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Opening Extract from...

Cry Wolf

Written by Michael Gregorio

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CRY WOLF

Michael Gregorio



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MAIN CHARACTERS

POLICE OFFICERS (in order of rank)

General Arturo Corsini, Special Ops Commander, *carabiniere*, a.k.a. the Legend
Alfredo Dandini, Captain, *carabiniere*
The Supervisior, Special Ops Co-ordinator, *carabiniere*
The Watcher, Special Ops undercover agent, *carabiniere*
Antonio Sustrico, Brigadier, commander of the *carabinieri* in Spoleto
Eugenio Falsetti, Special Constable, *carabiniere*

NATIONAL PARK POLICE

Marzio Diamante, Senior Ranger with powers of arrest
Sebastiano Cangio, Park Ranger with powers of arrest
Loredana Salvini, Cangio's girlfriend

CRIMINALS

Don Michele Cucciarilli, 'Ndrangheta clan boss
Zio/Zì Luigi Corbucci, 'Ndrangheta lieutenant
Raniero Baretta, 'Ndrangheta soldier
Ettore, 'Ndrangheta *picciotto*, a new member of the clan
Corrado Formisano, 'Ndrangheta former hitman
Andrea Bonanni, 'Ndrangheta drug dealer

POLITICIANS

Donatella Pignatta, the Queen, elected President of Umbria
Paolo Gualducci, the Queen's secretary
Maurizio Truini, Mayor
Cesira Truini, Mayor's wife

MAGISTRATE

Calisto Catapanni

BANKERS

Cosimo Landini, director of the bank
Ruggero Franzetti, manager of the bank

CIVILIANS

Lorenzo Micheli, student, anarchist
Federico Donati, student, friend of Lorenzo
Riccardo Bucci, student, friend of Lorenzo
Davide Castrianni, student, friend of Lorenzo

Wolves howl for three reasons:

- *As a rallying cry for the rest of the pack*
- *As a signal to let the pack know of a wolf's location*
- *As a warning to other wolves to stay out of the pack's territory*

They also howl when they are in pain.

EARTHQUAKE

The Apennine Mountains in central Italy are often plagued by a 'swarm'.

That's how experts described the series of earthquakes that hit Umbria that summer. The first one weighed in at 4.5 on the Richter scale. Almost seventy per cent of the buildings in the region were damaged, but not too seriously. There was another quake three days later, but that one was only 4.1. On 22 September, there was yet another one, even smaller this time. Only 2.4, a man from the Ministry of Civil Defence announced. The danger zone begins at 5.0 on the Richter scale.

People had been sleeping in their cars for weeks, and they were exhausted. The 'swarm' appeared to be diminishing. The danger was over. That seemed to be the message.

Most people slept in their own beds that night. At 03.02, another earthquake struck. It measured at 6.1. The real problem wasn't just how big it was, but how long it lasted.

It went on rumbling only four miles beneath the earth's crust for almost a minute.

Everything that wasn't new fell down.

The man from the Ministry appeared on the TV news next morning, saying that Umbria had been declared a 'disaster zone'.

A telephone conversation was recorded by police at 04.27 that night.

A: 'Did you hear the news?'

B: 'I just popped a bottle of Moët. We'll be partying till doomsday.'

A: 'Churches, houses, bridges. We'll have to rebuild the whole fucking lot . . .'

B: 'Billions and billions! And that's just the Italian government. There'll be more once the Europeans get their fingers out . . .'

A: 'We'll be swimming in champagne!'

No criminal intent could be inferred from the telephone call between two businessmen, who happened to be laughing shortly

after a massive earthquake in which thirty-six people lost their lives. No legal action was ever taken against them.

ip/00/395 – Brussels, 11 April, 2011.

European Commission approves emergency aid for earthquake-hit region in Italy.

Today the Commission approved an increase of €75 million in the budget for the parts of Italy most affected by the earthquake in autumn 2009.

In February 2010 the Commission, acting on the basis of Article 87(2)(b) of the EC Treaty, approved outright grants for firms in the worst-hit areas in Marche and Umbria which had made investments in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. It is now apparent that the total assistance of €46 million falls far short of what is required to meet compensation requests. The Commission has therefore decided to match the €75 million provided for in the Italian Budget Act for 2010/2011. The aid has been deemed eligible for the exemption provided for in Article 87(2)(b) of the EC Treaty.

'NDRANGHETA

Think of Italy as a long riding boot, and Sicily as a ball. The toe seems to be kicking the ball into the Mediterranean Sea. It is a visual symbol of what has happened in recent years.

Cosa Nostra, the original Mafia, gained power and influence after aiding the Allied invasion of Sicily in July, 1943. But there were other mafias in Italy, and some of them have expanded rapidly in recent years, smuggling tax-free cigarettes at first, then running drugs and guns, controlling rackets and extortion, prostitution and illicit gambling.

The Camorra controls the bay of Naples. The Sacra Corona Unita rules in Puglia, while smaller organizations, such as the Mafia del Brenta, reign over the rich Venice hinterland. But the most powerful mafia is the 'Ndrangheta from Calabria in the southern 'toe' of Italy.

It was the 'Ndrangheta that kicked Cosa Nostra into touch.

The 'Ndrangheta clans were violent, ruthless and greedy. They

infiltrated the rich, industrial north of Italy, controlling the drug trade in Lombardy and Piedmont. Today, they supply the whole of Italy and the rest of Europe. The drugs in your home town come from South America, Asia, Africa. They are imported and distributed by the Calabrian 'Ndrangheta.

The 'Ndrangheta earns thirty-three billion euros every year tax-free, one-fifth of the total tax revenue that Italy generates. The word 'Ndrangheta is a corruption of the Greek *andranghatia* – *andros* (man) and *agathos* (brave) – and it prescribes a criminal code of fierceness coupled with absolute obedience. The 'Ndrangheta is formed of 'Ndrine – criminal clans or 'families'. At least 160 'Ndrine are known to the Italian police, generally by the surname of the *capo*, or boss of the clan. They are spread all over Italy. Each new recruit starts out as a *picciotto*, a 'kid', and works his way up the ladder by showing his courage, following the orders of his section boss who is known within the clan as *zio* or *zì* (uncle). The head of a clan is the *don.* He may be the oldest and wisest man in the family, or he may be the youngest, the wildest, the most ambitious, the one who has wiped out all of his rivals.

All the 'Ndrangheta needs is the opportunity to move in.

On 23 September, 2009, the earthquake in Umbria provided an opportunity.

Before that date, rural Umbria had been of no interest to the 'Ndrangheta. But as EC money began to flow into the area and the reconstruction started, everything changed.

Some people came to help the victims.

The 'Ndrangheta came to help themselves.

ONE

December, 2011 – London

Sebastiano Cangio was heading east on the Central Line.

Most of the passengers jumped off at Tottenham Court Road, which was where the lovebirds got on. The guy had an Afro hairdo which added six inches to the five-foot-two-inch frame cruel Mother Nature had dealt him. The woman was thinner, taller in flat-heeled pumps, her black hair braided with multi-coloured strings. They weren't as young as they wanted to look, but the kiss they exchanged the instant they sat down was the biggest tongue-in-throat job that Sebastiano Cangio had ever seen.

He hated travelling on the Tube. Anything could happen down here, and no one took a bit of notice.

The woman's hand was inside her lover's jeans, and a couple of kids sat fiddling with their mobile phones. A woman on the opposite bench was working on her laptop, totally absorbed. An Asian in a blue uniform and matching turban was flicking through the pages of a free newspaper. There was something about Italy on the front page, but it was too far away for Cangio to read it. Almost everyone had ear pods shutting out the world.

All Cangio had was a plastic folder. He slipped a sheet of paper out of the folder and pretended to read it. He was heading out to the Docklands for an appointment with an American couple who had walked into the property agency the day before. They were interested in buying a top-floor flat with what the agency described as 'stunning views' of the slate-grey waters of the stinking River Thames, and a 'breathtaking' panorama of the low-rise south London skyline on the far bank.

He glanced up without thinking.

The man's purple tongue came sliding out of the woman's mouth.

'You fancy doin' it there, then?' the woman said.

The man was gazing at something above Cangio's head.

'Why not?' he said. 'I'd do it anyplace with you.'

The train began to slow down. Then it pulled in at Bank and the pair got off.

Cangio crossed the aisle and sat down where the lovebirds had been sitting. The seat was still warm. There was an advert next to the Central Line route map. He'd seen a lot of these ads on Tube trains in the last few weeks – pictures of Venice, Florence, Rome. The Italian tourist board was trying to woo the British holidaymaker away from Spain. This picture showed a fabulous view of a long, curving sandy beach and a pretty hill-top town that Sebastiano Cangio recognized.

Soverato.

Just seven months before he'd been stretched out on the sand at Soverato beach, drying off after a swim, watching the girls stroll by at the water's edge, when a family of four had arrived. They'd hired two deckchairs and a beach umbrella. The kids had dug a sandcastle while the mother prepared lunch, and the father had thrown a handkerchief over his face and taken a nap. They hadn't been there long when a Ducati motorbike pulled up on the promenade. The man riding pillion had jumped off, strode down the beach still wearing his crash helmet, pulled a pistol from his belt and shot the sleeping man in the face. Not once, but five or six times.

And still, the man wasn't dead.

He had dragged the blood-soaked handkerchief from his face, staggered to his feet and tried to run away, barrelling down to the sea and into the water, blood pouring from the wounds in his face and throat. The killer had splashed after him into the shallow water. People had screamed, running away in panic, but the killer had ignored them. He'd hooked the pistol in his belt, grabbed the man by the hair then smashed his face repeatedly against a rock until the water turned red and the man lay floating in his own blood.

Everyone had looked the other way as the killer sprinted back up the beach.

Everyone, except Sebastiano Cangio.

He'd been paralysed, shocked.

The crash helmet had turned his way for an instant, and he'd seen a lizard tattoo on the killer's neck. The gun had come up and aimed. *Click* . . . If there'd been a bullet left in the pistol, Cangio would have caught it. The killer had shaken his head then run up the beach to the waiting motorcycle.

You couldn't stay in Soverato after something like that.

The TV news that night had announced that the victim had

been a local 'Ndrangheta boss. There was a *faida* going on, they'd said – a new generation was taking over, stepping into the driving seat.

His mother had bought him a plane ticket for London that night: one-way from Lamezia Terme. He had tried to say no. He was supposed to be defending his PhD thesis at the University of Catanzaro three weeks later. He'd been working hard all spring and summer to put together the photographic portfolio, heading up into the Sila mountains two or three times a week, checking out the various dens. The wolves were roaming wild for the summer and the cubs were growing, starting to hunt, so it was easy to document the habitats that they had abandoned.

'There are no wolves in heaven,' his mother had said. 'Go to London and stay there, Seb. The mafiosi will slaughter each other before too long. I'll let you know when it's safe to come home.'

The feud was still going on, one or two dead each week, his mother reported, sometimes more.

Goodbye, PhD.

Goodbye, *Canis lupus italicus*.

He had found a job with an estate agency easily enough. He had a master's degree in ethology, the branch of biology that deals with animal behaviour, but they didn't give a damn about the life cycle of the Apennine wolf. His English was good enough to sell flats, and that was all they cared about. Could he sell two or three flats a month? He thought he could, so the interviewer came to the punchline. There was no salary, the woman said, just luncheon vouchers, an Oyster card if he had to use the Underground, and he'd be paid one per cent of every sale.

'How much do flats in London cost?'

The woman smiled at him. 'Anywhere from one-fifty for a bedsit to six or seven hundred for a two-room flat with a view.'

'Seven hundred thousand pounds?'

She nodded while he did the maths in his head. Three flats at an average of three hundred thousand, and he'd be making nine thousand pounds a month. He didn't think twice. 'I'll take it,' he said.

'You can rent a bedsit from us for one-fifty a week,' the interviewer added.

'One hundred and fifty thou . . .'

'Pounds,' she said, not getting the joke, and they shook hands on it.