

Petra Reski

# The Faces of the dead

Serena Vitale's second case

We can beat them

Just for one day

We can be heroes

Just for one day

David Bowie

She glided through Palermo like in a submarine. Past the cupolas of the Chiesa degli Eremiti and past a decayed procession vehicle for Santa Rosalia, past the huge ficus tree that cast its shadow over pictures of madonnas with faded plastic roses, past the marble commemorative stone for a little girl who was murdered by her parents.

Through the tinted bulletproof glass the city appeared drab and grey, with a soft blue hue and the sound muted. No screeching tires and no roaring Vespa scooters. Not even the chime of bells tolling penetrated the interior of the car. There were no smells, either. Not the warm breath of Africa when it rained. Not the mist of the ocean, no decay.

Tell me that the thought of me arouses you, the man she was about to see wrote.

She had planned this night like a military operation. The logistics of the troops landing on Omaha Beach was child's play compared to this. But everything was running according to plan. She was almost there.

Nothing showy, Mimmo, no flashing lights, Serena said as they headed towards the beltway outside of town. As soon as the traffic slowed down, Mimmo flicked on the siren. Her life had

turned into a continuous military mission when they put her in charge of the "Alessio Lombardo" search unit. An armored Lancia and four bodyguards who took turns. Mimmo and Enzo, Ciccio and Peppino. Sometimes others joined them, men she didn't know. You can get used to anything, she told herself. One step at a time.

Only once had she attempted to meet a friend for coffee at a café in the Via Principe di Belmonte. The bodyguards had leaped from the car, glanced around frantically to the right and left and ripped open the door. Bystanders stared at her as if she had escaped from a psychiatric ward.

Mimmo was ecstatic when the newly armored Lancia arrived. He was a ferocious driver and bullied other cars aside to head right down the center, lights flashing. Serena hadn't trusted the Lancia and she was always skeptical when people acted like they wanted to protect her.

We have plenty of time, Mimmo, there's a ferry every half hour, Ciccio said.

Roger that, Mimmo replied. And sped across the highway to Trapani as if they were inmates escaping from prison.

Ciccio grabbed the door knob. Ciccio's nickname was Fatty because of his size, and he moved at the pace of an anesthetized sloth. Ciccio had not been her bodyguard for very long and Serena assumed that if she were attacked he would simply play dead. The most dangerous part about him was his violet eyes.

They looked like they had been intended for someone else. An SMS popped up on her screen: When you come I will cover you with a petticoat of spittle.

Serena rummaged around in her papers. Interrogation records, recordings of telephone conversations of people Lombardo had dealings with. The logistics involved merely to wire-tap his mistresses were immense; there were ten or twelve of them. One of them had recently contracted a venereal disease. After they heard a telephone conversation with her doctor she had been watched 24 hours a day because her having contracted the disease from Lombardo would suggest that he had visited her recently. Or she had contracted it from another man. If that was the case, she'd soon be dead. They were assuming that Lombardo was about to visit another mistress because she had made an appointment with one of the most expensive hairdressers in Palermo, which was unusual; normally she had a friend dye her hair. They even wire-tapped his exes. One of them had moved to Germany and the hassle to get the Germans' permission to wiretap her was as complicated and bureaucratic as only Germans could get.

One of Lombardo's letter messengers was wiretapped, too. A butcher from Borgo Vechio. Serena had been tailing him for months. Bugs, video cameras and GPS – the full monty. They even had wire-taped Cataldo peeing. Two days ago Cataldo had purchased a pizzino in a hardware store in the old part of town. A

little slip of paper sealed with scotch tape. Which he'd be taking to Lombardo soon. They'd be right there behind him.

Another SMS: I kiss your tiny earlobes, the inside of your arms, I kiss the hollows of your knees.

She had explained to Mimmo and Ciccio that one bodyguard for Levanzo would suffice and it hadn't been difficult to convince Ciccio to spend the weekend with his family in Marsala. In Trapani she and Mimmo boarded the hydrofoil and she sat down in the first row, facing the horizon. She became sea-sick easily. Right next to her two young English women were embracing for a telescope-selfie.

Mimmo offered to get her an espresso.

He didn't appear very muscular yet he lunged into the approaching wave of passengers, pushed past women carrying screeching children and past pale English tourists clutching their suitcases, returning with a plastic cup and a piece of chocolate that he handed her worldlessly.

That was what was so nice about having had the same bodyguard for years: the familiarity. He knew her preferences better than some of her lovers did. And on the other hand she knew of his love of women and about his affairs with Norwegian and Spanish tourists (definitely more Spanish women than Nordic women who always took love so seriously), and about the Nigerian woman whom he had helped free from her pimp and with the one – and only – Sicilian woman whose love letters he still carried around in

his briefcase even though the affair had taken place more than ten years ago.

What are you wearing? the man wrote.

Serena glanced down at herself. She was wearing jeans and sneakers. She wrote: Lace stockings and a tight black dress.

And what are you wearing under the black dress?

Nothing.

Above her the news flashed across the screen; the sound had been muted. The minister president was yet again announcing something. A reform that that didn't deserve the name. A bonus that would be a malus. Her nickname for him was Mr. Announcement.

They passed Favignana, the island that from afar resembled a ghost town. Stone towers, the foundations in ruins, walls made of yellow tufa rock. The ocean glittered like an opal. Everything - Palermo, the Palace of Justice, the investigations, wiretap transcripts, status reports - evaporated and disappeared into the ocean that appeared as if illuminated from below.

Soon the contours of Levanzo appeared in front of her. The sun was hovering above the horizon like a blood orange and reflected in Mimmo's shiny turquoise sun glasses. He never took them off, even after the sun went down.

Mimmo, would you do me a favor?

Of course, Dottorè.

“Dottorè” was the Sicilian abbreviation for Dottoressa. You’d made it when your name was abbreviated; it signaled you’d been accepted.

When Michele became Michè, Serena Serè, and Dottoressa Dottorè, you’d arrived.

During her first years in Palermo she thought that Dottoressa was a remnant handed down over the centuries. Today she knew that Dottoressa was not a gesture of submission but a Sicilian expression of respect.

Do you remember telling me about your Norwegian girl-friend who is vacationing in Favignana?

Yes?

How about seeing her tonight?

He looked up, surprised.

Drop me off at the Pensione Paradiso and that fisherman could bring you over to the island. I bet you remember him.

The one who takes visitors on tour of the islands?

Yes, him. And then you and I would meet tomorrow morning?

She stared into the distorted reflection of her own face in Mimmo’s glasses and saw the wreath of tiny wrinkles forming while he laughed.

Okay, he said and stretched like a cat that was getting ready to hunt.

And ... when will we meet tomorrow morning, Dottorè? What time? Well ... you have to ... I have to tell the fisherman ... I'll send you an SMS later on.

Perfetto.

That was what she liked about Mimmo. No questions. No concerns. No buts. No and-what-happens-if-the-committee-for-safety-gets-wind-of it?

They entered the tiny port. Levanzo consisted of a street, a grocery store, two little hotels, two bars, a boutique and a tourist attraction. The boutique had things that nobody needed (handmade pottery lamps to burn fragrant oils) and the tourist attraction consisted of things that no one wanted to see (Palaolithic cave drawings). The two bars and small hotels were so alike it was virtually impossible to tell them apart: The same view of the ocean, the same piles of plastic chairs, the same aperitifs, the same menu.

In a world in which one constantly had to deliberate things, determine and assess them, Levanzo was paradise. After just one day you lost your sense of time, after two days you were certain that the world consisted of the ocean, the horizon, screeching sea gulls, and nothing else. After three days of watching the light change you felt like you were watching a movie – from white to blue, from blue to pink, from gold sprinkles to the dark blue of the night.

Pensione Paradiso, Serena said, and the boy waiting at the pier tossed her little suitcase onto the cargo area.

Ciao, Mimmo said after they had arrived at the pensione.

Ciao, Serena replied, opened the door to her room and collapsed on the bed, which started swaying like a ship on high waves. Organizing a rendezvous with a lover was harder than organizing a clandestine meeting with an informant. At least if you cherished anonymity but were surrounded by bodyguards, were driven around in an armored vehicle and every step you took was captured on video. Soon night would be descending on her like a black cloth and nobody would see her walking across Via Calvario.

She grabbed her smartphone and sent the man an SMS. Sea urchins, she wrote. Sea urchins and champagne.

He answered: at your service.

She hadn't seen him for a long time. Since their last meeting enough years had past to have a feeling of ambiguity arise between them again. And when she read that he would be lecturing at the University of Palermo - about the interconnection between love and vascular vessels, no pun intended - she had sent him a playful SMS.

He was a cardiac surgeon, an internationally renowned specialist for the mechanics of muscles and vascular reconstruction. In short: a hero. With a marked tendency towards pathos. Someone who could rile all of Italy's leftists and conservatives every time Repubblica praised him by referring to Italy's health care system as being just as corrupt as Italy's politicians. And that is why she forgave him his pathos. And anyway, this was about sex. C'est tout. Who ever said that lovers had to be congenial? She took a shower, applied make-up and put on her black lingerie. The money she had spent on the underwear would have been enough for her to live on for a whole month when she was a student. She smoothed the black lace stockings, slipped on the black dress and stepped into the high-heeled shoes and headed over to the villa – the only one that majestically rose from the yellow tuf stone cliffs. An elegantly decaying small palace, with a large terrace. She pressed the button for the intercom system and said: It's me.

She lost her step as she was climbing the chipped steps. He was standing behind the door. He yanked her in, pressed her up against the wall while pushing up her dress and placing his hand between her legs. When he tried to kiss her she turned her head to the side. She felt his breath against her ear and his hands on her breasts.

Your heart is impossible to conquer, he said later Rubbish, she replied.

Proudly he led her through the rooms that were as large as ball

rooms, yanking open the winged doors; outside the moonlight was reflected by the ocean glinting like a huge metal plate. He pointed to various furniture pieces, and explained the way the rooms were designed and situated, the history of the building. She had already read about his villa in various weekly journals, three Italian ones and two international newspapers. Five television shows and a thirty-minute documentary had focused on his passion for tin toys, his puppets, his collection of French fin-de-siècle-advertising posters and his book ends. She was touched by his vanity. It revealed the child he had once been. When they ate afterwards he lamented how reserved she was. She remembered it. It was a ritual.

I want to subjugate you, he said.

I know, she said. But don't you already do that with your assistants? And with the journalists who come to your home to interview you?

I have sex with so many, he said. But they don't have your kind of brain. I am a sentimental fornicator.

She took a helping of sea-urchins that he had served in a bowl over crushed ice. The wind blew through the curtains, billowing them like sails. They sat on crickety empire chairs at a small table.

I said romantic things to the women but they were not impressed. But when I touched them, it worked. Maybe that is what it is.

Maybe it is instinct that works.

Maybe, Serena mumbled, as she fished for another sea-urchin.

I have the impression that you think I'm only an interesting anthropological case.

Hm, Serena said and let the flesh of the sea-urchin melt in her mouth.

What are you doing these days, he asked and moved close to her while stroking her thighs.

I am standing at the riverbank, she said. Waiting.

And is your waiting rewarded?

Sometimes.

And what do you believe in?

In nothing, she said, and spit out the the thorn of a sea urchin. Who did he think he was? Marcel Proust?

She felt she couldn't take another question, so she queried him about his plans and in no time he was talking right through her as if into a mirror. He talked about doubts, his future and Zen,

about Cretians and causality and about the fact that the next day he was invited to the wedding of the son of a Sicilian regional president which was taking place in one of the most beautiful hotels of the city, Villa Igiea.

Well, I should tell you that if you are arrested, there's nothing I can do for you. The guests include at least seven people who are under investigation.

His look was a mixture of surprise and disbelief. Then he laughed, served raspberries with orange juice and lemon in small, dainty glass bowls and launched into a diatribe about the soul and material things, spirit and sensibility, the spirit and the body. Like a ball that once kicked follows its predestined course. Until she moistened her finger and touched his lips with it. He pulled her onto his couch. And put her hand between his legs.

Afterwards he kept her underwear. The sinfully expensive ones. And stuck them in his pants pocket.

He walked her to the door and kissed her hand. As she walked back along the Via Calvario she felt his fragrance clinging to her like something tragic. Her heel got caught in the cracked marble pavement. It was almost two in the morning.

She had almost reached the Pensione Paradiso when she felt her phone rattling. Paolo.

Goddammit, Serena, where the hell are you? I've been trying to reach you for hours.

But you know that there's no reception in Levanzo.

They arrested Cataldo.

You're kidding me.

She dropped her shoes onto the pavement.

Serena, you've got to come back to Palermo right now.

Who arrested him?

The ROS, the Carabinieri's special task force, as far as I know. Not the police. I talked to Romano. Cataldo was arrested in his apartment in Borgo Vechio two hours ago.

Shit, she said.

Yes, sure, shit. You have to get here right away. I'll send you a boat from Trapani.

Are you there already?

Where?

In Borgo.

Serena, I told you. I'm in Naples. Don't you remember? The first flight leaves tomorrow morning at 6.30.

I don't believe it.

She stared out on the ocean stretching out before her like black enamel, dialed Mimmo's number and prayed. At least his phone was ringing. She stared at the red dot on the screen under Mimmo mobile. Mimmo wasn't answering. And Ciccio wasn't, either. Shit, shit, shit. Son of a bitch. It was her fault. Her responsibility. Her sin. Because she had tried to escape from the real world for just one night. It was her fault that she'd gotten Mimmo and Ciccio into this goddamned situation. They were all going to be inundated with disciplinary measures, be demoted,

have their civil servant status taken away from them. That thought kept flashing in her head in large letters: A Carabinieri shouldn't let anyone talk him into anything, especially not the person he was guarding, the person crazy enough to send away her bodyguard away in exchange for a one-night stand with a vain surgeon. Are you out of your fucking mind, Serena? She ran over to the house where the fisherman lived, threw herself against his door and hammered against it until he opened it and stared at Serena like an apparition. Whereupon she started to cry. Exceptional situations require exceptional measures.

With tears streaming down her cheeks she mumbled something about an emergency. A trial, the danger of someone escaping, police, her life in jeopardy. And it worked. The fisherman used all the honorary titles he could come up with: But of course, Signora Dottoressa, mi perdoni Signora Giudice ... voglio dire ... Signora Procuratore ... and finally, because she was still weeping, he added Eccellenza non si preoccupi assuring her that he would go fetch Mimmo and return with him, dead or alive, immediately.

Her Excellence was trembling in the cold moon light and waiting at the mole, staring out into the dark night, and praying, like when she was a child. Dear God. Please. Help. She would take part in the Santa-Rosalia procession with her mother. And also the Procession of Mysteries on Good Friday. She would light candles for Madonna Immacolata. And for Christ on the cross, too. I

swear.

Finally she spotted a light in the distance. But it wasn't the light of a fisherman's boat. Shit. Here I am giving a chance to prove you exist, and now this. Resigned she plopped down on the wrought-iron harbor bollard and was holding her face in her hands when she heard a humming noise from the other direction. The fisherman. And Mimmo. She had just enough time to hand the fisherman a few bills when the Mobile Task Force's boat appeared. Now Ciccio was the only one still missing. Please God. Ciccio, Ciccio, Ciccio.

Luckily Mimmo had Ciccio's landline number in Marsala. Ciccio's wife answered. Full of reproach. My husband? He's asleep. What is it?

Two hours later they were finally all assembled in the armored Lancia and were roaring towards Palermo. Gradually the tension was beginning to fall from her. She rang Paolo.

Who told you?

The Questura. More precisely, the Maresciallo who had Cataldo wiretapped. Supposedly a German state attorney ordered he be arrested. Requested legal assistance. Interpol. The usual.

A German state attorney? But that is unbelievable. From where?

Dortmund or Duisburg, something with a D. At any rate, Di Salvo approved everything.

Sure, Serena said. What else.

The only thing you could hear in the car was the sound of the motor, the wind and the tweeting of the walkie-talkie. The speedometer was showing one hundred and eighty kilometers an hour. Slowly it was getting light outside. The contours of Isola delle Femmine appeared in the ocean. Serena tried to call Romano again. In vain. No reception. Neither on his phone at work nor his private phone. Shit.

And so why had she decided to replace her good old BlackBerry with this skimpy little thing? The BlackBerry's keyboard had cracked, it had fallen down a thousand times, but it always worked. When she threw it away she felt as bad as if she had left an old friend in the lurch. She was staring at the numbers of her iPhone as if hypnotized.

No reception. I can't believe it, Serena said. Murphy's Law.

Murfie?, Ciccio mumbled. Isn't that the name of that Neopolitan state attorney with the English name? The one who started investigations against Berlusconi for accounting fraud?

No way, Mimmo replied. Murfie is related to the Ingham-Whitaker family.

The ones who invented Marsala?

Yep, Murfie had something to do with the Palermo branch of the family. That is what I read.

Rubbish, Serena said impatiently. Murphy is only a turn of phrase.

An axiom.

Axiom?

What can go wrong, will go wrong.

Wieneke strolled into the arrivals of the airport and spotted the guy from afar. A huge German. It is impossible to overlook a man six feet tall surrounded by Sicilians. Life was bustling around him, people hugging and kissing each other, shouting and crying for joy. And this PR guy was standing there like a watchtower with waves crashing around him. Even when Sicilians spoke about the weather it sounded like the third act of a Greek tragedy, not to mention when they were showing how happy they were to see someone. That kind of joy was rolling through the hall here like a tsunami.

The press guy was carrying a sign that said W. Widukind Wieneke. That was enough to drive Wieneke batshit crazy. Every single email he'd written to this guy was signed Wolfgang W. Wieneke. This moron had probably gotten Widukind from Wikipedia. Only a week ago, after writing about three thousand emails to this Wikipedia person Wieneke had gotten into a fight with him because he was incapable of understanding that Wolfgang Widukind were his official first names and that he preferred being called Wolfgang Period Wieneke.

Hello, Mr. Widukind, the press guy was saying.

Wieneke, Wieneke said.

The press guy's blond hair was bleached by the sun and he had a dark tan. Next to him Wieneke looked about as pale as if he had been held prisoner in a basement. Which, in a way, was not all that far removed from the truth. In the past five years he had not dared take a single day vacation.

"Loose lips sink ships," is what they said at FACT when people were fired while they were on vacation. Firing people when they were on vacation was a specialty of the editor-in-chief. That way he didn't have to endure emotional scenes or tears. During every vacation that lasted longer than three days you were in danger of being replaced by someone younger, cheaper and with cut-throat ambition.

I'm so glad that we're finally meeting in person, Beach Boy was saying. Mr. Jützenbach is awaiting you on board his yacht.

Sure wasn't my fault, Wieneke replied pointedly.

The press guy looked irritated for a moment but got a grip on himself quickly. And started to butter up to Wieneke. Muttered that he was sorry that he kept postponing the meeting and that he was really glad that Wieneke was so flexible in terms of their organizational difficulties. And on and on.

First the interview was to have taken place in Paris. Next at Jützenbach's castle in Münsterland that Wieneke was dying to see because Jützenbach had his hunting trophies displayed all over the walls of one of the halls: Water buffalo, impalas, even

a stuffed boa constrictor, chandeliers made of stag antlers and a whole wall full of raccoon furs of wash bears that Jützenbach had shot himself, with eyes that contained LEDs blinking in red or green. At that point, however, the interview had been moved from Jützenbach's villa to Sardinia. And now to Jützenbach's yacht on tour of the Mediterranean. Every two days Wieneke was forced to reschedule flights. Wieneke's boss was fanatical when it came to Jützenbach. Every star or starlet they could get their hands on got a FACT column, a FACT interview or even an editorial by the editor-in-chief. Just one year ago FACT had dedicated a whole cover story titled "The Industrialist with the Green Heart" to Jützenbach.

Can I carry your suit-case for you?, the press guy was asking. Our car isn't very far from here.

I'm fine, Wieneke replied, yanking his suit-case closer to himself, desperately trying to remember what the guy's name was.

Outside it felt like a huge giant was blowing his hot breath into his face. A wind that was full of Saharan sand, like tiny little shards of glass. They landed right in Wieneke's eyes. Once again he'd forgotten his sun glasses at home. After only two steps his shirt was sticking to his body like a plastic bag. Wieneke headed towards the parking lot and noticed that the press guy was wearing neon green flip flops. So effeminate. A real space cadette. Don't be petty, Wieneke told himself. He hadn't believed that he would ever be going to Sicily again at the expense of FACT until the plane actually landed. Palermo was his Waterloo. And

here he was again.

He searched his mobile phone for the last email. Finally. Ah, yes. The press fairy's name was Schmidt. What else. Talked non-stop. Diarrhea of the mouth. About Jützenbach's private jet (a Falcon F7X), Jützenbach's helicopter (Augusta AW 139, limited edition), Jützenbach's sailing yacht (Carbon and burl wood veneer).

You won't regret it, Schmidt said, everything's cutting edge.

How sweet. As if he was interested in the décor of a sailing yacht. Beach Boy Schmidt seemed to think that Wieneke's silence meant that he was interested, because now he was yacking about how he had applied to work for FACT, but that was before Jützenbach had made him an offer. And even though he sometimes had the itch to write he was glad he wasn't involved in the day-to-day business. He met lots of people, got around a lot. The day before he had just returned from a flight to Stuttgart because Jützenbach wanted to be there when his daughter took part in a riding tournament.

Wieneke glanced at him pityingly. An almost imperceptible newspaper crisis and this candy-ass didn't want to be a journalist anymore but a PR jerk. No wonder nobody at FACT wanted to hire him.

Outside the car window, Sicily was flying by. To the left the ocean and to the right brown, scorched mountains. The airconditioning was blowing ice-cold wind into his face. Wieneke was about to direct the air away from himself when Schmidt apologized for

having cranked it up too high. Schmidt's long legs were in the way of the steering-wheel which once again convinced Wieneke that size in itself was not what it was made out to be.

The ship is a miracle. Cutting edge technology, and sophisticated elegance. 54 meters long, Schmidt said and Wieneke noticed that he was wearing a wedding ring. I bet this fag is married to a Cuban fitness trainer, he thought to himself.

Mr. Jützenbach is really pleased that you will be conducting the interview. He's heard a lot about you.

Wieneke's upper lip curled up, displaying his incisors. He didn't give a shit whether people liked him or not. This interview was a hoax anyway. A PR stunt. One day Tillmann had barged into his office taking Wieneke by surprise. If office was the word you use Wieneke's cubbyhole. It was smaller than a dog house. Tillmann had made fun of Wieneke's Che Guevara poster and not even noticed that the poster was ironic. But irony was dead

since Tillmann had taken over as FACT's editor-in-chief. Tillmann had slammed his ass right down on Wieneke's desk saying:

You're my man, and started doing leg excercises, stretching and raising them and making circles with his feet –

inside, outside, like he was at the gym and not in an office.

I know you've just gone through a rough patch, and continued his workout by massaging his calves.

Wieneke hated psycho babble and was about to

explain but Tillmann was already saying: A guy like you can put up with a lot.

Wieneke glanced up warily. And at the same time he was flattered. Even under torture he wouldn't have admitted how insulted he had been that Tillmann hadn't appointed him to the investigative team. On the one hand Wieneke thought the idea of an investigative pool was idiotic – he used to write the big stories all by himself. Nowadays a whole class swarmed out for miniscule building corruption scandals. Who, if not Wolfgang W. Wieneke, the driving force behind the investigative reporters should be part of the pool? But ever since his mishap in Palermo his position at FACT had been suboptimal. That is when he got stuck in the back office. Tiny articles, legends, googling. Wolfgang W. Wieneke – the problem journalist. The guy who got lucky if he was allowed to edit an info box.

Don't worry, Wieneke was saying.

FACT can't survive without people like you. Even if you didn't do so well in our last reader survey.

Not again. Wieneke took a deep breath. FACT was now the client of an agency that charged a fortune for having everyday readers take a pen and mark what they had read. The upshot of the survey was that well written texts did better than texts that hadn't been written well. Wow. Or that people wanted to read about something they had already read elsewhere.

Unbelievable. The culture section was considered to be a quota

killer, Wieneke couldn't agree more. You didn't require a survey to understand that an article with the heading "Durs Grünbein on a lecture tour through Mexico" would get rid of readers faster than you could count to three. But ever since they had added google analytics everybody knew how often readers had gone for a certain article; how long people remained on a page and what links had been clicked; at what point readers had abandoned the article, and that women didn't get jokes (Francesca hadn't even laughed when he told her his favourite joke: How does an Italian count his goats? He just counts the legs, and divides by four.) and that they tried to squelch everything they didn't like, deeming it chauvinist (his last joke about blonds). And that nobody gave a shit about Wolfgang W. Wieneke's last report about dishonest insurance agents. The things that were considered at FACT didn't constitute journalism but a social media fuck. I want an interview with Jützenbach. I want to know what makes him tick. What makes him suffer. What he loves. And what he hates.

Wieneke sighed. Bild-Zeitung had had an interview with Jützenbach the week before.

I want you and no one else to do the interview with Jützenbach. Hmh, Wieneke said.

I am glad you're thrilled, Tillmann said.

Wieneke pulled in his stomach.

Tillmann squinted and said quietly: Seriously, you're my man,

Wieneke. I know Hans-Ulrich Jützenbach well and I wanted to be sure that this interview is conducted by an experienced professional.

Thank you, Wieneke croaked.

I will have my secretary call his office so that you can make an appointment.

Sure, Wieneke said. A cushy interview with a rich idiot. His career was plummeting to a new low.

I can feel how elated you are, Tillmann said. The fire is burning within you. You have the heart of a true reporter. I can tell. Just what we need.

Wieneke squirmed in his chair. Most recently FACT had either warm or cold pages. Cold pages included topics that had to do with the economy or investigative stories.

Warm pages were articles about Buddhists and online dating or the return of home cooking. Psychoanalytic market research. During a meeting Tillmann had announced that FACT had to become warmer, more accessible, more female, softer. So the next title story was: "What Germans really eat." Wieneke felt himself blush. Quickly he turned around to the window. It was raining. It was pouring. Tillmann got up and left Wieneke's office with a saunter, hands stuck in his trouser pockets, without even turning around.

The highway was deserted, the ocean frozen. Beach Boy was yammering on his smart phone. With the crew of the Blue Star,

which was somewhere near Palermo on its way to the Aegean Islands. The phone was wedged between his shoulders and chin and he was finding out where Wieneke was supposed to board the ship. After he had ended the conversation he apologized: The only problem in my job is that I'm unable to make plans with HIM. If HE feels compelled, he stops everything in his tracks and flies to Munich to spend an afternoon at the Oktoberfest.

I understand, Wieneke said. I hope this pseudo-confidential bullshit will stop soon. Didn't he have a hairdresser he could talk to?

Last week HE used the sailing tour to invite his friends to a banquet. HE rented the whole Greek temple grounds around Selinunt. Aperitif with Sicilian granita and dinner in front of the Hera Temple.

Really, Wieneke said and yanked out his notebook. A magical night with a full moon, Schmidt crowed rapturously. And around us nothing but the breath of antiquity, a few chirping crickets and Vicky Leandros. They hired her just for the occasion.

No kidding, Wieneke said. He attempted a smile, although just the thought of a fancy party in archeological surroundings was enough to send him over the edge.

But Italy was broke. Virtually everything was on sale here. Even Greek temples. Schmidt was droning on, providing him with the names of the guests, Deutsche Bank managers, BMW heirs, the executive board of the German postal bank and Westphalia's Federal Bank, two managers of Energy NRW, the Energy Minister

of Saxony, a Sicilian or President whatever.

Borussia Dortmund's goalkeeper.

Really? Him too? Wieneke said.

Who? The Sicilian President?

No, I mean the goalkeeper.

It was all in Gala, the press guy said. Wieneke slammed his notebook shut.

Only a sentence. In the "People" section.

Gala isn't a problem, Wieneke said magnanimously. But those are all no-names. We at FACT expect more. Goldman Sachs managers, Al Pacino and steel magnates from India. Stuff like that.

That point was his. Wieneke stretched his arms contentedly.

And a photographer is going to be joining us, if I'm not mistaken?

Yes, Wieneke said.

He is Sicilian and works for FACT, right?

Yes, Wieneke said.

Wouldn't it have been better for him to accompany you?

No. The photographer will be joining us for the interview tomorrow, Wieneke said. Giovanni was all he needed now.

HE wants to go tuna-fishing near Favignana, Schmidt was saying.

This is confidential because I think it would be a worthwhile motive for your photographer. HE

adores mattanza. That is what they call it here. It means slaughter.

Tuna slaughter is not going to work for FACT, Wieneke said. A picture of a fat cat slaughtering a tuna. Hello? What were these people thinking? But what if HE is in the mood to go tuna fishing? Then tell him to do it another time. Wieneke wasn't going to be the laughing stock of the media industry. That's all he needed. A tuna fish slaughter. That would guarantee a shit storm that would last a week.

As they zoomed past Palermo, Wieneke regretted that the only thing he'd be seeing this time was underpasses and beltways, cement silos and DIY stores. Finally they arrived in a village the color of sand with square-shaped houses. Along the road there were shriveled palm trees, plastic bags and cardboard boxes. The light was milky, maybe because of the sand swirling through the air and spoiling the view. A cement wall jutted out into the ocean like a finger, next to it a beach with boats rotting away, burst water melons, empty bottles of detergent and piles of used condoms. Along the street by the ocean cars with fogged up windows that reminded Wieneke of the first time he had sex. In an NSU Prinz. Sicily was so old-fashioned and sentimental. Schmidt was on the phone again and decided that it would be better to wait in a bar and have a cup of coffee until HE came. A tiny bar nearby. One that Jützenbach had been frequenting since his childhood, because his father, Jützenbach Senior, RIP, always stopped by there when he was on one of his sailing tours during

the summer.

The bar was located near the beach and looked like the world had not turned since the sixties: screen doors and neon lights, a loud airconditioner and a tv that was broadcasting a soccer game. A painting of a Madonna hung over the door. The barkeeper greeted them sleepily and continued to polish the stainless steel counter. Schmidt slapped him on the shoulder and tried to involve him in a conversation but the barman merely reacted by clicking his tongue. It was a well known fact that it was hard to get people to talk in Sicily.

Wieneke was about to head outside to smoke a cigarette when suddenly the barkeeper came to life: He turned the volume down on the TV and gestured towards the door with his chin. The screen door swung open and a group of men crowded into the bar. They all had a great tan and sunbleached hair, were wearing white Bermuda shorts and polo shirts, and all clamoring for the attention of a shriveled little man with a beard. The little old man with the beard had a purple shawl draped around his neck that resembled the batik dyed cotton diapers people wore around their necks in the eighties. Just as Wieneke was beginning to wonder if the dwarf with the purple diaper was really Jützenbach, Beach Boy introduced him. Wieneke flashed a smile and immediately launched into playful small talk: How happy he was to finally meet him, and how his boss had lauded his ecological sophistication and his passion for sailing.

This was a mode Wieneke shifted into automatically as soon as the magazine sent him off on a mission. His inner autopilot flipped on, no matter whether it was a PR event or a really hot investigative story. Wieneke threw himself into it. Real pros had a method that worked. Of course the young guys who wore wool hats and full beards, drank latte by the gallon and used Google Street View to acquaint themselves with the world didn't know what it was like to have printer's ink flow through your veins instead of blood.

Wieneke experienced something of a hot flash. He was in his element, even if this interview was a courtesy of his boss. At least he owed Tillmann's annulling his anathema against him to this wizened dwarf. He was no longer sitting in that cubbyhole office scribbling legends with a view of dark rain clouds over Hamburg but was standing in a bar that would have been a perfect setting for *The Godfather*.

He smirked as he listened to Jützenbach complain about having to wait in his private jet for two hours after landing in Palermo until all of his papers had been checked and that drug dealers weren't checked as meticulously as he was. Wieneke giggled in agreement and was about to instrumentalize this train of thought to mention his experience in Sicily. But before he could mention his Mafia research and contacts to Sicilian bosses he was introduced to the Blue Star's crew: Captain, helmsman, sailors, stewards. Blue Star was monogrammed into their shirts and they were all barefoot. Bare feet covered with

sand. Jützenbach's feet were pretty sandy, too. Flatfooted splayfeet. Every since he had served in the army Wieneke could detect that in an instant. They all wore their bare feet like awards. It was the way they showed that they belonged to the club of wealthy people, even if the skippers were only subordinates. Athletic, muscled subordinates. With toned torsos. Wieneke was wearing brand new sneakers that looked orthopedic in the midst of all these tanned, bare feet. Wieneke headed for the bar counter to finish his espresso when something shrieked. He had stepped on a tiny dog that was scurrying around between the feet of the skipper, the steward and the captain and towards a girl he hadn't noticed yet. The girl was wearing a greenish gold shimmery kaftan and carrying a black cotton bag which read Portofino and Blue Star. Presumably Jützenbach's sex kitten. The dog was a purebred beagle and its name was Theodor. The girl was an exotic mixture with an Arabian nose but without a name.

The barkeeper referred to Jützenbach as capo and started serving hors d'oeuvres. Wieneke took a bite and realized it was fish. Anchovie muck. He spit it out discretely into a paper napkin and pretended that he was listening to Jützenbach rapturously who was droning on about what it was like to catch tuna fish. All you have to do when you catch a tuna fish is dump a bottle of Bacardi down its neck and it collapses immediately, Jützenbach was saying, adding: And then we turn it into sashimi, right on board.

Everyone swooned. Wieneke laughed along with them.

The plan was to have dinner in Porticello, a fisher village, in a restaurant that was located right on the ocean.

Jützenbach referred to it as vintage. Like all rich people he occasionally wanted to associate with "ordinary people".

Wieneke shoveled a handful of peanuts into his mouth when Jützenbach left him standing there, right in the middle of the sentence. The skippers raced after him, the dog jumped up and started barking happily, while the girl followed them as if in a haze.

Jützenbach, the beagle and the girl climbed into the mahogany Riva boat with its root wood veneer. The sight of the sophisticated wood stung Wienecke because it reminded him of the fact that his bookshelves at home weren't even walnut but white, bleached Ikea shelves that he'd had ever since his university days. He decided to get rid of them immediately when he got home. And to replace them with genuine pinewood shelves. Plywood was toxic and exuded toxic vapors for years.

The sun set was gorgeous. The sky resembled pink ice cream with vanilla swirls, and night clouds were beginning to glow.

Wieneke watched the beagle's ears flap in the wind and climbed into the rubber boat together with Beach Boy. However, instead of sailing along the coast the Riva boat headed out into the ocean. A sudden change in plans, Beach Boy Schmidt was saying. Maybe he wants to show you the Blue Star first.

Wieneke nodded his head enthusiastically, almost animatedly. Of course Jützenbach wanted to present his toy to him first. Wieneke smelled the iodine in the area and felt the humidity of the night spread out over his arms.

The last time he'd seen stars in a night sky like this was when he was a small boy. Planets, asteroids, whole galaxies, everything seemed so close that you felt like you could reach for it.

Strange how one never tired of the stars. Every time you saw them was like seeing them for the first time. He tried to remember constellations he knew, like the Southern Cross and the Flying Fish, when he heard Schmidt whoop. There she is, there she is, he shouted as excitedly as if he had witnessed a meteorite exploding, pointing to something in the distance, which Wieneke first thought was the Big Dipper but it turned out to be the mast of the Blue Star.

Wieneke was told to remove his shoes before getting into the boat. Sailing was something for foot fetishists, he decided. He stuffed his socks into his shoes and noticed that the crew was cleaning their feet with a little hand shower before they got into the boat.

Jützenbach was standing on deck holding a glass of whiskey. The girl was draped among the silk pillows alongside the beagle, while stewards were scurrying around. A tall, slender blond handed Wieneke a drink and introduced herself as Schmidt's wife, taking Wieneke by surprise. Well, on the other hand there were millions of gay people who were married. The blond had the figure

of a model and turned out to be a librarian from Berlin who accompanied her husband on the Blue Star for a few days during her vacation. A pale kid appeared, probably a trainee that they kept under deck. He approached Jützenbach and was about to hand him a slip of paper, but Jützenbach shooed him away like a pesky fly and started ranting about how the Blue Star was going to be sailing to the other end of the earth during winter, to Uruguay. It would take three weeks to cross the Atlantic.

Humanity's last great adventure.

Sure, Wieneke replied, and nodded his head knowingly, as if he'd sailed around Cape Horn just last week. Man against the elements.

The boat rocked like a cradle, the ice cubes clinked in the whiskey glasses while Wieneke noted the color of the silk pillows were draped around the girl who was beginning to resemble a corpse. He noted the size of the beagle, the frosted hair of the skipper, whiskey being served as a welcome drink. Jützenbach was lecturing everyone about God and the world, about the Aegean Islands from where one sailed to Sardinia where the Blue Star was going to anchor. In Mortorotondo.

Wieneke drew a little question mark after Mortorotondo. Question marks always meant that he'd google it afterwards.

Jützenbach's villa on Sardinia was up for sale ever since the Aga Khan had sold his hotel to the Arabs and so many Russians spent their summers there.

Wieneke, who lived in a modest two room apartment in Hamburg,

nodded his head vigorously again, trying to appear as sympathetic as possible. He was determined to outdo that interview with Jützenbach in *Bild*. There had to be at least one quote for the agencies in there, whether this was a courtesy interview or not: This was about news, too.

He decided that he'd try to scratch Jützenbach's image. He simply had to live up to his reputation.

Antonio Romano always changed his outfits in the restroom of a local express train, the most inconspicuous way of entering a place as a male and exiting as a female. The lighting was dim as he applied make-up in the train restroom, and the train lurched, which was why he was having a hard time applying the false eye lashes. Carefully he used a brush to draw the contours of his lips, pulled on the wig with the red highlights, put on a corsette and stockings. He had everything he needed to transform himself into a perfect woman. A short skirt with a place to hide his penis, silicon breasts – naturally the breasts sagged slightly, stockings, a white blouse, a tight leather jacket. He also took the time to apply nail polish, which wasn't easy in a train. He stored these utensils in a black, padded suit-case that he hid in his garage at home and at the baggage counter at the Stazione Termini in Rome. When he crossed the train station he noticed a few business men staring at him approvingly, so he took tiny little steps like a geisha. He had visited the Vatican museums and the Villa Borghese en femme. Today he would have a cup of tea at the Cafè Greco and was pleased when the waiters addressed him as Signora. Later that afternoon he visited a department store to check out designer clothes. He tried on a few black dresses and finally decided on a tight black pencil skirt and a thin yellow

blouse. Yellow was a bit risqué but why not be daring? He made sure not to use his credit card when he went to pay.

When he boarded the last plane to Palermo that evening he was as relaxed as after a day at a spa.

He perused the newest edition of Espresso, which he bought because it contained an article about Alessio Lombardo entitled "The Untraceable."

It said that Lombardo was a kind of master spy, the pop star among fugitive bosses. There was a small box with an interview with Di Salvo. And Paolo De Luca was quoted, too. That guy irked him. The investigations on Lombardo had not been completed yet and so it was stupid to alert people. But everyone knew that Neapolitans were gossips. He couldn't understand what Vitale thought was so great about that guy. She laughed at his jokes. She probably went to bed with him. Why else would she laugh about every single one of his stupid Neapolitan jokes?

All in all there was nothing new in this Espresso-article. The stupid fable of the untouchable, the invisible – "Assoluto" as Mafiosi referred to Lombardo. The star portrait of a boss with his own fan pages on Facebook – including a lot of policemen. Of course that wasn't mentioned here, well, yes, that is how the media worked. They grabbed information as fast as they could without saying thank you and pretended like it had been meticulously researched.

He had a good look at the phantom photos of Lombardo with a double chin. Romano was hoping that he'd had

it surgically removed.

He actually liked Lombardo. He wasn't a boss who hid in a cow stable somewhere between Partanna and Montevago. Instead he seduced beautiful women in luxury hotels, a Rolex on his wrist and a glass of champagne in his hand – judging its perlage. Lombardo was the most intelligent Mafia boss, not as bourgeois as his predecessors whose hideaways contained bible pictures, pictures of saints and recordings of The Smurfs. That was about as humiliating as it got. Here you had been sitting close to a boss for years and when you arrested him you discovered that he had been listening to the Smurfs?

He expected more from Lombardo. Penthouses with a view of the Colosseum, the Eifel Tower or the Brandenburg Gate. With pools and flat screen television sets the size of ping pong tables in each one of the seventeen bedrooms. No bible, Slaughterhouse Five. No Olivetti typewriters, Notebooks.

Basically he even shared Lombardo's political convictions.

*My skepticism is directed against the political elite. I don't see men. I only see wimps. They all writhe like grass in the wind. And the worst one is at the top. A vulgar hot-air merchant. I say that fully aware of the circumstances, Lombardo had written in a pizzino.* How could you disagree with that?

Lombardo had also been the one who had liberated the Cosa Nostra: Drug dealing was in the hands of the Calabrese, big government-commissioned jobs were a thing of the past, cement

wasn't in demand and racketeering was a tiresome enterprise, only providing the money to pay the bills of the families. Lombardo had been the first one to realize what potential the green economy had for the Cosa Nostra: This is where public funding disappeared nowadays, and the penalties were light. You didn't have to mess around with murder anymore, and also not with the complicated logistics that drug dealing entailed. All you had to do was cash in on the money. Minimal risk and maximum profit. Green economy, that not only meant wind and sun but also cement. Tons of it, the foundations of the windmills. It meant electronic cabs, landlines, streets that had to be built. A huge business - controlled by Lombardo. First in Sicily and then all over the world. The best kind of cooperation with Northern Italian, German and Swedish companies. Rarely had joint ventures between businesses, Mafiosi and politicians worked better.

Romano continued to read Espresso, noticed pictures of trucks with tailboards that read: »If you don't love Alessio you don't love Sicily" accompanied by pictures of the banner reading "Alessio per sempre" that had recently been unfurled in La Favorita's south curve during the Palermo against Juventus Turin soccer game.

He stuffed the newspaper into the seat pocket in front of him. Okay, Lombardo was on the wrong side but at least it was satisfying to note that the chase wasn't skeet shooting but rather big-game hunting.



It was almost daylight when Serena Vitale finally arrived at the Borgo and was standing in front of Cataldo's butcher shop. The soft rosé sky formed an arch over the houses. Swallows were chirping, seagulls squealing and ripping garbage bags to shreds to distribute their contents over the pavement and street. There was signal tape everywhere, even across the garbage containers. The police car was parked in front of the butcher shop, two policemen fast asleep. Their faces were sweaty, smooth and pale; they looked like children. Serena knocked against the window. Would you mind if I had a look around?

The men woke up with a jolt. And jumped out of the car. Don't mind me, gentlemen, Serena said and slipped under the signal tape. The two Carabinieri ran after her, trying to button their uniform jackets while running.

She walked into the small apartment behind the sales room. Two rooms and a bathroom.

All closet doors had been opened, there were piles of clothing, sheets, table cloths, styropor boxes, paper stacks, butcher knives and notebooks that Cataldo had obviously been using for his accounting. The floor was cluttered with drawers that had been turned upside down. There was a crunching noise as Serena stepped glass shards. A container for holy water had been smashed. Even the upholstery had been ripped from the sofa and

slit open. Apparently forensics had been a real success. Dottor Di Salvo approved the operation, one of the baby Carabinieri was saying apologetically.

Yes, I can tell.

She waited for Romano. Not only because she didn't trust the Carabinieri of the Direzione investigativa antimafia – that, too – but because their criminal investigation unit, with the appropriate name Tempesta was envied by every single anti-mafia investigator between northern Italy and southern Sicily. People never missed the opportunity to harass them. Lombardo was the biggest fish in the pond: Not a minor or subordinate boss of one of the innumerable Camorra clans who were constantly killing each other; not an overweight Calabrian 'Ndranghetista who had to share his power with twenty-seven other families who had been hating and killing each other for centuries, but “the most charismatic person at the head of the only hierarchically organized mafia organization: Cosa Nostra,” as the Italian chief investigator had stated recently. A star. You couldn't conceive a better PR campaign for Lombardo. Every Carabiniere wearing headphones, every policeman listening to wiretappings was dying to hear words that would lead him to Lombardo and turn him into a celebrity. And just as many were trying to prevent Lombardo from being arrested. Basically she only trusted Romano. Him and the guys in Tempesta, his special unit.

When Romano was standing in front of her a bit later, with his

wide muscular shoulders and dimpled chin she thought to herself:  
Okay, his hair isn't as thick as it used to be but compared to  
the rest of what is on the market: A handsome man.

The Carabinieri nodded their heads officiously.

Serena headed into Cataldo's apartment and picked up  
one of the notebooks. Cataldo had recorded how much protection  
money he had blackmailed from whom.

If the colleagues from forensics over-looked even more ...

I'll be in touch, Romano replied.

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# Press Release

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**“For every scene in her book Petra Reski she can come up with three even more outrageous real-life examples.” *Die Zeit***

Mafia boss Alessio Lombardo has been on the lam for decades. The investigations spring to life when Serena Vitale is appointed to the case. Petra Reski provides a powerful and chillingly realistic depiction of the mob and corrupt politicians who have infiltrated governments and secret services throughout Europe.

While Serena Vitale is chasing the fugitive Mafia boss, one of her hottest leads brings her to Germany: There she not only stumbles across Lombardo’s accomplices and a glamorous mistress of his but also her own father’s story. Her father came to Dortmund as a *gastarbeiter*, and Serena Vitale knows so little about him she isn’t even aware of his affiliations. But Lombardo doesn’t surface and a jailed Mafioso commits suicide by hanging himself in his cell. When Serena Vitale tries to shed light on the circumstances she suddenly finds herself in great danger ...

**Petra Reski** was born in Dortmund, Germany and lives in Venice. She’s been writing about Italy since 1989 – for *Die Zeit*, *Geo*, *Merian*, *Focus* and *Brigitte* – usually about the Mafia phenomenon. She was involved in the making of a movie about women in the Mafia and has received awards for her reports and books; the last one in Germany was “Reporter of the Year.” In Italy, where she is renowned for her dedication to fighting the Mafia, she received the Premio Civitas and the Amalfi Coast Media awards

Petra Reski has published several novels and non-fiction books, most recently by Hoffmann und Campe *Von Kamen nach Corleone*. *Die Mafia in Deutschland* (2010) [From Kamen to Corleone, The Mafia in Germany] and *Palermo Connection* (2014).



Petra Reski

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