

## CHAPTER 11 – MARTINIS AND INTELLECTUAL FOREPLAY.

*15 04 2022 Friday. Car picked up. All Fixed. Martinis with Jaqueline at Hotel. Frank invites her out.*

Jaqueline pulls up outside Cafe Discorso at 2 and Frank gets in.

“Thank you so much. It’s a great help.”

“Well, I did cause all the troubles.”

“Not a problem. Thing of the past.”

“So what work are you in?”

“Modelling. Cars, high-end fashion advertising primarily. Normally with Ferraris and Maserati as backdrops.”

“That’s very interesting. You have lots of talent.”

“Not in any abundance. The cars cost far more than the perfume. It’s the allure as you know.”

“Very much so. May I ask what your current project is? What are you working on right now?”

“New fashion line for Versace. They want it with a Ferrari. I told them Bugatti. They won’t listen. They want a Testa Rossa. 40 years old. Head spinner in its days and still is now. Mainly older well-to-do women. At least they should use the modern yellow ‘Ferrari Spider’. They are being old romantics.”

(Pauses).

“This Versace Line really is for younger spoilt bitches. Oops, I mean ladies. The commercial message is confused. So I disagreed with the directors entirely. So I told them ‘This is the backdrop I want. A Bugatti – nothing less. But I don’t have any power’. They did not take it lightly.”

“I can sense your business mind here. And you explained that extremely well. Maybe you could have handled it slightly differently. This is where older experience can help.”

“Just cannot find the car Frank. The time for the commercial to go to air is fast approaching. Time is money.”

“So you spotted my Bugatti and you thought you had the answer.”

“Yes. Until the little accident. So it wasn’t to be. Anyway, the agency signed up Ferrari for the next four commercials. They will start with a Testa Rossa. Good luck.”

“Oh really sorry to hear that Jaqueline.”

“One door closes. Another one opens.”

“(Pointing at himself). The old stallion here.... Myself, I used to be a Testa Rossa fanatic once in my younger days. And I did own one too.”

“What do you know eh? Oops we’re at Santino’s. She parks her Alfa by the garage and both step out of the car.”

Santino comes out to greet them. Goes to the Bugatti. Points at the car door.

“Okay Mr. Costanzo. Can you tell me where the damage was?”

“I cannot. It’s like what Jaqueline said. Will look like new. She recommended your services.”

Both glance at her acknowledging her contribution.

“Mr. Costanzo, if you are happy please sign here to acknowledge so I can release the vehicle. Here are your keys.”

“Thank you. I will leave you to it.”

“Jaqueline I would like you to join me for a drink at the hotel.”

“Thank you. Most certainly. I will follow your car.”

They both drive away. Frank does not trust the valet parking service with his new Bugatti and drives it himself to his reserved parking spot. The Alfa follows.

Giacomo gets an SMS message from Ivan the Hacker: Whoopee. Bugatti and Alfa at Frank’s hotel.

They both walk to the lounge. They are shown to a table in a quiet area of the lounge. Frank orders two Martinis. He reaches out in his pocket and takes Jaqueline’s business card and looks at it.

“du buwa. du buuuuwaaa.”

“You are so perceptive. You knew that I was struggling with the name. Du Bois.”

“Perfect. You have good command of language accents.”

“Em... So, so.... French background?”

“Yes. Born in Montpellier, South East France. Catholic. Private School. 2 sisters. 1 brother. Pop died in car accident. I was 10. Spent 2 years in a convent getting educated and then quit. I continued studying in a local college. Competed in endurance games and did well. I went to Sorbonne University and completed a Masters Degree in Psychology. I couldn't make money. So I decided to go into modelling. That's me.”

“Sorbonne University eh. Very impressive. Top notch. Wow! So are you happy in your profession?”

“There are times when I would like to find an acting role in a movie. But getting a break is not easy.”

“That is interesting. Yes it could be difficult. What role or character suits you?”

She motions Frank to lean forward towards her and he gladly accommodates.

She exposes her teeth and lurches towards at Frank's neck.

“Aharrggghhhh. A vampire.”

Momentarily Frank is taken aback, spilling his drink partly on his trousers. Both burst out laughing.

“You are a devious lady. But a nice one at that. You really got me there.”

Both continue laughing. And enjoying it.

“Your teeth are too pretty to be a vampire. But you did shake me, I have to admit.”

Another round of Martinis is served.

“So tell me something about yourself Frank. Are you a playboy?”

Frank is taken aback.

“Wow. What an opener? I just like fast cars. I have 3 Dealerships in London. High-end cars. Mercedes, Audi, BMW and Ferraris. They are our top models. No Bugattis. No Lamborghinis. No Maseratis.”

“Businessmen always fascinate me, background, education, university. How do they start from scratch and become successful.”

Both continue sipping on their Martinis.

“My background is poor. So I went to HK University. In short, U H K.”

“Really, that would be Hong Kong University? H K U?”

“No it’s U H K. (Pauses). University of Hard Knocks.”

Both burst out laughing.

“Academically. Zero. I started washing cars and running errands for a second hand car dealer. Then I bought a little garage for myself, traded some cars. Made some money. Then I bought into a new dealership from Roger Ricks, an ailing owner but a friend. Eventually I bought his holdings using further funds from friends. So I ended up owning 100%. I squared off all my debts and we are still friends. And then I continued like that. The business became very successful. It grew to three separate locations. When my wife passed I decided to get out of it, but I still keep an eye on it.”

And he pauses. Jaqueline was all ears. Crafty old Frank was watching out for this signal before he continued.

“Yes, University of Hard Knocks. U H K.”

“Keep going Frank. This is all new to me and fascinating.”

“Okay you try to get a job. They sit behind their desk trying to shoot you down even before you cocked your gun. Then they ask you for the papers, certificates, all that mumbo jumbo. You can train a monkey for that. All these plush offices are full of them. Ticking boxes and wasting young people’s lives. Of course I am known to exaggerate somewhat ... amongst members of my family.”

“Have you ever come across that Jaqueline?”

“Many many a time. Too short, too tall, long fingers, short fingers, chubby fingers, too smart, long face, small tits, narrow shoulders, big ass, flat feet, ... I was not bestowed all of them, the occasional one. It took me a total of 45 interviews exactly to get the job. I can tell you half of these young interviewers wouldn't know their left nostril from the one on the right. That is why they can never sniff good talent if there is one staring at them in the face. I call it the Too Syndrome.”

“Ahh. Frank Sinatra.”

“What has Sinatra to do with all this? Same name, same country, perhaps?”

“I DID IT MY WAY.”

“You got me there ... again.”

“So what was your stumbling block. What did they call you out on?”

“Too smart for the job.”

“Whoa.”

“And how did that make you feel? What did you say to that?”

“FY.”

“Financial Year?”

“No. Fuck You.”

Frank laughed heartily and then paused for a moment. A tear came to his eyes.

“Sorry it was painful losing Emma. After that I went a bit wild.”

Jaqueline felt some pain for him. Was it a bad sign for this project? She wondered.

“Who runs the business now?”

“My son Gino. He is a little genius. Really good kid. But a tough businessman too. Actually he drives a Ferrari Spider - yellow.”

“Just one boy?”

“Antonio is my youngest. No daughters.”

“Antonio works for you too?”

“Antonio works for the Lord. His mother’s wishes. He is with the local Franciscan monks in a monastery, here, in Modena. He was very close to his mother. He has a heart of gold.”

“How interesting. So you see him often?”

“On occasions. I need to see him soon. They are building a new chapel and are always looking for donations. I may have to drop there next week ... with a cheque. Heh Heh.”

“I will be irresponsible to offer you more alcohol. You still have to drive. You have to be in bed soon otherwise your mum will be worried. Ha Ha.”

Both laugh and feel relaxed. Frank feels completely infatuated by this young lady. He pauses and goes deep in thought.

“Something the matter Frank?”

“Jaqueline. Would you like to join me for breakfast here tomorrow at this hotel and then we go for a drive in the Bugatti?”

“Perfect.”

“Shall we say 10?”

“Your wish is my command.”

They giggle.

He picks her card again. She gently takes the card off his hand. Gets her perfume out and sprays just a dab.

Frank holds the card close to the nose and takes a gentle ‘sniff’ and puts the card back in his pocket. Then he leans back on the chair, closes his eyes while lifting his head slightly. She taps her forefinger on his left hand as she gets ready to leave.

“You can open your eyes now, it’s time to go.”

“Am I being naughty?”

“No, not at all.”

Both smile and leave.

Ivan sms’s Giacomo and 4 Fingers. “Alfa leaves hotel. 8.30 pm.”

4 Fingers calls Jaqueline.

“What’s happening?”

“All is fine. I am meeting him tomorrow at the hotel for breakfast and then we’ll go out for a drive.”

“Careful Jaqueline. We need him alive. Don’t kill him.”

“I will be careful, Johnny.”

She mutters.

“Nice way of treating people.”

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*16 04 2022 Saturday. Chapter 11*

*Section Break*

*Frank and Jaqueline. Breakfast.*

*Intellectual Foreplay. Off for a day out.*

*Medical issues confessions.*

Frank gets up at 6.30 with a heavy head. Nothing unusual. Pops in a tablet and goes back to bed. But he could not relax. He kept thinking about the vampire scene, how charming she was, how much laughter they shared, when will it finish, and when will it really start .... if ever.

He gets out of bed at 7.30, goes to the bathroom, follows the usual standard routine, shaves and stares at the mirror. No Bugatti is going to get him the handsome face he had 40 years ago. He puts on his robe and gets some coffee delivered to his room. He realizes he needs to cut down a bit on the coffee. He will be running at max soon. So he

needs to balance his coffee, drinks, medicine, Viagra, fatty food more responsibly.

All these thoughts were spinning in his head. So he lies on the couch looking at the TV counting the time to 10.00 am. He puts on a somewhat sporty outfit. No business suit today. He couldn't wait so he thought he'll go down to the dining room and take a seat.

It is a better idea to be already seated when Jaqueline walks in than looking at him approaching with a tired walk. His personal Bugatti Body was running like an old battered and bruised Mini Minor.

His walk, lack of agility, gas build-up after sitting down in the car for any length of time started to put him in a frequent pensive and soul-destroying mood. He hasn't thought of the old massive ego blow phrase for a while. Sitting at the Cafe Discorso seeing the world drift by seemed to have become the norm for the last few months. Getting active again is like reading a chapter from the past, but with thicker glasses and much less clarity.

Ivan calls 4 Fingers and tells him the Alfa has just arrived at Frank's Hotel.

"Thanks Ivan. Keep me in the picture."

"Bongiorno Signor Costanzo coffee while you wait?"

"Prego."

Frank decided against picking up that day's "Guardian" newspaper while waiting. Otherwise his hands will get full of newsprint. Not very presentable when Jaqueline shows up. He browses on his mobile and checks the news. He was terrified Coronavirus would close down travel again within Italy grounding his Bugatti and disrupt all his plans.

"What's happening in the world Frank?"

Frank promptly looks up. Jaqueline was standing next to him. He stands up and greets her with a smile and motioned her to sit down.

"You look nice and refreshed."

"Yes I am feeling good. And yourself?"

Instantaneously, she remembered a line from Buddy Fox in “Wall Street”.

“Doing better, it will be a sin.”

“Buddy Fox, Wall Street.”

“Exactly. You’re a movie buff Frank?”

“Some movies are imprinted in my memory. ‘Wall Street’. ‘Thomas Crown Affair’.”

“Steve McQueen and Faye Dunaway.”

“And what about “Wall Street”.”

“Intellectual aggression to get results. No firearms.”

“The second?”

“Smoothness of approach and sophistication.”

“And your preference?”

“Fifty Fifty. But you remind me of Faye Dunaway first time I saw you. That’s what got me. Smart, sharp and intriguing.”

“Meant to be a complement?”

“Most certainly.”

“What part did you play when you saw me first time?”

“Cool. Like McQueen in the movie.”

“Why is that?”

“Now don’t laugh at me.”

“I promise I won’t.”

“The moment I saw you first, I stood up and tried to straighten my waistcoat.”

“So what happened?”

“There was no waistcoat. I never wear one. And my stomach was never as slim as McQueen’s in the movie.”

“So you were in a dream, would you agree?”

“More like instantaneous hypnosis.”

“Was my approach smooth and sophisticated enough?”

“Smooth as silk. Sophisticated to the nth degree.”

“Do you find this conversation stimulating?”

“In more ways than one.”

“So which ‘way’ are you going to decide on?”

“You decide. I will be thrilled with your choice.”

“I noticed you got totally absorbed in this sharp acerbic exchange.”

“You’re practising the Sorbonne Psychology on me.”

“The waiter has already approached us twice and politely did not interrupt our chit chat.”

Frank motions to the waiter.

“Breakfast Madame?”

“Yes I will have Italian Poached Egg and Latte.”

“Same for me please. I want to get slim again.”

The waiter smiles and leaves.

“Are you on a health kick?”

“Good idea I thought. For a while, maybe. See how it goes.”

He smiles and looks at her intensely.

“Always keep fit. Important. So Frank, I assumed Italy, but were you born in London?”

“No, No. I was born in a little town in Sicily. Family came from Taormina, not far from Catania. Poor family. Farming community.”

“But I was born in Scopello while on holiday. Popped out early.”

“My parents came to England when I was 5 or 6. Francesco, my father, got a job in the Railways, then at the Airport in Heathrow. My mother, Caterina, she looked after the family. She cooked and washed for six kids every day. And kept the house very clean. She used to take us to Church every Sunday. Both parents died before I was about 20. I was still finding my way around.”

The waiter comes to the table with their breakfast.

“Our education was poor but we survived. All my brothers and sisters left for New York and Canada. They’re doing well. But I don’t keep in touch.”

“Surprising. All Italian families keep in close contact.”

“The business must have changed me. I regret that.”

“Nice place Sicily. I always wanted to visit.”

“I have a little house in Scopello. Tonnara di Scopello. Trapani area. Not far from Palermo. I have friends. Nice simple people. Fishermen. They fish for tuna. The fish is so fresh and beautiful. When I go there I give the local church \$10,000 for maintenance. Father Giovanni writes to me occasionally. He happens to be my wife’s brother.”

He sheds a tear.

“So I send him \$5000. He is getting in the habit of calling me regularly. What the hell. I don’t mind. I am not taking it with me. They treat me like a king when I visit. They take me to their homes. Have dinners together. They take me on the fishing boats and I find peace. I love those people. Poor, hard-working and kind. But. NEVER cross them.”  
“Cosa Nostra?”

“Maybe. Some. Most of them simple people. Don’t worry Jaqueline, I am not part of that family. But never get anywhere near the Mafia. They are like Octopus.”

“Phew, that’s good to know.”

“Better start on this breakfast before we forget about it.”

All is quiet for 5 minutes. Both enjoy their breakfasts while digesting their inner thoughts.

“Will you take me there one day Frank? To Scopello.”

“Of course. But not today. I have to get used to my Bugatti first. Ever driven a Bugatti Jaqueline?”

“Once. Very nice, exhilarating, a bit too fast.”

“Even for you?”

“Sure. One must always be very careful and respectful in any situation.”

“You are a very sensible lady Jaquie. Oh, do you mind if I call you Jaquie?”

“By all means.”

“That makes me feel better.”

“Let me go to the bathroom and then we are ready to go.”

“Good idea. I go quickly to my room.”

Up in his room, Frank wonders if he should take a tablet. But decides to see what signal his body sends him without interference. He meets Jaquie again and both walk to his car. He drives rather carefully enjoying the car and even more so, Jaquie’s presence next to him.

“Enjoying the drive, the car, the views?”

“Very nice ride Frank. Goes like a dream. Perfect. What are you enjoying most Frank?”

“You.”

“No hesitation.”

“None whatsoever.”

They stop after an hour. Frank opens his eco-friendly fridge and pours champagne.

“One glass for Jaquie. One glass for Frankie.”

“Very impressive.”

“Salute!”

“Do people call you FRANKIE?”

“Only those who are very close to me. Most of them dead now. Ha Ha.”

Jaquie goes out and stretches her legs. She looks away from the car at the distant view. Frank sits in the car admiring her movements. His body has not responded again. He has Lucio Dalla’s CD Caruso playing. His favourite song. *Ti voglio bene assai. Ma tanto bene ....* He started dreaming again.

“Are you coming out Frank?”

“Once in the car, I get a bit lazy.”

“Remember, you should keep the body moving.”

He starts the engine and then he feels a gentle tick. Oh, finally, he thought. But he was not sure whether it was the initial shiver you get when you start the Bugatti engine. She walks back and gets in the car revealing a fair bit of leg. The sensation went blank when it should have ticked even more. The goose pimple shivers gone. But the Bugatti engine was still humming. They started on the drive back.

“So what’s your schedule for the day?”

“I have a shoot with Versace at 2 o’clock today. A different fashion line than the Ferrari one. No cars.

Tomorrow I have been invited to a party at YSL to meet a couple of their marketing people. Their parties go all day. I find them boring. Part of the job.”

“Then a couple of days of shooting again with Versace. I don’t even have a clue of the location. No manners shown or consideration for other people’s schedules or lives.”

“So a few busy days for you. I may have to go to London myself to check on a few things. It’s getting a bit tough over there with this Coronavirus pandemic.”

They arrive at the hotel, park, get out and shake hands.

“It’s been a great day, very pleasant. I wish you a successful shoot. Oh, enjoy the party. And behave!”

“Yes it was a wonderful day.”

“Can I call you when I get back from London?”

“Sure, remember you still have to take me to Scopello.”

“But of course.”

Jaqueline gives him a kiss on the neck.

“Wow that was very nice from a Vampire.”

Both laugh heartily. Frank takes her hand and kisses it. He figured he was still too nervous to return a kiss on the neck. He was convinced that she must have thought that Frank is lacking confidence. Jaqueline says goodbye and leaves.

Ivan Sms’s 4 Fingers. 12.30. Alfa left Hotel. Bugatti still parked at Hotel. 4 Fingers sms’s back. ‘Thanks Ivan. Keep me posted.’

Jaqueline sms’s Johnny: “FRANK OFF TO LONDON FOR 3 DAYS AT LEAST. THINGS GOING AS EXPECTED. ALL CLEAN. He will call me around Wednesday. Busy on a shoot for the next 3 days.”

Frank sms’s Mrs. Baxter letting her know he will be there tomorrow. And to send somebody to stock the Fridge with fresh food and milk. And a fresh loaf. And have his old Mercedes parked downstairs.

Mrs. Baxter replies all should be okay.