a wildly beating heart and no breath left in his lungs. Maybe he

was too old now for round-trip jogs. As he stretched his calves, he looked up at the sky. A cloudless blue vault, the start of another glorious Tuscan September day.

The dog relieved himself against a tree and meandered into the woods, sniffing for food that hunters or lovers might have dropped. The snap of twigs was followed by a chain of snaps. The dog froze, its ears at attention.

‘Where are we going?’ a voice asked.

The dog silently crouched down under a bush.

‘I know these woods,’ another voice answered. ‘I’m taking you to the meeting place.’

‘Why here, and why at this ridiculous hour?’

‘You wanted privacy, didn’t you? You’ll only get that in the woods, when everyone is asleep. If it were hunting season, we couldn’t even come here.’

‘We’ve already been walking for half an hour.’

‘Consider it a step towards repentance.’

‘It hasn’t been easy to live with what I did.’

‘You’ve certainly waited long enough to make amends, but don’t worry. The money will be enough to wipe away even your sins.’

‘Are you sure this will happen? I have to fly back tonight.’

‘Shh. Relax. You’ll get what you came for.’

A ten-minute shower restored Nico. Cargo pants, a clean shirt, bare feet and he was ready. The previous night’s pickings from the vegetable garden he’d started as soon as he’d signed the lease for this place awaited him in the room that served as both a kitchen and living

area. Two baskets of ripe, luscious plum tomatoes sat on the thick pinewood table. He picked one up, felt its weight in his hands. A lot of work and love had grown these beauties. Nico turned on the oven and started slicing the tomatoes in half. After salting them, he drizzled extra virgin olive oil gifted from his landlord's grove, added a spattering of minced garlic, and spread them, cut-side down, over four trays.

A gunshot rang out just as Nico was sliding the first tray into the oven. The sharp crack made his arm jerk. Tomatoes spilt to the floor.

'Shit!' Hunting season wasn't opening for another week, but some hotheads were too eager for boar meat to follow the law. Aldo Ferri, his landlord, had warned him about the boars showing up en masse now that the vineyards were loaded with ripe grapes. The farmhouse Nico was renting was close to a dense growth of trees, the beasts' favourite habitat. They were mean, ugly animals who could grow to weigh over two hundred pounds. Aldo had suggested Nico pick up a hunting rifle to be on the safe side. No, thanks – he was through with guns of any kind. Last night was the first time he'd heard gunshots. They'd come in short, distant bursts. This one had been much closer.

Only one shot. If this guy was after boar, he must be a damned good marksman. A wounded boar would spare no one.

Nico stared down at the tomatoes on the floor. Some had landed on his shoes. Hell, what was the rule? Thirty seconds? A minute? Well, Rita would have to forgive

him. He'd swept the kitchen two days ago, and he needed every single tomato for the dish Tilde was letting him cook at the restaurant tonight.

With the tomatoes back in the oven to roast, it was time to enjoy the rest of this new morning. Nico ground some more coffee beans, put the moka over a low flame, cut two slices of bread, and filled them with thin slices of mortadella and a sheep's milk *caciotta*. Probably a lot more calories than two whole wheat cornetti, but not caring about that was one of his new freedoms. He put his coffee and the sandwich on a tray, shrugged on a Mets sweatshirt, and stepped out to the best part of the house: an east-facing balcony overlooking part of the Ferriello vineyards and the low hills beyond.

There was just a slim ribbon of light floating over the horizon, enough light to see that the wooden beams holding up the roof were empty. No sleeping swallows. They didn't usually fly off so early. That gunshot must have scared them away. Or maybe early September was simply time to move on. He would miss them, if that was the case. The evenings that Nico wasn't helping Tilde at the restaurant, he'd got used to sitting out on the balcony with a glass of wine to wait for the three swallows to swoop in and tuck themselves in between the beam and roof for the night. He didn't mind cleaning up their mess in the morning. They'd become fond of each other.

Nico was halfway through his breakfast sandwich when he heard a dog yelping. A high-pitched, ear-busting sound that could only come from a small breed. Maybe it was the mutt that seemed to have made a home next

to the gate to his vegetable garden. A small, scruffy dog that always greeted him with one wag of his bushy tail and then lay down and went to sleep. Nico had checked the garden the first time to see if the dog had done any damage. Finding none, he let it be.

Nico leant over the balcony and whistled. The yelps stopped for half a minute, then started off again, louder this time. Nico whistled again. No pause this time. As the yelps continued, Nico wondered if the dog was hurt. More than possible. The vineyard fences were electric. Or it could've got caught in some trap. The yelps seemed to be coming from the left, past the olive grove. What if a boar had attacked the dog?

With hiking boots on and the biggest knife from his new kitchen in hand, Nico traced the sound of the yelps. They led him past the olive grove, up a small slope of burnt-out grass and into a wood thick with scrubby trees and bushes. The yelps got louder and faster. He was getting close. Then silence. Even the birds were mute. Nico broke into a run.

The dog almost tripped him. There it was, between his boots, with a single wag of its tail. 'What the—' The dog looked up at him with a perky expression that clearly signalled, *I'm cute, so pay attention to me*. Toto, the cocker spaniel he'd had as a kid, used to give him that exact same look whenever he wanted a treat.

'I got nothing on me.'

The dog raised a paw. It was red.

Nico bent down to get a better look. Blood. On all four

paws. The thick undergrowth had masked the prints. He checked the animal for cuts. Nothing. It was filthy, but fine. The mutt must have found the spot where the boar or other wild animal had been hit with that one shot.

‘Come on, you need a clean-up.’ Nico tucked the dog under his arm and turned to walk back. The creature squirmed and fought his grip, letting out a growl. ‘Fine, suit yourself, kid.’ Nico put it down and kept walking. The dog stood in place and barked. Nico didn’t stop. The dog kept on barking. Nico finally turned around. Toto would do this when he was trying to tell him something. Once, it had been a nasty rat underneath the porch. No rats here, but maybe he should go along with it.

He turned around. ‘Okay. What?’

The dog shot off deeper into the woods. Nico trudged behind him. ‘This better be good, mutt.’

At the edge of a small clearing, the dog sniffed the air a few times, then lay down, his job complete. When Nico reached the spot, he let out a long breath. What the mutt had been trying to tell him was a blinder.

About twelve feet in front of them, at the far edge of the clearing, a man lay on his back, arms and legs spread out at an unnatural angle. What had been his face was now a pulpy mess of flesh, brain and bits of bone steeped in blood.

Nico’s stomach clenched. It wasn’t the sight that got to him – during his nineteen years as a homicide detective, he’d seen worse and quickly numbed to it. No, it was the surprise of finding a body here. He’d walked away from that job, his old life, and come to Italy to find peace. He

wanted to be near Rita, near her family, and far from violent death. Murder seemed to have no place in the beautiful Chianti hills.

‘Come on, let’s get out of here.’ His phone was back at the house. Nico bent down and swooped the mutt back up. No protests this time. He took another long look at the dead man without getting any closer. This was a crime scene, and old habits persisted. To blow off a man’s face, you needed a shotgun, not a rifle. Close range, maybe four feet. So it was probable the victim knew his killer. Blood would have splattered all over him. Find the bloody clothes, and you had the perpetrator. Nico’s eyes scanned the ground around the body. No shell that he could see. Either the murderer had picked up his brass, or it was somewhere in the underbrush. Not his job to go looking. His eyes shifted back to the body. A six-footer at least, judging by the length of his torso and legs. Big belly poking out of his jeans and a grey T-shirt mostly covered in blood. Some dark-red letters on it, or was that more blood? Nico leant as far forward as he could without taking a step. Not blood. Two letters. *AP*. Blood covered the rest of the word or logo. At the man’s feet were gold running shoes spotted with blood. Michael Johnson sprinters. If this man had ever been a runner, it was a very long time ago. White socks peeked up from the Nikes. On his wrist, more gold – a very expensive-looking watch. Maybe a knock-off. Hard to tell, even up close. Chances were the killer hadn’t been interested in that. Unless something or someone had scared him away.

Nico looked down at the mutt huddled in the curve of his elbow. ‘You?’ He surprised himself by smiling. ‘Sure thing.’ He turned his back to the dead man and, with the dog tucked under his arm, started walking back to the house. About twenty feet back into the woods, Nico felt the ground soften. He looked down. He’d stumbled on a patch of wet ground. Elsewhere the ground looked perfectly dry. It hadn’t rained in days. Nico took another step and spotted an upturned leaf. It held water. Pink water. The killer must have washed himself. There was no water source that he could see. Nico continued his walk home. Solving homicides wasn’t his job any more.

Nico gave the dog what was left of his mortadella and caciotta sandwich and put it out on the balcony. He’d stick it in a bath later. He had a call to make: 112, the Italian emergency number, was the logical choice, but he’d prefer to talk to someone he knew first. Tilde was busy preparing lunch at the restaurant. She was a rock, but the news might upset her.

Maybe Aldo, his landlord, a cheery, likeable man who seemed to have a lot of good sense. It hadn’t taken much effort to convince him the run-down farmhouse that hadn’t been lived in for thirty years would make Nico a cheap new home.

‘Gesú Maria! On my land?’

‘I don’t know. I found him about two kilometres into the woods past the olive grove.’

‘Not mine, thank the heavens. The German who owned it died a few years back, and the heirs put it up for sale. I

wanted to expand and had the ground tested two years ago. You can't grow grapes on that land. Too loamy. Loamy soil makes for inferior wine. There's a rumour that some—'

'Who's in charge around here?' Nico interrupted. Aldo was a talker. 'Polizia or carabinieri?' He had no idea who was called when. All he knew was that the carabinieri were part of the Italian army, and that there was no love lost between the two police forces.

'Carabinieri. I'll call Salvatore, the maresciallo. The station is in Greve. If he's there, it'll take about twenty minutes for him to make the trip.'

'Thanks. I'll wait here.'

'I'll bring him over. Thanks for letting me know. Wait till I tell Cinzia. She's going to flip out! We're booked solid today. Seventeen Germans—'

'Someone has to get over there fast. Every second counts in a homicide investigation.'

'You sound like a TV detective.'

'I just want my part in this to be done.'

'I'll call Salvatore right away.'

'Thanks.' Nico put down the phone. He had to keep in mind that Tilde was the only one who knew he'd ever been a cop. And only a patrol officer, which was what he'd been when she had first met him. Rita had sworn her cousin to secrecy, afraid the townspeople would shun him. The Rodney King beating had happened only a few months earlier.

Sitting on a stone trough by the front door, Nico smoked the one of the two-a-day cigarettes he hadn't

been able to enjoy earlier. The mutt lay at his feet, snout between his still-bloody paws. Clean-up could wait. The dog was a part of the crime scene. So were Nico's hiking boots. He'd changed into trainers, his boots next to the mutt. It was just past eight. The sun was warming things up, not a trace of cloud in the sky, and the tomatoes were nicely charred and out of the oven. He took another drag and felt the tension release. The morning's discovery would soon be over. A walk and a talk with this maresciallo, and he would return to his new Tuscan life.

A dark blue sedan with distinctive red stripes on its hood appeared at the top of the dirt road that led to Nico's rustic house. Nico quickly stubbed out his cigarette, forgetting that no Italian was about to tell him he was killing himself. The dog sat up and started a series of high-pitched barks.

'Shut up.'

The dog looked at Nico with what he would swear was a puzzled expression.

'You heard me.'

One last bark in protest, and the dog lay back down.

'Good boy.'

Christ! A man's face had been blown off not more than a few hours ago, and here he was, acting like his eight-year-old self when his mother had brought home Toto. Nico raised his hand to acknowledge Aldo in the back seat. In front were two men, the driver's blonde head tall above the steering wheel and the front passenger's head lying low.

Aldo came out first. He was a big man in his late forties with a round, jovial face and a wine-barrel paunch. He was wearing tan slacks and a bright leaf-green T-shirt with the purple logo for his wine on it. He waved back at the car. ‘Who would have thought we’d have a murder on our hands today, eh, Salvatore?’

A dark-haired man in a tan shirt and jeans stepped out of the passenger seat. A black nylon jacket was tied around his waist. ‘The murder is in my hands, Aldo. Yours have to make good wine.’

The maresciallo walked towards the house, recognising the man out front from his last visit to Bar All’Angolo. He had assumed then that he was just another American tourist, a man who’d held no interest for him. Now he saw the man as loose-limbed, big-shouldered, at least two heads taller than himself, on the short end of sixty with retreating grey-brown hair. He did not have the open, optimistic face he observed on so many Americans. Kind, naive faces bad at spotting danger. People who kept their wallets or cameras within easy reach of a thief and then came to the carabinieri with hope in their eyes. Hope the maresciallo was rarely able to reward. This man’s face was closed off, though there was intelligence in his eyes, which were the colour of steeped tea leaves. Had he only discovered a body this morning, or did he have something more to do with it?

The officer was somewhere in his forties, at the most five foot six, with a full head of hair black enough to

seem dyed. A stocky, muscled frame and a chiselled face, handsome, with large liquid eyes, thick lips, an aquiline nose. A face Nico had seen before but couldn't place. The man was smiling.

'Salvatore Perillo, Maresciallo dei Carabinieri. I should wear uniform, but no time.' Up close, Nico saw that Perillo's hair had too much shine to be dyed. Perillo offered a hand. 'Piacere.'

Pleasure it's not was on the tip of Nico's tongue, but he stopped himself. He conformed to Italian politeness and shook the hand. 'Nico Doyle.' Perillo's grip was strong enough to crunch bone. Nico squeezed back.

Perillo nodded as if to acknowledge a tie, then took back his hand. 'I have questions, but forgive, my English not so good.'

Before Nico could explain, Aldo stepped between the men and said in Italian, 'Nico's Italian is good. Italian grandmother, Italian American mother and Tuscan wife. Accent American.' He grinned, seemingly happy to impart information the maresciallo didn't have. Nico recognised the same proud tone Aldo used to explain the mysteries of wine-making to the busloads of tourists who came to his vineyards.

The fact that Nico was pretty fluent in Perillo's language didn't seem to affect the man one way or another. 'And the father?' Perillo asked in Italian.

'Irish,' Nico answered in Italian.

'An explosive combination, I've been told.' The maresciallo's Southern accent was strong.

'You've been told right.'

‘I usually hear the truth when I’m in civilian clothes. With the uniform, not so much.’ Perillo looked down at the dog sniffing at his heels. ‘Is that blood on his paws?’

‘Yes, the dead man’s. The dog led me to the body.’

‘Yours?’

Nico found himself answering yes.

Perillo bent down and scratched the dog’s head. He got the one wag for his trouble. ‘What’s his name?’

Toto was the first idea that popped into Nico’s head. No good. And they were wasting time. ‘I call him OneWag.’ He used English words for the name. To say the same thing in Italian would have required too many letters. ‘I’ll show you the way now.’

Perillo eyed him for a moment. Nothing showed on his face, but Nico suspected the maresciallo was surprised he’d taken the initiative. ‘Yes, please lead the way. My brigadiere will stay here with the car. Is it far?’

‘About three kilometres into the woods.’

‘Ah, the woods!’ Perillo’s glance went down to his own feet. He was wearing brown suede boots that looked brand new. ‘At least it hasn’t rained.’ He gestured towards the woods. ‘Please. I will ask questions as we walk.’

‘Maybe it’s faster,’ Nico said, not used to being on the receiving end of an interrogation, ‘if I explain and then you ask questions.’

Perillo seemed amused by this. ‘The Americans are prisoners of speed. Tuscany, the whole Italian north, is closer to the American way of thinking, but I come from Campania.’ They started walking, Aldo trailing behind them, OneWag running ahead. Nico was surprised

Perillo was letting Aldo tag along. The fewer people on a crime scene, the better, but again, he reminded himself, it wasn't his investigation.

'We have a different approach,' Perillo was saying, 'although in this case, you are correct. Time brings heat, flies, maggots. I'm sure it was a very unpleasant sight in the first place, one perhaps you are not eager to repeat and therefore wish to be over with. Best to deal with it quickly. As for understanding the story behind this death, I fear speed will not be possible. Our investigations are not like on *Law & Order* or *CSI*. And so tell me, Signor Doyle,' Perillo said, addressing Nico using the formal lei, 'what facts are you so anxious to remove from your thoughts?'

'A few minutes after seven this morning, I heard a single gunshot. It sounded fairly close by. I assumed it was some hunter who couldn't wait for the season to start. But it could be the shot that killed this man.'

'We will see. No need for you to speculate.'

'Of course.'

'Please continue, Signor Doyle.'

'Please, call me Nico.'

'For now, let us keep up the formalities.'

They stepped into the woods. There was no path. Nico was grateful that OneWag led the way. Under different circumstances, the walk would have been a pleasant one. The morning silence was now broken by bird chatter, the dark underbrush splotched with the sun breaking through trees. A light breeze ruffled the leaves. While Perillo kept his eyes on the ground, careful of where he

placed his new suede boots, Nico explained that he'd been led to the body by the dog's desperate-sounding yelps. 'I thought he was hurt.'

'Where were you when you heard the dog?'

'On the balcony, having breakfast.'

'If the body is three kilometres into the woods, you have very sharp ears.'

'OneWag has a very sharp voice. It was early and quiet. It's possible I was on alert because of that gunshot. Just one – that surprised me. When I heard the yelps, I followed them and saw the mess. On my way back, I found a patch of wet ground and some pinkish water. My guess would be that the killer washed some blood off there. I don't remember where it was, exactly.'

'We'll find it. Did you step in it?'

'Yes. You'll want my boots.'

'Indeed,' Perillo said, looking at Nico with renewed interest. OneWag's barking stopped Perillo from going any further.

'It's just there,' Nico said. 'In the clearing behind those laurel bushes. The dead man's at the far edge.'

'Stay here, both of you, and hold the dog,' Perillo ordered. He squared his shoulders and walked ahead with a determined step.

The maresciallo was first overtaken by the thick metallic smell of blood and the frenzied buzz of the flies. And then he saw the body at the edge of the clearing. He shrank back a step, closed his eyes and crossed himself. It was indeed an ugly sight. What had he said earlier?

Time brings heat, flies, maggots. I'm sure it was a very unpleasant sight in the first place. He regretted his pompous tone. It was an unpleasant trait that always surfaced with strangers. What Signor Doyle had discovered was a gruesome act of hate. The dead man's face and half his brain blown away, spread across the grass like pig fodder.

Who was this poor soul? What had he done to deserve such violence? Certainly not a local, not with those shoes. Perillo took off his new boots, his socks. He had forgotten shoe covers. Bare feet were easily washed. He took out rubber gloves from his back pocket and slipped them on.

Slowly, he walked in a wide arc below the man's legs, trying to remain on clean grass. He circled the legs and stopped near the man's hips. Perillo reached into the pocket. It was empty. He leant over the body and tried the other one. It had nothing that would tell him the identity of this poor man, but deep inside he found a hard object. He pulled it out, careful not to move the body, and studied it in the palm of his hand. With some luck, it would lead him to some answers. Luck and hard work.

Perillo slid the object into an evidence bag and took out his mobile phone. He punched in the number of headquarters in Florence.

Nico bent down and tucked OneWag under his arm, receiving a lick on the chin for his effort. Aldo waited a few minutes before tiptoeing forward.

‘Oh my God.’ Aldo’s knees buckled as he peered beyond the bushes.

‘I did warn you,’ Nico said.

Aldo backtracked slowly, wiping his face with a handkerchief. ‘You think he got shot in the face so he wouldn’t be recognised?’

Nico had wondered about that himself. ‘He may have had ID in his pockets.’

‘You didn’t look?’ Aldo’s hands kept kneading his handkerchief.

‘I know not to mess up a crime scene.’

Aldo looked at his watch. ‘I’ve got to get back. Seventeen Germans coming for a wine tasting and lunch, and forty Americans busing in from Florence for dinner. It’s going to be a hard day.’

‘The hard day’s mine, Aldo.’ Perillo walked through the laurel bushes with his suede boots and socks tucked under his arm. ‘This murder makes it a good day for you. You have a much better story to tell your guests than how wine is made.’ His tone was jovial, his face anything but. ‘Regale them with a few details, they’ll be thirsty for more, and you’ll sell some extra bottles. Go home and enjoy a few glasses of your Riserva. It will erase the ugly sight you insisted on coming here to see.’ He turned to Nico, who was staring at his bare feet. ‘Blood and suede is a disastrous combination, Signor Doyle.’

Aldo asked, ‘Did you find ID on him?’

‘No. He was wearing white athletic socks and gold running shoes, which makes me think he’s an American, although I might avoid telling that to your guests. He

was also wearing a gold Breitling watch, worth around five thousand euro.'

'That eliminates robbery as a motive,' Aldo said.

'Possibly, if he was the kind of man who went around without a mobile phone, wallet, credit card or driver's licence,' Perillo said, 'although one can be robbed of many things besides expensive accessories. Their life, for one.' He turned to Nico. 'Thank you, Signor Doyle, for being my Cicero on this terrible occasion. I am sure your expectations of Tuscany did not include a gruesome death. I do request that you give your boots to my brigadiere, who is by the car. I also need you to come to the station in Greve this afternoon for a deposition. At that time, I will take your fingerprints and a DNA sample.'

'My fingerprints are on my residence permit, and I didn't go anywhere near the body.'

'I don't doubt your word, but nevertheless. The DNA requirement is fairly new and meant to eliminate confusion. A good idea, for once. We Italians often make more confusion than is strictly necessary. As for your fingerprints, it will save time. It takes a while for the carabinieri to gain access to residence permits. Leave the dog with me, please. He may have picked up something of interest in his paws and fur. The technical team and medical examiner are on their way. Don't forget, Signor Doyle. At four o'clock. The signage in town is clear. You won't have a problem finding the office.'

Nico glanced at the dog, who looked back with a sharp tilt to his head as if he knew something was up. 'I

don't have a lead for him.' He was having a hard time letting him go. 'I could stay here until they come.'

'We cannot have you stay here while we do our work. Lay aside your fears. We will treat him with hands of velvet.' Perillo undid the nylon jacket tied to his waist and lay it flat on the ground. 'Put him here.'

Nico did as he was asked. Perillo quickly zipped up the jacket around the dog, tied the sleeves and lifted the bundle up. OneWag peeked out of the opening and barked at Nico.

'Go home, Aldo. You too, Signor Doyle.'

Nico gave OneWag a quick scratch behind his ear and turned to go. The dog barked louder.

'Try to forget what you have seen here. It is not representative of our beautiful country.'

Nico could not help thinking of all the Camorra killings he had read about in Perillo's neck of the woods, but the maresciallo was right about his expectations of Tuscany. They did not include murder or a stray dog.