



THE DEVIL'S BANKER

*Based on the True Story of the
Vatican/Banco Ambrosiano Scandal*

By

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To Pavlina and Michelle...

***I**NSPECTOR PORTER FIRED OFF four rounds and three men went down. Two more came at him; he fired again and one man fell with a gaping hole in his arm, blood spattered on the wall behind him, as he lay writhing in agony.*

Porter aimed his gun at another man coming towards him, pulled the trigger, but the chamber was empty! Thinking quickly, he took hold of the scorching barrel and smashed the gun butt across the attacker's face, then took off running back down the darkened halls, searching desperately for an exit.

He knew he had taken on far more than he'd bargained for; a deadly nest of vipers more than ready to end his pitiful existence.

Gelli was furious and in an agitated state. He panicked as fire and smoke spread quickly throughout the antechamber. This was not acceptable, and Porter would pay the price for his act of defilement.

"Kill him!" Gelli screamed to his guards, shaking a clenched fist, "He must not leave here alive with the list!"

PROLOGUE

IN THE STILLNESS OF the night, a silver crescent moon hangs radiant over St. Peter's Basilica. A Priest at the altar, wearing regal golden robes with papal mitred headdress, slowly raises a golden, glimmering chalice over his head to the sombre, hauntingly beautiful sounds of Gregorian chanting, echoing throughout the cavernous vault. The aged Priest delivers his solemn prayer in Latin, "*In nomine Patris... et Filii* – In the Name of the Father... and of the Son..." – whilst on the Thames River in London, a well-dressed middle-aged man wearing a pricey pinstriped suit with grey fedora is led to a small abandoned pier at the river's edge. Two dark figures escort him to a river launch, docked by the pier. As they board, a third figure appears from the shadows, shrouded in a black cape, with hood concealing his face.

The caped figure speaks quietly, "Good you could make it. I think we can finally settle this matter..."

"I knew we could work something out," replies the man in the fedora.

Moving inside the boat, heading down to the cabin, one of the figures turns to the man next to him and nods, then removes a length of cord from his pocket, and discreetly conceals it behind his back. Descending the stairs into the cabin, he quickly slips the rope around the well-dressed man's neck...

In the Cathedral, the aged Priest in golden robes lowers the golden chalice, whilst the prayer and chanting continues, filling the breathtaking dome of Bernini's grand canopy.

"Ave Maria gratia plena, Dominus tecum. Hail Mary, full of grace, The Lord is with thee..."

... Not far away in an up-scale apartment in Rome, an attractive woman in her late forties climbs the steps of a dimly lit stairwell, carrying a bag of groceries. She puts her key in the lock, jiggling it until the door clicks open to the dark apartment. Once inside, she flicks on the light, heading into the kitchen, and sees her plump Tabby cat eating wet food from its bowl on the floor.

"I thought I'd fed you", she says to herself, absently; just as a shadow of a man slithers past the kitchen door, coming up behind her and... SWISH! quickly slipping a noose around her neck. Fighting for her life, she's squirming and kicking with all her might, no match for the assailant who drags her toward the open window, and pushes her violently to her death, three stories below.

The Priest continues his prayer, offering and holding aloft a Host from the chalice to a young boy, while the celestial chanting continues, "*Sancta Maria, Mater Dei, ora pro nobis peccatoribus...*"

...Outside a towering building in another part of Rome, a heavy-set man dressed in an overcoat and glasses comes down a flight of steps in the dark to a waiting taxi. He climbs in and it pulls away down the street. A short distance later the taxi stops and POP! POP! – the muffled shots of a gun are heard. The driver calmly exits the taxi, looks around, throws something in a trash bin, and walks away into a dark alley...

...The Priest in robes sets the golden chalice down, as the chanting reaches a feverish pitch, "*Ora pro nobis peccatoribus, nunc, et in hora mortis nostrae, Amen.* Now and at the hour of our death, Amen."

CHAPTER I

The Discovery

London - June 18, 1982

IT WAS A DAY like any other day. The leaves swirled aimlessly in chaotic, endless circles at his tired feet, a cool, fine mist blowing in from the sea.

Well into his monotonous daily morning rounds, weary, middle-aged postman, Martin Shaffer, went about his business, dropping letters into post boxes on his route along a steady row of posh brownstone flats fronting the perpetually flowing Thames at Blackfriars Bridge. The kind of affluent people who lived in such comfortable upscale flats normally didn't associate with commoners of his lowly stature, but he couldn't care less what they thought. He was a simple working stiff and what the jaded, idle rich did was of no consequence to him.

Glancing up at the ruddy grey sky and incessant drizzle, Martin thought he caught a glimpse of the sun peering through the clouds and, when it finally came out, it lifted his spirits, and the slick, wet, busy London streets were suddenly full of promise.

And before him, the celebrated bridge stood like a grand old lady; having been built in 1753, when it became evident in those emergent times that a new bridge was needed to access the capital, this was the third such structure built across the Thames, after London Bridge and Westminster Bridge.

As Martin drew nearer to the many curved, arched structure, after completing deliveries, he paused to take in a bit of warm morning sun. The sun was always welcome after rain, and it dried the dampness from his clothing and his well-worn shoes.

Laying his mail bag down on a park bench, he stopped for a cigarette. The first smoke of the day was good he thought, as he sat and gazed out at the free flowing river.

In his reverie, observing the swirling currents, the sound of something creaking suddenly caught his attention. He looked up and caught a shadow of something dangling under the bridge's arched girders.

Curious, he stubbed his cigarette and went to investigate. Peering up under the bridge, near the parapet, he noticed a length of orange nylon cord lashed to bars of scaffolding under the inner section fastened to the archway. Whatever the object was it was bulky, and partially hidden in darkness in the underbelly of the towering structure. He took a few more steps forward, rubbed the stubble on his chin, and tilted his head upwards under the girders. An uneasy feeling came over him when he finally saw it. To his astonishment, he'd discovered the lifeless body of a well-dressed man in a crumpled, but expensive looking, dark blue pin-striped suit; hanging by the neck; the man's shoes still on, his feet dangling in the water.

Martin's skin bristled and his blood ran cold. He stumbled back in horror, crossing himself, "Oh... my... God!" he gasped, staring up at the gruesome find.

CHAPTER II

The Inquiry

London - June 26, 1982

“**A**SK AND IT WILL be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened.” Matthew 7:7

What makes a policeman, and for that matter, what makes a man? It is the company he keeps and his environs that influence.

Inspector Serge Ryan Porter's father was a career veteran constable who ended up as a desk clerk after being wounded in the line of duty; though he appreciated his father, Serge would be damned if he would become a pencil-pusher as well. His mother, who was partly French-Russian, had died of leukaemia when he was seven, and there was no taking the easy route for him. After the pain and anguish he'd suffered as an only child, he wanted to be on the city's front line. Some say it was a subliminal death wish, but he didn't see it that way. London, he felt, was his city to serve and protect.

Porter savoured his leisurely days off from the force, and was fond of taking long walks and sightseeing, or sometimes taking in the theatre in the evening in Mayfair after shopping with his wife, Alana, at bustling Covent Gardens. The strolling street musicians, flower sellers, and the cozy, quaint pubs and restaurants, all had a way of making him feel at ease and at home.

London was an intriguing place with a vibrant, rich history, the oldest parts of it found in Westminster. The city had developed and flourished here, with its enduring boundaries dating back to the Middle-Ages. It was only a small section of the larger London vicinity, but alive and pulsating with activity.

Most Londoners referred to it as “The City” or the “Square Mile”, since it encompassed one square mile of land and included Britain's dynamic financial centres.

As a policeman, Porter was also aware of the City's share of vice and crime. The City of London Corporation governed the area, and it was his responsibility to enforce law and order, which in some cases included extrajudicial authority beyond London.

In Britain, police officers are commonly known as “constables”, irrespective of rank and, although police officers have wide ranging powers, they are still considered civilians, subject to the same laws as members of the public. The only restrictions being police were barred from taking part in industrial action or having involvement in active politics. Porter wasn't interested in politicians anyway. He found most of them boring and obnoxious tricksters, full of themselves, characterless with overblown egos.

Unlike police in other developed countries, the vast majority of British police officers are not allowed to carry firearms on patrol, but they do carry Extendable “Asp” or fixed Monadnock PR-24 batons and CS/PAVA pepper spray.

However, should the need arise, every force in the United Kingdom, apart from the British Transport Police, has firearms trained officers available. In times of necessity, these well-armed

police carry a variety of lethal weapons including German Heckler & Koch MP5 carbines, MSG901 Sniper rifles, Baton Guns (which fire baton rounds) and a number of other weapons such as Remington pump-action shotguns.

Inspector Porter casually walked down the flight of grey and white Naxos marble stairs at the Financial District's police headquarters, wearing a fashionable Tweed waistcoat and Cambridge tie. He cut a handsome, clean shaven figure, tall with bright blue eyes and dark Irish looks and was known to be a bit of a Dapper-Dan by his mates, favoring Armani and pricey, handmade Italian shoes.

Flanked by fellow officers, Kevin Cardigan and Tom Kelly in black cotton uniform with light-blue shirts, he descended the staircase, joking and conversing in camaraderie.

"You're looking particularly smart today, Serge," commented Tom, giving a sly wink to Kevin.

"That was a fine job on the Berkshire Ripper case, Porter," said Cardigan, patting his back.

Porter smiled and looked away, not one to succumb to praise or frivolous compliments; plus the last thing he wanted to do was to talk about the horrific Berkshire murder case.

"Heard you're on the Calvi file?" officer Kelly said. "Those Italian blokes play nasty, Serge. Hope you're up to it."

On an upper level a burst of gunfire echoed through the halls, screams and shouts following shortly after. Another officer called that an arrestee had escaped and was trying to flee with a gun.

Tom and Kevin broke away, and took off running up the stairs into the hall in search of the man.

Porter continued down and, as he reached the bottom of the stairs, he could hear shouting and a ruckus from the flights above. Then the desperate, frenzied, pock-marked face of a gangly man in his twenties appeared, scurrying above him on the mezzanine level. Frantically looking left and right, the escapee came running down the stairs heading for the open exit towards the street and freedom.

Porter calmly turned as the criminal ran past him, put out his foot and tripped him, and the man went flying head first, tumbling down the stairs with a resonant thud into the wall, and knocking himself unconscious.

Officers Cardigan and Kelly ran out of the hallway, and caught sight of the downed offender sprawled out at the bottom of the stairs. Tom looked down at Porter, smiling broadly, "You're a cool one... Hope it's that easy in Italy," he said.

Kelly straightened his tie then yanked the man up from the floor, handcuffing him.

"He'll need more than he thinks working on that case, a CPA course in high finance and international banking," quipped Kevin.

"And blessings from the Pope!" laughed Kelly.

Porter had heard enough, "Alright, gentlemen, cut the rubbish. Take this sorry sack of shit up to be booked."

Tom and Kevin grabbed the man by each arm and hustled him down the hall.

Porter continued down the corridor to an office door with a brass plaque reading: "H.M.S. COMMISSIONER DANIEL R. HARRIMAN".

Upon entering, he was ushered into another office by Mrs. Abbot, Harriman's ever efficient, matronly secretary. Whilst the Commissioner was on the phone, Porter glanced around the place. Its decor was sterile and starkly minimal, a large desk piled high with police files, a big padded swivel chair and numerous framed achievement awards hung on the walls. Porter had had his run-ins with Harriman in the past and never thought much of him, and, sometimes, wondered if he'd actually won the awards.

Commissioner Harriman, a big brute of a Scot in his fifties with a face wrinkled as a prune, finished his call and stood up from behind his great oak desk to greet Porter, with a firm handshake. Harriman looked like the kind of man who could have easily been a boxer had he not become a top cop. "I suppose you've heard the Italians want us to call the investigation off? They've already deemed it suicide."

"Suicide?"

"That's right," the Commissioner assured. "No one wants a political hot potato in their hands."

That kind of casual parlance was the reason Porter disliked the other man, and it got his back up. Politicians and police officials were always looking for a way to shun their responsibilities, especially if it involved thorny, cross-border crimes.

"What are you saying, sir? The man was murdered on our streets."

Harriman smiled, easing his concern. "We know that, Porter, that's why you're going to Rome; you know a little Italian, we want you to do some fact-finding. Make it look like a holiday, take the wife with you for cover."

Porter's wife, Alana, was an Italian-American, whose family hailed from northern Padua near Venice. She worked as a photographer in the fashion industry and travelled to Italy on occasion for photo shoots to cover the seasonal collections. After four years of marriage and numerous trips to Italy with her on assignments, he had made an effort to learn the language; enough to get by anyway.

Porter reached into his pocket and pulled out a scrap of notepaper and handed it to the Commissioner. "Calvi's shoes came back from the lab with no traces of paint from the bridge girders..."

The Commissioner nodded and pointed to an X-Ray on the light table. "Not to mention the third vertebra in the neck was broken."

"...Which is inconsistent with the Coroner's findings."

"Which means he didn't climb the bloody scaffolding and hang himself!" Harriman bellowed with a sneer.

"They found \$15,000 cash in three different currencies in his pockets. Does that sound like a man ready to commit suicide?"

"I know, I know..."

“So, what’s the plan?”

The Commissioner sighed, tossed the X-rays on the table and came out from behind his desk, shaking his big head. “I don’t give fuck-all what you do, just keep it quiet till we know the score from Home Office. Seems someone in Italy is trying to pull strings here to drop the inquiry.”

“Didn’t Calvi have something to do with The Vatican?”

“No proof, only a rumour... but The Vatican is an autonomous state with diplomatic immunity, so tread lightly.”

“Understood. This could get dicey. I also read something about him having underworld connections.”

“Exactly, so watch your back,” Harriman cautioned. “The toes you step on might be your own. We don’t want you to end up another casualty. Keep a low profile and find out what you can. Relay the information back, and we’ll take it from there.”

“Yes, sir. I’ve been doing some research on Calvi’s background” Porter said, as he pulled out more notes from his pocket.

“Anything of interest?”

“Could be. It says he was born, Roberto Calvi in Milano, 13 April, 1920. He was chairman of Banco Ambrosiano until a short time ago, right until after the collapse of the bank, which led to criminal investigations. In 1981 he was put on trial and given a four year sentence, and fined \$20 million for exporting \$27 million out of Italy illegally.”

“And they only fined the bugger?”

“Yes, and here’s the curious part. It says he was let out on bail pending appeal when he disappeared.”

“Calvi, huh?” the Commissioner grunted, “That’s not the name he used checking into the hotel in London. The passport we found in his room was in the name of Calvini.”

“Not much of an alias, wouldn’t you say?”

“Well, it’s a start. Gather all the background information on the crime scene from forensics and let’s get this sorted out.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Good luck, Porter, and for god’s sake keep your bleedin’ head down. We’re not looking for a star on this, or any publicity.”

Porter nodded, “Yes, sir,” and left.