

## The Family

by : Joseph Genovay

BANG! Francesco Marchesini woke with a start, his heart beating a mile a minute. His mind was racing, replaying the events from last night repeatedly, leaving him wondering how everything went so wrong, so fast. Sandro Donati had said it would be a simple job, one without the extreme violence and manipulation typically associated with his assignments. Though the promise of finally having a family initially drew Francesco in, he now wanted nothing more than to be out of the Mafia,

He started working with the Donati crime family soon after his eighteenth birthday, when he was aged out of the orphanage home in Little Italy, New York. He was brought there at the age of ten, when his mother Giulietta Ferretti lost her battle with breast cancer at thirty-four. She had been fighting with the vicious disease for three long years. Francesco's father, Antonio Marchesini, died of a drug overdose when Francesco was three. He had some extended family members that lived in Italy but wanted nothing to do with him, forcing him to take shelter at the local orphanage. When he was eventually released from the cold place that he had called home for the past eight years, he went looking for Sandro Donati and his family of thugs. Rumor was, Francesco's father used to work for Donati, some saying he was Sandro's right-hand man.

"Ahem." grunted the young detective who sat across from him. Francesco was so lost in thought he hadn't realized that he was in the interrogation room at the 5<sup>th</sup> precinct.

"Who are you?" Francesco asked, startled. Since joining the crime family, he was used to being in trouble and even knew many of the detective's names that worked out of the police station.

"My name is Detective Javier Morrow, and we have a lot to discuss." Detective Morrow said sternly. "Last night, you and your boss Sandro Donati wacked an innocent shop owner and his wife for not paying Donati's weekly protection fee. We caught you running away from the scene covered in blood and holding the murder weapon, a Colt 1911." Detective Morrow kept an uncomfortable amount of eye contact with Francesco before finally breaking his gaze and continuing. "Though you were caught with the murder weapon, I don't believe you killed that poor couple. In fact, there is evidence that someone tried to stop Mrs. Garner from bleeding out. I believe that person was you, Francesco. I think Donati killed the Garners, robbed them, and left you at the scene to take the fall." Detective Morrow was now staring intently at Francesco with his cold, brown eyes.

"Mrs. Garner is dead?" Francesco asked, saddened by the news. He would run into the Garners occasionally while walking around Little Italy. They were a nice couple and always treated him with respect. Mr. Garner was a frail, older man who knew oranges were Francesco's

favorite fruit and would sometimes give him some from their grocery store for free. Mrs. Garner, like her husband, was fragile and treated him like the grandson she never had. She would always take the time to talk to him, asking him how he was doing and discussing the latest New York Rangers game. The Rangers were Francesco's favorite hockey team and he dreamed of playing professional hockey one day.

The detective was correct about how last night's events went down. Sandro had killed the Garners after they refused to pay him, taking the money out of the register, and fleeing the scene before the police arrived. Normally Francesco would run as well but he couldn't, not last night. He refused to leave Mrs. Garner there all alone, slowly bleeding out next to her dead husband. Francesco tore off chunks of his blood-soaked suit to put over her wounds to slow her blood loss and keep her from bleeding out. He had never seen so much blood in his life. Huge tears flowed from his eyes, and he apologized profusely to Mrs. Garner, begging her to forgive him and praying she would not die. When he heard the police sirens around the block, Francesco decided to flee the scene, leaving an alive but unconscious Mrs. Garner behind. He was terrified of going to jail because of the many enemies the Donati family had made on both the inside and outside.

"Mrs. Garner died on the operating table," Detective Morrow said sadly. "As you know, she lost a lot of blood from the gunshot wound to her abdomen. You almost saved her, Francesco. If you had called an ambulance right after she was shot, she might have survived the ordeal."

Francesco felt his neck begin to feel burning hot. He wanted to save Mrs. Garner, he really did, but he couldn't call the police, not while Sandro was still inside the store. The family would consider him to be a snitch and would punish him the way they punished everyone who betrayed them, an ordeal that typically consisted of intense torture and a slow, painful death.

"Right now, I have enough evidence to charge you with murder," Morrow continued. "You were found running from the crime scene, in possession of the murder weapon, and covered in the victims' blood. However, instead of charging you, I want to make a deal. If you agree to wear a wire and get Sandro to admit to murder, I will grant you immunity for this crime."

"Are you serious?" Francesco bellowed in a sudden bout of rage. "Do you know what the family does to snitches? If I do what you are asking me to do, I will be a dead man walking."

"Francesco, we can protect you," Detective Morrow said calmly.

"You cannot protect me from the family, no one can. There is a reason the Donati crime family have been in power for so long, all the witnesses to their crimes end up in a body bag." Francesco cried hysterically.

“You have twenty-four hours to consider my proposal.” Detective Morrow said gruffly. “In the meantime, you will be staying in this interrogation room.” He took one last look at Francesco, shook his head, and then left.

Two hours later, detective Morrow barged into the interrogation room, waking Francesco up. He laid some photographs on the table in front of Francesco and said, “I’m so sorry to say this, but your friend was found dead, with a gunshot wound to the neck.”

Francesco felt the blood drain from his body as he studied the pictures. Sure enough, his friend of five years, Roman, was in them, brutally beaten and dead. He knew Sandro had done this, he must have known the police had him in custody and was trying to send a message to keep him from talking. Francesco looked at Detective Morrow and said, “I’ll wear the wire and do whatever you want me to do, as long as you promise to keep Sandro in jail for the rest of his life.”

Francesco exited the police van that contained Detective Morrow and his team and walked toward Sandro’s clubhouse. He was feeling extremely nervous and knew that this could be the last time he would step outside for good. His heart was beating rapidly, and he could feel the hairs on the back of his neck stand straight up.

As he walked into the clubhouse, Sandro stared at him with his cold, brown eyes and said something to his two bodyguards before putting on a fake smile and walking over to Francesco.

“Francesco! Where have you been, we have been looking all over for you,” Sandro said quizzically.

“I was keeping a low profile; the neighborhood was swarming with police.” Francesco replied testily.

“That’s strange Francesco. You were lying low with your phone turned off? What if the family needed you?” Sandro stated. His smile disappeared and was replaced with his usual scowl.

“I figured you would be lying low too, Sandro. Afterall, the police are surely looking for you as a prime suspect in last night’s murder,” Francesco said.

Sandro didn’t flinch and said through gritted teeth, “Some of my informants said the police picked you up last night. What did you tell them?”

“Your informants must have confused me with someone else. I was never in police custody, I left the scene right after you did, way before they came on the scene.” Francesco stated with confidence.

“Ah I see. Also, I’m sorry to hear about your friend Roman, he was a good guy.” Sandro said in an insincere tone.

Suddenly, Francesco felt a sharp pain in the back of his head and his vision blurred, causing his legs to buckle. Before he lost consciousness, he saw one of Sandro’s bodyguards drop a baseball bat near his body.

Francesco awoke with icy water being tossed in his face. As his eyes adjusted to his new surroundings, he realized where he was. Francesco was bound to a shaky, wooden chair in Sandro’s basement, also known as his torture chamber. The concrete under him was caked in dried blood from Sandro’s previous victims, illuminated by a dim bulb loosely hanging from the ceiling.

“I almost didn’t escape your police friends back at the clubhouse,” Sandro said with a smirk. “Good thing my bodyguards were there to distract them while I escaped with you.”

“Why did you kill Roman?” Francesco blurted out suddenly.

“I was afraid you were going to talk to the police, so I killed him to send you a message.” Sandro stated while shaking his head like a disappointed father.

“I was never going to talk to the police, Sandro, I thought you knew me better than that. When you killed Roman, my plans changed and talking to the police suddenly seemed so easy.” Francesco said defiantly.

“I know you would have talked eventually, Francesco. I’ve known for a while now that you wanted to get out of the family. Though I don’t understand why, I couldn’t let that happen. When you join the Donati family, you are a part of us until the day you die. Unfortunately for you, that day seems like today.” Sandro swiftly grabbed a wrench off the table near him and struck Francesco’s left knee, breaking it.

Francesco’s vision blurred yet again as he howled in pain. He knew Sandro’s assault wouldn’t end there and had to think of a plan to get out of this mess. As Francesco tried to block out the pain and think, Sandro arced his wrench in the air and drove it into the wooden chair legs beneath Francesco, splintering them in half and spilling him onto the hard concrete floor. Sandro laughed and returned the wrench to his table, proceeding to look for his next instrument to inflict pain. As Francesco remained on the floor, he noticed one of the splintered chair legs had an extremely sharp point and was within reach. He quickly rolled over on his back toward the object so that his bound hands could grasp the potential weapon. After obtaining the lethal object, Francesco slowly scooted into the back corner of the room, using the walls to try and help him stand on his one good leg.

Sandro selected brass knuckles off the table and turned toward Francesco, surprised to see him standing but oblivious to the weapon Francesco had obtained. As Sandro went to strike him in the stomach, Francesco dodged him and thrust the wooden chair leg deep into Sandro's side. The sudden movement had caused Francesco to put some weight on his injured knee, leading it to buckle underneath him. He looked over to see Sandro howling in pain on the floor, with the wooden weapon still sticking out of his side. Blood quickly pooled around Sandro's body and his breathing became shallower.

Francesco rolled over to another splintered chair leg and used it to break free of the duct tape that bound his hands together. He crawled towards Sandro's motionless body and felt his neck for a pulse. Sandro was barely alive. Francesco took a spare chair leg and ripped at Sandro's shirt, putting the fabric over the wound to try and slow the blood loss.

As Francesco sat there, trying to save the man who caused him so much pain, he heard sirens approaching his location in the distance. He decided this time, he wouldn't run and would face the consequences head on, whatever they may entail. Exhaustion settled in and as he closed his eyes, he dreamed of turning his life around and becoming the man his late mom would be proud to call hers. Maybe he would even have a family of his own one day.