ANDREA CAMILLERI

ANGELICA'S SMILE

Translated by Stephen Sartarelli

MANTLE

ONE

He awoke with a start and sat up in bed, eyes already open. He was sure he'd heard someone talking in his bedroom. And since he was alone in the house, he was alarmed.

Then he started laughing, having remembered that Livia had arrived unannounced at his place that evening. The surprise visit had pleased him immensely, at least at first. And there she was now, sleeping soundly beside him.

A still-violet shaft of the dawn's very earliest light shone through the shutter. He let his eyelids droop without bothering to look at the clock, in hopes of getting a few more hours of sleep.

But then his eyes suddenly popped open again. Something had just occurred to him.

If someone had spoken in his bedroom, it could only have been Livia. She had therefore been talking in her sleep. But this had never happened before. Or perhaps it

wasn't the first time. But if she had in fact talked in her sleep before, she'd done it so quietly that it hadn't woken him.

And it was possible she was, at that moment, still in the same dream state and might say a few more words.

So this was an opportunity not to be missed.

People who suddenly start talking in their sleep can't help but say true things, the truths that they have inside them. He remembered reading that it was impossible to tell lies or stretch the truth in a dream state, because one is defenceless when asleep, as helpless and innocent as a baby.

It was very important not to miss anything Livia said. Important for two reasons. The first was general in nature, being that a man can live a hundred years at a woman's side, sleep with her, have children with her, breathe the same air as her, and think he knows her as well as humanly possible, and still, in the end, feel as though he never really knows what she is like deep inside.

The other reason was more specific and immediate.

He carefully got out of bed and went and looked through the slats of the shutter. It promised to be a lovely day, without clouds or wind.

Then he went over to Livia's side of the bed, pulled up a chair, and sat down at the head, as in an all-night vigil at the hospital.

The previous evening – and this was the more specific

reason – Livia had made a huge fuss in a fit of jealousy, ruining the pleasure of her surprise visit.

Things had gone as follows.

The telephone had rung and she went to answer.

But as soon as she said hello, a woman's voice at the other end said: 'Oh, I'm sorry, I must have the wrong number.' And promptly hung up.

And so Livia got it in her head that the caller was a woman he was having an affair with, that they'd arranged to meet that evening, and that when she'd heard Livia's voice she'd hung up.

'I guess I rained on your parade, eh? . . . When the cat's away, the mice will play! . . . Out of sight, out of mind! . . .'

There was no making her see reason, and things ended terribly because Montalbano had reacted badly, disgusted not so much by Livia's suspicions as by the endless barrage of clichés she fired at him.

So now Montalbano was hoping that Livia would say something stupid in her sleep, anything that might give him ammunition for a proper revenge.

He suddenly had a great desire to smoke a cigarette, but restrained himself – first, because if Livia woke up and found him smoking in the bedroom, a revolution might break out, and second, because the smoke itself might wake her up.

About two hours later, he got a cramp in his left calf.

To make it go away, he started swinging his leg back and forth and, as a result, ended up giving the wooden bedframe a violent kick with his bare foot.

It hurt like hell, but he managed to hold back the avalanche of curses that threatened to burst out.

The kick had an effect, however, because Livia sighed, moved a little, and then spoke.

Giving first a little laugh, in a full voice with no trace of hoarseness, she said distinctly:

'No, Carlo, not from behind.'

Montalbano nearly fell out of his chair. This was a bit too much of a good thing, for Christ's sake!

A couple of muttered words would have sufficed, just enough for him to build a castle of baseless accusations, Jesuit-like.

But Livia had uttered a whole sentence, loud and clear! Fuck!

As if she had been wide awake.

And it was a sentence that suggested just about everything, even the worst.

She had never said a word to him about any Carlo. Why not?

If she'd never mentioned him, there must be a reason. And what exactly was it she didn't want Carlo to do to her from behind?

Did that mean: from in front, OK, but not from behind?

He broke into a cold sweat.

He was tempted to wake Livia up, shake her roughly and, glaring wild-eyed, ask her in an imperious, cop-like voice: 'Who is Carlo? Is he your lover?'

But she was a woman, after all.

And therefore likely to deny everything, even when groggy with sleep. No, that would be a wrong move.

It was best to summon the strength to wait a while and try to broach the subject at the right moment.

But when was the right moment?

Anyway, he would need to have a certain amount of time at his disposal, since it would be a mistake to bring the question up directly. Livia would immediately go on the defensive. No, he needed to take a roundabout approach, without arousing any suspicion.

He decided to go and have a shower.

Going back to bed was out of the question now.

*

He was drinking his first coffee of the morning when the telephone rang.

It was eight o'clock. He wasn't in the mood to hear about any little murders. If anything, he might kill somebody himself instead, given half a chance.

Preferably someone by the name of Carlo.

He'd guessed right. It was Catarella.

'Ahh, Chief, Chief! Wha'z ya doin', sleepin'?'

'No, Cat, I was awake. What's up?'

'Wha'ss up is 'ere's a buggery tha'ss up.'

Montalbano hesitated. Then it dawned on him.

'A burglary, you mean? So why are you bothering *me*, then?'

'Chief, beckin' yer partin', bu—'

'But nothing! No beckons or partings! Phone Inspector Augello at once!'

Catarella was about to start crying.

''Ass jess what I wannit a say t'yiz, ya gotta 'scuse me, Chief. I wannit a say 'at Isspecter Augello was let go whereas of diss mornin'.'

Montalbano was stumped. You couldn't even sack your housekeeper these days!

'Let go? Who by?'

'Bu', Chief, i's youse yisself 'at let 'im go yisterday aftanoon!'

Montalbano remembered.

'Cat, he took a leave of absence, he wasn't let go!'

'Bu' ya gotta let 'im go f'r 'im to be assbent!'

'Listen, was Fazio let go too?'

''Ass also what I wannit a tell yiz. Dis mornin' 'ere's some trouble atta market an' so the afficer in quession izzatta scene o' the crime.'

It was hopeless. He would have to look into it himself. 'All right, is the aggrieved party there?'

Catarella paused for a moment before speaking. ''Ere meanin' where, Chief?'

'There, at the station, where else?'

'Chief, how's I asposta know 'oo this man is?'

'Is he there or isn't he?'

''Oo?'

'The aggrieved party.'

Catarella remained silent.

'Hello?'

Catarella didn't answer.

Montalbano thought the line had gone dead.

And he fell prey to that tremendous, cosmic, irrational fear that came over him whenever a phone call was cut off, as if he was the last person left alive in the universe.

He started shouting like a madman. 'Hello! Hello!'

'I'm right 'ere, Chief.'

'Why don't you answer?'

'Chief, promiss ya won' get upset if I tell yiz I dunno wha'ss a grieve party?'

Calm and patient, Montalbà, calm and patient. 'That'd be the person who got robbed, Cat.'

'Oh, that person! Bu' iss no party f'r 'im, Chief!'

'What's his name, Cat?'

''Is name's Piritone.'

Which in Sicilian means *big fart*. Was it possible?

'Are you sure that's his name?'

'Swear to God, Chief. Carlo Piritone.'

Montalbano felt like screaming. Two Carlos the same morning was too much to bear.

'Is Mr Piritone at the station?'

'Nah, Chief, 'e jess called. 'E lives a' Via Cavurro, nummer toitteen.'

'Ring him and tell him I'm on my way.'

Livia hadn't been woken up by either the phone or his yelling. In her sleep she had a faint smile on her lips.

Maybe she was still dreaming about Carlo. The bitch. He felt overwhelmed by uncontrollable rage. Grabbing a chair, he lifted it up and slammed it down on the floor.

Livia woke up suddenly, frightened. 'What was that?'

'Nothing, I'm sorry. I have to go out. I'll be back for lunch. *Ciao*.'

He ran out to avoid starting a fight.

*

Via Cavour was in the part of Vigàta where the rich people lived.

It had been designed by an architect who deserved a life sentence at the very least. One house looked like a Spanish galleon from the time of the pirates, while the one beside it was clearly inspired by the Pantheon in Rome . . .

Montalbano pulled up in front of number 13, which looked like the Pyramid of Menkaure, got out of the car, and went into the building. On the left was a little booth of wood and glass with the porter in it.

'Can you tell me what floor Mr Piritone lives on?'

The porter, a tall, burly man of about fifty who clearly spent a lot of time at the gym, put down the newspaper he was reading, took off his glasses, stood up, opened the door of the booth, and came out.

'No need to bother,' said Montalbano, 'all I need is—'

'All you need is for someone to smash your face in,' said the porter, raising a clenched fist.

Montalbano cringed and took a step back. What was his problem?

'Wait, listen, there must be some kind of misunderstanding. I'm looking for a Mr Piritone and I am—'

'You'd better make yourself scarce, and fast – I mean it.'

Montalbano lost patience. 'I'm Inspector Montalbano, damn it!'

The man looked surprised. 'Really?'

'Would you like to see my ID?'

The porter turned red in the face.

'Christ, it's true! Now I rec'nize ya! I'm sorry, I thought you were somebody tryin' t' fuck wit' me. I apologize, sir. But look, there's nobody here named Piritone.'

Naturally, Catarella, as usual, had given him the wrong name.

'Is there anyone with a similar name?'

'There's a Dr Peritore.'

'That could be him. What floor?'

'Second.'

The porter walked him to the lift, endlessly excusing himself and bowing.

It occurred to Montalbano that one of these days Catarella, by screwing up every name he gave him, was going to get him shot by someone who was a little on edge.

*

The slender, blond, well-dressed, bespectacled man of about forty who opened the door for the inspector was not as obnoxious as the inspector had hoped.

'Good morning, I'm Montalbano.'

'Please come in, Inspector, just follow me. I was forewarned of your visit. Naturally the apartment is a mess; my wife and I didn't want to touch anything before you saw it.'

'You're right, I should have a look around.' Bedroom, dining room, guest room, living room, study, kitchen, and two bathrooms, all turned upside down.

Wardrobes and cabinets thrown open, contents scattered all over the floor, a bookcase completely emptied and the books strewn everywhere, desks and consoles with all their drawers open.

Policemen and burglars had one thing in common when searching somebody's home: an earthquake left things in better order.

In the kitchen was a young woman of about thirty, also blonde, pretty and polite.

'This is my wife, Caterina.'

'Would you like a coffee?' the woman asked.

'Sure, why not?' said the inspector.

After all, the kitchen was less topsy-turvy than any of the other rooms.

'Maybe it's best if we talk in here,' said Montalbano, sitting down in a chair.

Peritore did the same.

'The front door didn't look forced to me,' the inspector continued. 'Did they come in through the windows?'

'No, they just used our keys,' said Peritore.

He stuck a hand in his pocket, took out a set of keys, and put them on the table.

'They left them in the entrance hall.'

'I'm sorry. So you weren't home when the burglary occurred?'

'No. Last night we slept at our seaside house, at Punta Piccola.'

'Ah. And how did you get in if the burglars had your keys?'

'I always keep an extra set with the porter.'

'I'm sorry, I don't quite understand. So where did the burglars get the keys they used to enter your apartment?'

'From our seaside house.'

'While you were asleep?'

'Exactly.'

'And they didn't steal anything from that house?'

'They certainly did.'

'So in fact there were two burglaries?'

'That's right.'

'I beg your pardon, Inspector,' said Signora Caterina, pouring his coffee. 'Maybe it's better if I tell you. My husband is having trouble putting his thoughts in order. So. This morning we woke up around six, both of us with headaches. And we immediately realized that someone had broken in through the front door of our seaside home, knocked us out with some sort of gas, and had the run of the place.'

'You didn't hear anything?'

'Nothing at all.'

'Strange. Because, you see, they had to break through your front door before they could gas you. You just said so yourself. And so, you should have heard . . .'

'Well, we were . . .' The woman blushed.

'You were?'

'Let's say we were a bit tipsy. We were celebrating our fifth wedding anniversary.'

'I see.'

'I don't think we would even have heard a cannon go off.'

'Go on.'

'The burglars apparently found my husband's wallet in

his jacket, along with his ID card and our address – this one, I mean – as well as the keys to this place and to the car. So they quietly got into our car, came here, opened the door, stole what they wanted to steal, and went on their way.'

'What did they take?'

'Well, aside from the car, not very much from the seaside house, relatively speaking. Our wedding rings, my husband's Rolex, my diamond watch, a rather expensive necklace of mine, two thousand euros in cash, both of our computers, mobile phones, and our credit cards, which we immediately had cancelled.'

Not very much? If you say so.

'And a seascape by Carrà,' the lady concluded, cool as a cucumber.

Montalbano gave a start.

'A seascape by Carrà? And you had it out there, just like that?'

'Well, we were hoping no one would know how much it was worth.'

Whereas the burglars certainly did know how much it was worth.

'And what about here?'

'Here they made off with a lot more. For starters, my jewellery box with everything inside.'

'Valuable stuff?'

'About a million and a half euros.'

'What else?'

'My husband's four other Rolexes. He collects them.'

'And that's it?'

'Fifty thousand euros in cash. And . . .'

'And?'

'A Guttuso, a Morandi, a Donghi, a Mafai, and a Pirandello that my husband's father left to him in his will,' the woman said in a single breath.

In short, a whole gallery of art worth a fortune.

'One question,' said the inspector. 'Who knew that you were going to your house at Punta Piccola to celebrate your wedding anniversary?'

Husband and wife looked at each other for a moment. 'Well, our friends did,' the woman replied.

'How many friends do you mean?'

'About fifteen.'

'Do you have a housekeeper?'

'Yes.'

'Did she know too?'

'No.'

'Are you insured against burglary?'

'No.'

'Listen,' said Montalbano, standing up. 'You have to come to the station immediately and file an official report. I would like a detailed description of the jewellery, the Rolexes, and the paintings.'

'All right.'

'I would also like a complete list of those friends of yours who were informed of your movements, with their addresses and telephone numbers.'

The woman gave a little laugh.

'You don't suspect them, I hope?'

Montalbano looked at her.

'Do you think they'll be offended?'

'Absolutely.'

'Then don't tell them anything. I'll be the first. See you later, at the station.'

TWO

The moment he walked into the station he noticed that Catarella looked pained and distressed.

'What's going on?'

'Nuttin', Chief.'

'You know you're supposed to tell me everything! Out with it! What happened?'

Catarella blew up.

'Chief, iss not my fault if Isspector Augello ghess let go! Iss not my fault if Fazio goes to da market! 'Oo's I asposta ax? 'Oo's I got left? Jess youse, Chief! An' ya treated me real bad!'

He was crying, and to keep Montalbano from seeing, he was turned three-quarters away as he spoke.

'I'm sorry, Cat, but this morning I was upset about something personal. You had nothing to do with it. I'm really sorry.'

The inspector had barely sat down at his desk when Fazio came in.

'Chief, sorry I wasn't available this morning, but there was a big row at the market . . .'

'Apparently this is the morning for excuses. Never mind, just sit down and let me tell you about this burglary.'

When Montalbano had finished, Fazio nodded several times.

'Strange,' he said.

'Well, it was certainly a perfectly planned burglary. We've never seen anything so well planned in Vigàta.'

Fazio was now shaking his head.

'I wasn't referring to the perfect planning, but to the perfect resemblance.'

'What do you mean?'

'Chief, just three days ago, there was another burglary just like this one, an exact duplicate.'

'Why wasn't I informed of this?'

'Because you told us you didn't want to be bothered with things like burglaries. Inspector Augello took care of it.'

'Tell me more.'

'Do you know a lawyer named Lojacono?'

'Emilio? A fat man, about fifty, with a limp?'

'That's him.'

'And so?'

'Every Saturday morning his wife goes to Ravanusa to visit her mother.'

'A fine example of daughterly devotion. What do I care if she visits her mother? What's that got to do with anything?'

'A lot. Just hang on a minute. Do you know a lady named Dr Vaccaro?'

'The pharmacist?'

'That's right. Her husband also goes to see his mother every Saturday morning, in Favara.'

Montalbano was starting to feel his nerves fraying. 'Would you please get to the point?'

'I'm getting to that. So anyway, both Lojacono the lawyer and Dr Vaccaro the pharmacist take advantage of the absence of their respective spouses and every Saturday spend a blissful night in Lojacono's country house.'

'How long have they been lovers?'

'For a little over a year.'

'And who knows about it?'

'Everyone in town.'

'We're off to a good start. So how'd it go?'

'The lawyer's a man known for being precise; he always does the same things, never varies. For instance, when he goes to his country house with his lover, he always leaves the keys on top of the television, which is only about three feet away from a window that is always left half open, night and day, winter and summer. Got that?'

'Got it.'

'The burglars stuck a wooden pole about ten feet long with a magnetic metal tip through the railing and through the window, attracted the keys with the magnet, and then took them.'

'How did you find out about the pole?'

'We found it at the scene.'

'Go on.'

'Then they opened the gate and front door with the keys and, without making any noise, went into the bedroom and gassed the lawyer and the lady pharmacist. They grabbed all the valuables they could find, then got into both cars, since the lady had come in her own, and drove here to Vigàta to ransack their homes.'

'So there were at least three burglars.'

'Why do you say that?'

'Because there had to have been a third man, the one driving the burglars' own car.'

'True.'

'Can you explain to me why none of the local TV stations ever mentioned this story?'

'Because we did a great job. We wanted to avoid a scandal.'

At that moment Catarella showed up.

'Beckin' yer partin', Chief, but Misser an' Missis Piritone juss come onna premisses juss now.'

Montalbano gave Catarella a dirty look but decided not to say anything. He might start crying again.

'Is that really their name?' Fazio asked in disbelief.

'Of course not! Their name's Peritore. Listen, take them into your office, get their report and the list they've drawn up, and then come back here.'

*

After spending the next half-hour signing papers, which were piling up on his desk out of control, the telephone rang.

'Chief, 'at'd be yer lady frenn.'

'Is she here?'

'Nossir, she's onna line.'

'Tell her I'm not here.'

Catarella must have balked.

'Chief, beckin' yer partin' an' all, bu' mebbe ya din't unnastand 'oo's onna line. The foresaid caller in quession is yer lady frenn Livia, I dunno if 'at wuz clear t'yiz.'

'I got that, Cat. I'm not here.'

'Whate'er y' say, Chief.'

And immediately Montalbano regretted it. What kind of nonsense was this, anyway? He was acting like a little boy who'd quarrelled with a little girl in the playground. How was he going to fix it? He had an idea.

He got up and went to Catarella's station. 'Let me use your mobile phone for a second.'

Catarella handed it to him, and Montalbano headed to the car park, got into his car, started it up, and drove off. When he was in the middle of traffic, he called Livia.

'Hello, Livia? Salvo here. Catarella told me . . . I'm in the car, so make it quick.'

'Well, hats off to your Adelina!' Livia began.

'Why, what did she do?'

'First of all, she suddenly appeared before me when I was naked! She didn't even knock!'

'Wait a second, why should she have knocked? She didn't know you were there, and since she has a set of keys . . .'

'You always defend her! And do you know what she said the moment she saw me?'

'No.'

'She said – or at least this is what it sounded like she said, since she speaks that African dialect of yours (Livia loved to be rude about his native Sicilian tongue): "Oh, you're here? Then I'm leaving. Goodbye." And she turned on her heel and left!'

Montalbano decided to let the business of the 'African dialect' slide.

'Livia, you know perfectly well that Adelina has trouble with you. It's an old story. Is it possible that every time—'

'It certainly is possible! And I have trouble with her too!'

'Then can't you see she was right to leave?'

'Let's just drop it, OK? I'm going to take the bus into Vigàta.'

'What for?'

'To go shopping. Do you want lunch or not?'

'Of course I want lunch! But why do you want to go to all the trouble? You came here to have a couple of days off, no?'

What a stinking hypocrite. The truth of the matter was that Livia didn't know how to cook, and every time he ate something she'd made, he felt poisoned.

'So what should we do?'

'I'll come by with the car around one and we'll go to Enzo's. And in the meantime enjoy the sunshine.'

'I've got all the sun I need at home in Boccadasse.'

'I don't doubt that for a minute. But I've got a possible solution. Here you could take the sunlight from the front, on your face and tummy, let's say, and in Boccadasse you could take it from behind, on your back, that is.'

It had slipped out. He bit his tongue.

'What's this nonsense?' asked Livia.

'Nothing. Sorry, I was just trying to be funny. See you later.'

He went back to his office.

*

Fazio returned after about an hour.

'All taken care of. It took a while. I must say the burglars certainly did well on this one!'

'And the one before?'

'There were fewer valuables there, but totalling up the things they found in both houses, I'd say things went pretty well there, too.'

'They must have a coordinator who knows what he's doing.'

'The brains of the gang isn't too bad, either.'

'I'm sure we'll be hearing from them again. Did you get the list of their friends?'

'Yes.'

'This afternoon I want you to start checking them out, one by one.'

'All right. Oh, and I made a copy for you.' He laid a sheet of paper down on the desk.

'A copy of what?'

'The list of the Peritores' friends.'

*

After Fazio left, the inspector decided to ring Adelina.

'Why dinna you tella me 'atta you girlfrenn was acomin?' the housekeeper attacked him.

'Because I didn't know she was coming, either. It was a surprise.'

'Well, she mekka me a bigga sahprize too! Alla nekkid like a she was!'

'Listen, Adelì . . .'

'An' whenna she gonna go?'

'Probably in two or three days. Don't worry, I'll let you know. Listen, is your son free?'

'Which one?'

'Pasquale.'

Adelina's two sons, Giuseppe and Pasquale, were two incorrigible delinquents forever in and out of prison.

Pasquale, who Montalbano had even arrested a few times, was particularly fond of the inspector and had asked him, to Livia's great shock and dismay, to be his son's godfather and baptize him.

'Yeh, fadda moment 'e's free. Bu' no' Giuseppe. 'E's in jail in Palermo.'

'Could you ask Pasquale if he could come down to the station this afternoon, say around four?'

'Wha' fah? You wanna 'rrest 'im?' Adelina was alarmed.

'Don't worry, Adelì. You have my word of honour. I just want to talk to him.'

'OK, whativva you say.'

*

He went home to pick up Livia, who he found on the veranda, reading a book, surly and silent.

'Where do you want to go?'

'I dunno.'

'Shall we go to Enzo's?'

'I dunno.'

'How about Carlo's?'

There was no restaurant in the area by that name, but seeing the welcome Livia was giving him, he'd decided to go on the offensive.

And whatever happened, happened.

'I dunno,' Livia said for the third time, indifferent. She hadn't even blinked at the sound of that name.

'Well, I say we go to Enzo's and end the discussion.'

Livia kept reading her book for another five minutes, purely out of spite, leaving Montalbano standing beside her.

*

As they entered the trattoria, Enzo, the owner, came running up to Livia to pay his respects.

'What a lovely surprise! It's so good to see you again!'

'Thank you.'

'You're a sight for sore eyes! A true delight! Can you explain to me how it is that every time you honour me by coming here, you're always more beautiful than the last?'

Like a ray of sunshine, a sudden smile swept the clouds away from Livia's face.

But how was it that the Sicilian dialect was suddenly

no longer African and now quite comprehensible? Montalbano wondered.

'What would you like?' Enzo asked.

'I do feel a little hungry,' said Livia.

And if Enzo's compliments ended up whetting her appetite, just imagine the effect Carlo's compliments must have!

Montalbano's irritation doubled.

'I've got spaghetti in a sauce of sea urchin, fresh as can be, caught just this morning, a real treat,' said Enzo.

'Then let's go with the sea urchin,' Livia consented, batting her eyelashes like Minnie Mouse to Mickey.

'And what do you feel like?' Enzo asked the inspector.

I feel like taking this fork and gouging out both of my girlfriend's eyes, Montalbano thought to himself.

Instead he said: 'I'm not very hungry myself. Just bring me some antipasti.'

After wolfing her spaghetti, Livia smiled at her boyfriend and put her hand on top of his, caressing it.

'I apologize for last night.'

'For last night?' said Montalbano, as phony as a twelve-pound note, pretending not to remember anything.

'Yes, for last night. I really acted stupidly.'

Oh, no you don't! That shouldn't count! It wasn't fair!

Montalbano felt outmanoeuvred.

He made a gesture with his other hand that meant nothing and everything, then muttered something.

Livia took it to mean they had made peace.

When they left the trattoria, Livia said she wanted to go to Montelusa, where she hadn't set foot for a long time.

'Go ahead and take the car,' said Montalbano.

'What about you?'

'I don't need it.'

*

He had no need to take his customary digestive and meditative stroll along the jetty to the lighthouse because he'd hardly eaten anything.

The fact that Livia had put him in a situation in which he couldn't bring up Carlo had closed off his stomach.

But he went for the stroll anyway, in the hopes of working off his irritation.

When he sat down on the flat rock under the lighthouse, however, his eye fell on the great tower dominating the landscape.

It had been built by Carlo V.

How many Carlos were there in the world, anyway?

*

Seeing him walk in, Catarella started gesticulating wildly.

'Ahh, Chief! There'd be 'at son o' yer cleanin' lady waitin' f' yiz! Says ya summonsed 'im!'

'Send him to me.'

The inspector went into his office, sat down at his desk, and Pasquale appeared.

'How's the little boy?'

''E's beautiful and growing.'

'And your wife?'

'Good. An' Miss Livia?'

'Fine, thanks.'

The ritual over, Pasquale got down to business.

'My mama tol' me—'

'Right, I need to ask you something. Have a seat.'

Pasquale sat.

'What is it?'

'Have you by any chance heard anything about these recent burglaries that were pulled off with such skill?'

Pasquale put on a distracted air, then twisted up his mouth, as if to minimize what he was about to say.

'Yessir. I've heard a couple o' li'l things.'

'What kinds of "little things"?'

'Well, you know, the kinds of things people say . . . an' you just happen to hear . . . in passing . . .'

'And what did you just happen to hear in passing?'

'Inspector, if I tell you, iss gotta remain between us, OK?'

'Of course.'

'I heard that it wasn't none of our people.'

That is, it didn't involve any thieves from Vigàta. 'I'd worked that out myself.'

'These people are real artists.'

'Right. Foreigners?'

'No, sir.'

'Northerners?'

'No, sir.'

'Who, then?'

'Sicilians, just like me an' you.'

'From the province?'

'Yessir.'

He was going to have to force it out of him. Pasquale obviously didn't like discussing the subject.

Being friends was one thing, playing informer was another.

Anyway, with cops, the less said the better.

'And why, in your opinion, did they suddenly decide to come and work in Vigàta?'

Before answering, Pasquale stared at his toecaps, then looked up at the ceiling, then finally decided to open his mouth.

'They were called.'

Called? Pasquale had said it so softly that Montalbano didn't understand.

'Speak louder.'

'They were called.'

'Explain what you mean.'

Pasquale threw his hands up.

'Inspector, all I heard is they were called directly by

someone from here, from Vigàta. An' he's their coordinator.'

'So this gentleman is both their mastermind and manager?'

'It looks that way.'

It wasn't that unusual for a gang of thieves to go somewhere on assignment, but he'd never heard of a crew being specifically enlisted for a job.

'Is he a thief himself?'

'I don' think so.'

Alas. If he wasn't a professional thief, that complicated matters considerably.

Who could he be?

And why did he do it?