

An old story on the estuary of the Po river

The Po river flows through mountains and green valleys slowly increasing its size from the confluence of many small rivulets to become a great silent slightly yellow flow that allows the survival of the agriculture in the nearby countries. Towards the end of its trip before the great river flows into the relatively small Adriatic sea, close to Venice, the landscape changes into a flat lowland perennially covered with fog. Then the waters flow slowly into the sea seeping through banks of canes in the utmost silence. The landscape is still, only some seagulls fly in circle looking for food. The sides of the river are sandy banks with sparse vegetation mostly growing in bushes. The settlements are represented by sparse villages all of them with a church since people living in those marshlands are extremely religious. Towards the end of the 70' there were no hotels, and truly not even now. Only some bed and breakfast tended by simple villagers.

The young doctor was walking slowly looking superficially at his dog that was running before him and regularly turned to check on him. He had selected this place to take decisions about his future and had already spent a couple of days there. That morning the fog was thicker than usual, and the pale rays of the sun barely penetrating the myriad of particles of mist after having passed with great difficulty the clouds created an even denser screen to the vision. The dog went back with a stone in his mouth, and deposited it at the feet of the young doctor, who reflexively through it ahead, and the story went on for some five hundred meters or so. Then abruptly lupo stopped. Rigid on its four limbs, pointing ahead. Then started barking, and slowly and cautiously moved ahead. The young doctor collected a stick eventually to defend lupo from a snake and also followed the dog. A few steps ahead the thick layer of fog allowed to see something black on the ground, but lupo did not care. Stopped beyond the thing, that now appeared to be a bicycle and after some seconds went ahead barking against the bushes. The young doctor was concerned but followed him, trying to focus what was happening in the bushes with great difficulty because of his myopia and the fog. And he saw a pair of shoes and pant legs. Being a doctor supposed that someone had fallen from the byke and was there wounded: a man with a black dress, a cassock. A priest or what appeared to be a priest was lying face down in the bushes. The young doctor came close and turned him. The ground was damp from the dew deposited, and he felt wet, but should have not been so warm. He retracted the hand and saw blood. The body was turned now and the blood was oozing from a single hole in the left chest where the heart uses to be. The young doctor looked around frightened. Only fog and no one in sight, if ever it was possible to see somebody within that fog. He only perceived the warm breath of the dog.

The Maresciallo dei Carabinieri, the investigator in charge was in a very talkative mood that morning. The man was from Padova, a much larger city, and had spent the last 12 ys of his life in the delta del Po (the estuary of the river) dealing with occasional thieves that stole hens or sheep, and was in great excitement. After a thorough interrogation of the young doctor he added "doubtless there are some rumors about Don Antonio, the dead priest - do you know anything?". The young doctor did not react, just asked "which rumors?". The Maresciallo dei Carabinieri lit a cigarette, then slowly added "where are you staying now doctor?" the young doctor thought that the maresciallo was a little showing off, but did not mind this. He was tired and stressed. He had seen some cadavers in the emergency room, but this was different. He answered "actually i spent the last two days alla Pensione Aurora". The Maresciallo smiled and asked "did you know the mistress?". The young doctor had met her when he arrived. A gorgeous lady, 40 or 45 years old, plump but attractive, and she sat showing much more than an abundant portion of thigh and her big

breasts from the blouse. The young doctor had felt a sexual attraction in his spine, but said nothing. The Maresciallo added "she is a devote believer and spends much of her time in the church..... with Don Antonio... may be more than is needed". The young doctor was thinking "none of my business", but instead asked "is she married?" The maresciallo observed the smoke of his cigarette filling dangerously the little room, waited the time to create a coup de théâtre then added "she has a fiance, Carlo, we will interrogate him this evening".

The young doctor was still in the investigator's office when the cuffed man was brought in by two policemen. The young doctor understood immediately that the man was Carlo. The chief investigator looked at him triumphantly. He had solved the case immediately, even in this faraway land he had proved to be a great policeman. Then another disheveled man in his fifties entered screaming "I am his lawyer, do not dare to interrogate him in my absence".

The young doctor left the police station and walked back to the pensione Aurora where lupo was waiting impatiently without barking. The dog recognized him through the fog and ran into him waving the tail. The mistress was sitting silently near the main desk, the sight lost but notwithstanding her bosom was protruding and looking with attention up her skirt one had the impression that she was not wearing anything underneath. The young doctor kept his breath balancing his hormonal stimuli against the distaste of that situation. Raised his eyes from the skirt and met those of the lady, and had the uncomfortable sensation that although in despair she was looking at his crotch. There were no cell phones in those years, and the young doctor went to the old fashioned telephone and since his father was a lawyer he dialed the number of his office. The father was plain "get less involved you can in this matter". He sat at the table ate his dinner served by a small nondescript young waiter and went upstairs to pack since the following morning he had to go back to his hospital in Urbino

the young doctor was eating his breakfast when the Maresciallo dei Carabinieri entered the Pensione Aurora. The man had a gloomy face and told the young doctor " Carlo has an alibi confirmed by some 10 persons! he was in Venice the night before and slept there. We will start the investigation anew. We still cannot find the pistol". The young doctor looked at him with a compassionate face. Lupo moved his tail and farted.

The Maresciallo rose and went towards the main desk to speak to the mistress and probably also to avoid the stink. The young doctor heard him speak aloud then he went away waving a good bye with his hat.

The young doctor met Carlo entering the pensione Aurora while he was uploading the trunk of his car with his bags. He was still fumbling with the bags when Carlo came out and addressed him: "i know who you are and I want you and the whole people of these hamlets to know that the story of a sexual relationship between my fiancé and that priest is absurd. All garbage, slander!! she is a pious lady and she only uses to go to the church to prey. Such gossip will destroy our life". He went away in a fury.

The young doctor remembered that he had to pay the bill and went back to the building, but before he could enter he heard a thump and a scream, then other screams of a female voice. He froze and lupo started barking. Then the young waiter ran out crying. He followed her and entered the room of the mistress. The window was open and the body of the mistress was laying out in the courtyard. She had committed suicide!

The investigation kept him in the village for two more days. Carlo was destroyed by the grief and cried blaming the gossip. The Maresciallo dei carabinieri decided that the priest had been killed by unknown persons during a robbery attempt and that the mistress killed herself because she could not live with the gossip, true or not.

The third morning the young doctor loaded the trunk of the car again and after lupo had jumped into the backseat started the engine. Before leaving he casually felt something in his hip pocket and found a scrap of paper. He had grasped it in the room of the mistress to push the window more open without risking to mess up with fingerprints. In the faint light of the rays of the rising sun trying to find their way through the clouds and the mist he read: "my life is miserable. Don Antonio did not even have the balls to accept his fault and to share with me the drama of the abortion. He deserved the death I inflicted on him since he had

no pity of me and my child. I made what i thought was justice and however i acknowledge I was wrong. Death of a child in exchange for the death of his assassins, both of us"

The young doctor read two more times those lines written in despair, accurately folded the paper and put in gear. Both the priest and his assassin were now dead. He remembered an old latin motto "fata viam invenient", (destiny always finds a way to settle things). No point stressing the poor Carlo any more. Let him believe he was never betrayed. Lupo made a single bark and moved his tail approvingly