

38. Kidnapped

After the fall of Saigon in April of 1975, the cynics and critics of the United Nations, not to mention insiders who were well acquainted with the subterranean antics of Italian counter intelligence, so called, predicted that the United Nations Social Defense Research Institute in Rome, the baby nurtured by various politicians and top bureaucrats of the Italian government (such as it was, though any sensible person would also include the Mafia as part of the top governmental bureaucracy), would be short-lived, most likely a few years when what money it managed to raise from knowing or unknowing member states' donations, had been milked dry. Few could believe that the giant of the United States of America could have lost a war against a tiny, though as was now clear, dedicated band of communists. Many blamed the US entrapment in Vietnam on the dalliances and incompetence of the CIA, given its pathetic history of failures, such as the Bay of Pigs disaster, and the near self-destruction of the CIA brought about by the incompetence of top spy Jesus Angleton who was convinced the Russians had totally infiltrated the CIA, yet was himself duped by his "best friend" Kim Philby who turned out to be a double agent. Fired by CIA director William Colby in December 1974, Angleton spent some of his early boyhood in Italy and was certainly closely linked to many influential people in the Italian counter intelligence elite (SID and its various ancillaries). Angleton was anti-communist to the core, and probably fascist as well, given his friendship with Ezra Pound. His role in Italian counter intelligence has never been seriously investigated. But there is little doubt that he laid the foundation for the CIA in America to establish important ties with the Italian Mafia, upon whose resources it would draw in the assassination attempt of Castro in Cuba, not to mention the assassination of JFK in 1963 by Lee Harvey Oswald, spied on when he

was in Russia, cunningly manipulated and fingered by the CIA.

Necessarily, all of this is a long-winded prelude to the memorable day on which Ugo di Napolitano, Supreme Court Judge of Italy, and de-facto expert director of UNSDRI failed to show up at his office in Via Giulia, on Monday, May 11, 1975. He had not been in the office since Wednesday May 6. At first, no one thought much of it since the directors and experts who moonlighted from their other official positions in the Italian bureaucracy came and went as they wished. On Thursday May 6 the Director General of UNSDRI, who was not often in the office himself because of his “many diplomatic responsibilities” had received a call from the Carabinieri, asking to speak with Judge Di Napolitano.

“It seems that Judge Di Napolitano has disappeared,” announced the Carabinieri. We just received a call from his wife who says he did not come home last night.”

Director General Supreme, as he called himself when he answered the phone, smiled and said into the mouthpiece, “Oh, don’t worry. I am sure he is on mission, often these are secret you know, as I’m sure you would, being of carabinieri.”

The carabinieri said thank you and hung up. Director General Supreme placed the receiver on its base and reached for his car keys. No sooner had he done so than there was another call. He picked up the phone and said, impatiently, “I have important diplomatic business to attend to, do not allow calls to come to me unless they are urgent.”

“Director General Supreme?” came a loud voice, the sound of typewriters clanging in the background. “This is the *Corriere della Sera*. I understand that Judge Di Napolitano has disappeared?”

Supreme stood up and snapped his heels together as if saluting his troops. “I do not know who told you that, but it is definitely not true. I know where he is but I cannot reveal his location. He is on mission, as we say in the United Nations.”

“His wife, we understand, called the Carabinieri. She’s worried that he did not come home last night. Are you

sure that this is a UN mission?"

"You are Italian, I presume?" asked Supreme, in an impudent manner.

"Well yes, of course I am, I am a top journalist for the *Corriere della Sera*."

"Then you would understand that men, especially those of highly respected status among Italians, have their, shall we say, dalliances?"

"You're sure of that?" replied the journalist, dumbfounded.

"Of course, but you should not print that. It is surely also a well-known fact that such relationships are well publicized Italian secrets, if you see what I mean?" Supreme joggled on his feet, itching to get out to his Mercedes, but proud of what he thought was his ability to frame in English, nuances and hints that hid the truth, as it were.

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Next day, there was a small entry on the back of page 1 of the *Corriere della Sera*, mentioning that the Supreme Court Judge Ugo Di Napolitano was reported missing by his wife to the Carabinieri and that they were investigating. People close to the matter indicated that it was not unusual for Di Napolitano to be on mission for the United Nations for a day or two, probably staying at his holiday house in Fregene, which was closer to the Rome Fiumicino airport. Of course, people close to Di Napolitano knew that he was with his mistress, Sabrinetta, a buxom beauty from the Sardinian mountains, where, it must be said, kidnapping was a routine affair.

However, over the weekend the *Corriere della Sera* received a handwritten note that stated:

"Judge di Napolitano is our captive and will be tried in our court charged with corruption and cruel detention of our people, heroes and liberators of the nation. We demand the immediate release of our three compatriots held in Viterbo prison. If this is not done by Tuesday, May 10, if found guilty, Di Napolitano will be executed according to our law."

The note was signed "NAP" (Nuclei Armati Proletari). And over the next few days they released

manifestos detailing the “trial” of Judge Di Napolitano, this very much reflecting the modus operandi of the Brigade Rosse (Red Brigade) that reaped havoc throughout Italy in the 1970s. The details of the manifestos were, however, made up. That is to say, they did not accurately report what really happened. This not surprising since the Red Brigade and its various factions had been, as was later to be discovered, or maybe was already known by SID, the brainchild of a well-known publisher and journalist.

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Just across the river from UNSDRI lies the infamous prison Regina Coeli. It is an unattractive stone building, as older buildings in Rome go, dating back to the 17th century, facing Via Lungara that runs from the busy Lungo Tevere and the River Tiber. One can see it from the toilet next to Judge Di Naplitano’s office in UNSDRI. Known for its brazen acts of terrorism, the NAP had taken over a small apartment just down the street from the prison, reached from an alley that led off the Piazza Trilussa. It was a one room basement apartment, accessed via a winding stone staircase, recently renovated; that is, everything was painted a bright white. Three scruffy, unshaven, stocky men, obviously from the south, probably Calabria or thereabouts, their demeanor sullen and sour sat at an oblong table, wooden and bare, scrubbed clean, its top soft and rough. Di Napolitano sat tied roughly to a chair, facing them, set back against the whitewashed wall.

“You are responsible for the condition of prisons in Italy, is that correct?” asked the slightly larger of the three, sitting at center.

Di Napolitano wriggled a little. Then spoke in his familiar, sonorous high pitched voice, loud and piercing. “You cannot get away with this. Give up now and I will ensure that you are looked after.” He eyed each of his captors carefully, finding it difficult to hold back a grin. They reminded him of the Marx brothers, Harpo on his left, Groucho, the boss in the middle, and Chico on his right.

“Shut up and answer our questions,” growled Groucho. “We demand that our three colleagues in Viterbo be released.”

“Who are they?” asked Di Napolitano. Though he

already guessed who they would be — the threesome whose escape from Viterbo prison had been foiled because of a tip-off from a Mafia confidant inside the prison.

Groucho responded. “Pietro Sofia, Giorgio Panizzari, and Martino Zichitella.” If they are not released by the end of the week, you will be sliced up into many pieces and spread out over Rome’s filthy streets.”

One should add that there was a garbage collectors’ strike, the direct result of the incompetent administration of the city by the current occupants of the city’s administration, the Communist Party.

Unperturbed, Di Napolitano replied, “you may well kill me, but that will not get you what you want, will it? In fact, it will more than likely end up with you all going to jail forever. Or, if a fascist party wins the next election, you may even hang, if they bring back the death penalty.”

“Are you in charge of the conditions and treatment of prisoners in Italy’s jails? Yes or no!” demanded Groucho.

“Let’s kill him now to be done with it. He’s not going to do us any good,” muttered Chico.

“I am not in charge and have no authority over any prisons. I am simply an expert consultant. That is all,” answered Di Napolitano.

Harpo stirred as if coming back from a deep sleep and said, leaning across the table, “if you are such an expert, why don’t you recommend the abolition of all prisons? It’s obvious to all of us that they are brutal, cruel places. Nobody, including terrorists or murderers deserves to be in such places.”

Di Napolitano was taken aback by the intelligence displayed by this otherwise oaf, his very red face obviously the result of too much wine. “You have been drinking too much wine, my friend,” he said haughtily, “you know that if you were in charge you would put your enemies in prison, that is if you did not kill them,” answered Di Napolitano.

“I am not your friend. And you are right. It is better to kill your enemies than pretend to forgive them by putting them in jail,” Harpo answered. And as if to drive home his point, he reached under the table and brought up a bottle of red wine and took a swig.

“I see,” said Di Napolitano, “I see, indeed. I see that

you lack courage, and find it in the wine. There are many terrorists like you.” Had his arms been free, Di Napolitano would have waved them to drive home his point. As it was, his high pitched lilting voice, and sonorous Neapolitan accent, were enough to carry the weight of his intellect and, perhaps more important, his position in the Italian bureaucratic hierarchy. It angered all three of his kidnapers. They stood up as one, knocking the chairs backwards, and thumped the table.

And so it went on for three days of interrogation and presentation of “evidence” of the judge’s guilt, the proclamations and reports of the proceedings conveyed to the press that hungrily consumed every word and printed them on their front pages.

The authorities, at first the director of Italian prisons, responded with the standard, “we do not negotiate with terrorists.” But as the proclamations and threats became more and more violent, by the third day the person who ended up responding was the Prime Minister himself, Aldo Moro.

In the meantime, the apartment was beginning to smell of stale pizza and the toilet, a small closet with a rickety door that would not stay shut. All men were now unshaven and disheveled. The judge did his best to retain his composure as a Supreme Court Magistrate, but it was undeniable that his face was haggard from lack of sleep, which was difficult if not impossible to get, given the constant interruptions and questioning, and the severe discomfort of being tied to a hard wooden chair. So by the end of the third day, something or someone had to give.

Di Napolitano, his sharp intellect a little numbed, remained continuously alert for an opportunity or advantage to show itself. A sign of weakness was all he needed. Harpo now was frequently dropping off to sleep. Chico remained vigilant and kept muttering to himself to keep awake, stirred and stood from his chair and shouted at the judge, always with threats of violence, even getting so close with fists raised, but never actually attacking him. Groucho slumbered, occasionally grabbed Chico to restrain him from beating the judge, then snoozing, only to wake suddenly and pepper the judge with more questions, then sleep as he

awaited an answer.

The resilient judge managed never to sleep, refused to look distressed. He stared at them individually to make strong eye contact. And just as Chico had made another death threat, Di Napolitano raised his head and spoke in his best magisterial voice. "Release me now and I will arrange for the release of your colleagues from Viterbo Prison," he said as if presenting the verdict of a trial.

Groucho blinked, Harpo awakened after a big snore, and Chico snarled in response. "Liar! Let's kill him now. I've had enough."

Groucho sat up. "You heard what that filthy piece of shit Moro said. 'He will never negotiate with a terrorist.'"

Di Napolitano replied with confidence. "That is right. He will not. But I will, and I am now. As my position as expert consultant to the Department of Prisons I can issue an edict for the release of any inmate if I can show cause."

"But what of Moro? Isn't he your boss?" responded Groucho, full of suspicion.

"Have you forgotten that this is Italy, and in politics no politician is anyone's boss. The politicians talk. We in the bureaucracies, the labyrinths of power, the complexities of which you could not even begin to imagine, anything can be done. And I mean anything."

"I don't know. What you said, it sounds like bullshit to me," murmured Chico, clenching his fist and now standing threateningly right beside the judge.

Groucho blinked and fingered his heavy moustache. "You mean you can get them out?"

"Of course," replied Di Napolitano confidently. "I am very powerful in the corridors of prisons and courts. Is that not why you chose to kidnap me?"

Harpo snored again, then woke. He looked around with his heavy eyes, then stood and muttered more to himself than to anyone else. "Fuck this. I'm leaving." And when he opened the door to leave, the cool air of the night breeze and the sounds of people playing around the fountain in Piazza Trilussa wafted into their apartment that had become a smelly, disgusting cavern.

Chico stared at Groucho in disbelief. "You didn't stop him? What if he goes off and talks to everyone?" he

cried.

“He won’t talk,” said Groucho belligerently, turning to Harpo, “would you?”

“You know the answer to that, asshole,” growled Chico. “I tell you, if you let this piece of shit live, we’re fucked. I’m leaving. Fuck you all.”

“And we’d be properly fucked if we killed him. And to what end?” answered Groucho, now realizing himself, that their venture had been unrealistic and pointless right from the beginning. They had expected an Italian bureaucrat to plead for his life. Di Napolitano had outstayed them.

Di Napolitano saw his opportunity. “I state on my word as a Supreme Court Magistrate that I will order the release of your three colleagues once I am released from your captivity.”

He was about to repeat his promise when Chico walked past him, pushing his chair backwards, though thankfully it did not tip up, and left the cavern. That left Groucho. He reached down to his leg and pulled out a knife that he kept strapped there, just in case he needed it. Di Napolitano stared at it, then at Groucho. “You wouldn’t,” he said, frowning, pursing his lips.

“I would, if I thought it worth it. But you’re not worth it,” snarled Groucho with disgust. He threw the knife at the judge and it landed softly in his lap. “You can take it from there,” he said, “and see you keep your word, or someone will pay for it.”

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After an hour or so, Di Napolitano managed to grip the knife and cut his bonds. He staggered to the toilet, relieved himself, and splashed a little cold water on his face. It was drawn and haggard. He ran his hands through his copious hair and felt around for his comb, but it was gone. His captors had taken everything from him, including his wallet. With difficulty, he staggered up the steps to the door that led to the street. It was somewhere around late afternoon, he guessed. He went to look at his watch, but they had taken it. He sat down on the old stone step to gather his bearings. He could hear laughter and music coming from around the corner. The noise of traffic hummed loudly in the background. Perhaps there was the faint trickle of a

fountain.

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The famed criminologist Franco Ferrapotti, the co-director expert of UNSDRI along with his friend and compatriot Ugo Di Napolitano went, one hates to say it, haywire. He rushed into the Director Supreme's office without permission and ranted and raved, while the Supreme sat, cowed, fingering his car keys.

"Oh, ah, er... how could you do that?" Ferrapotti ranted. "Have you no sense? And all the time he's been kidnapped? And what did you tell the carabinieri? He was with his mistress? And you leaked it to the newspapers? His wife's in my office now, crying. Dio! Dio! What if they kill him?"

Supreme buried his head in his hands. "I was only doing my job," he cried lamely.

"Your job? Your job is to shut up! That's what your job is!" screamed Ferrapotti in harsh Roman Italian.

Ferrapotti ran out of the office and back to his own. Phones were ringing all over. He picked up his own and immediately walked to the corner of his office and covered his mouth over the hand-piece, looking sideways and beckoning to Andrea, everyone's secretary, who stood at the door of his office, to close the door, and to take Di Napolitano's distraught wife with her..

"Ferrapotti here. Yes. I know. Yes, I do know who it was, or at least I have a good idea. No. Don't know where he is being kept. But don't worry. I have my sources. Yes. I will find him. The carabinieri? No. They know nothing. Useless. Just remain calm. I will find him. I have my sources. I have my sources."

Ferrapotti banged down the phone, rushed out of his office, bounded down the steps, and out the door to Via Giulia, leaped into his Alpha Romeo, which was of course illegally parked right at the door. In challenging times, he always got in his Alpha and drove it round and round the block wherever he happened to be and sooner or later it would come to him what to do. It was as if his Alpha spoke to him. And many times, when he and his friend-come colleague-come nuisance, Di Napolitano had a serious disagreement, they rode round and round in the Alpha until

it was resolved. This created quite a spectacle, since their voices carried far out of the car, though the words and secrets they held were not comprehensible. He drove down Via Giulia as far as Via Dei Pettinari, planning to drive left, past the Casa Palotti, then back on one of the many narrow medieval streets. Normally, he would not bother to look right or left, simply drive where his whim took him. Other cars, this being Rome after all, would have to swerve to get out of his way. It was the unwritten law of the road: first there first served. Every turn or stop or crossroad was a race. But he was so distracted with worry for his friend's safety, that he hesitated and looked right instead of left where he had planned to go. And then he saw a figure, stooped, but at the same time trying to hold his head up high, staggering over the *Ponte Sisto* (Sisto Bridge). He blinked, and stared. Someone behind him tooted an awful horn, others yelled at him to get a move on. He drove left, just enough to get a better look at the pathetic figure. Cars came from everywhere zooming down the Lungotevere, coming up behind him from Via Giulia, others trying to turn into Via dei Pettinari. He drove his Alpha, or maybe it drove him, whatever it was, straight across the Lungotevere, a suicidal act, especially as one could not drive over the bridge because of a chain stretched across the entrance. It was for pedestrians only. No matter! Ferrapotti stopped his car right in the middle of the road, facing the bridge and leaped out, waving his arms, screaming at the top of his voice, "Consigniere! Ugo! Here! Over here!" Yes, it was his friend and now what a big nuisance he was right this minute. The traffic on Lungotevere was choked to a standstill. Horns tooted loudly, people got out of their cars, shaking their fists, yelling obscenities.

At last, a carabinieri showed up, initially preparing to take Ferrapotti into custody and charge him with any number of crimes. But Ferrapotti ran, something he rarely did because of his rather corpulent condition, calling, "Ugo! It's you! How did you do it? Come! Let's get you home!"

Di Napolitano staggered some more, and with a great effort managed to reach Ferrapotti's extended arms, and he fell into them, sighing, "Ferrapotti, I never thought I'd get this close to you!" This was Di Napolitano! Even in

exhaustion, he sees humor.

“Come diavolo hai fatto?” cried Ferrapotti, then lapsed into English for no apparent reason, “Oh...er...ah...How the hell did you do it?”

The astounded carabinieri recognized Di Napolitano. “Judge! I will call for an ambulance. Where are the kidnappers? Tell me which way they went and I will radio for a car. And an ambulance for you as well,. You look like you need attention.”

“Can’t you see he’s exhausted?” complained Ferrapotti. Here, help me put him into my Alpha, and I will take him to the hospital. And get all these the cars out of the way!”

Di Napolitano fell into the car, Ferrapotti beside him. He revved the engine, as if to say, “get out of the way or I’ll run you down.” The flustered Carabiniere tried to get the cars to back up so that Ferrapotti could turn his car around and move with the traffic. “I need to turn around. The nearest hospital is on Isola Tiburtina.”

“Franco. I’m all right. Just need a good glass of wine and a small plate of pasta. Then some sleep. Let’s go to the office. It’s the closest, and we can send out for something.”

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Ferrapotti managed to turn the car around and drive back down Via Dei Pettinari, then into Via Giulia. He gunned the Alpha, its front wheels screeching, and drove like a madman, his hand on the horn all the way, the tires skimming over the cobblestoned street. He pulled up in front of UNSDRI and was met by several of the pezzi grossi, as well as the security guard waving his pistol, and two young soldiers, probably no older than 18, their rifles at the ready.

Ferrapotti wound down the window. “Out of the way! Out of the way! I have the Judge! He escaped! Stand back!”

The security guard opened the passenger door and, annoyed that he had to put his gun in its holster, helped Di Napolitano out of the car. “Call an ambulance!” he yelled to the doorman.

Di Napolitano, with a superhuman effort, stood up straight, indicating that he was the boss. “No! No

ambulance! I am good. Tell Eduardo at the Trattoria Giulia to send over pasta fagioli and a bottle of red wine. That's all I need to recover."

"And no one is to enter this building without my consent," added Ferrapotti.

Ferrapotti and one of the pezzi grossi helped Di Napolitano up the steps and down the corridor to his office. Andrea came running, tears in her eyes. "Oh! Consigliere, you're safe! I will ring your wife immediately!"

Thus ended this troublesome incident. The one who suffered most, probably, was Sabrinetta, who had remained in Fregene, waiting for her lover who did not arrive, unable to receive any sympathy from anyone, friends or relatives, because her existence was a well-known secret, which in practice meant that she did not exist, except in the imagination of others.

