

1

On a Saturday in early November, Guido Brunetti, reluctant to go outside, was at home, trying to decide which of his books to remove from the shelves in Paola's study. Years ago, some months before the birth of their daughter, he had renounced claim to what had been his study so that their second child could have her own bedroom. Paola had offered his books sanctuary on four shelves. At the time, Brunetti had suspected this would not suffice, and eventually it had not: the time had come for *The Cull*. He was faced with the decision of what to eliminate from the shelves. The first shelf held books he knew he would read again; the second, at eye level, held books he wanted to read for the first time; the third, books he'd not finished but believed he would; and the bottom shelf held books he had known, sometimes even as he was buying them, that he would never read.

He decided to begin with the books at the bottom. He knelt on one knee and studied the spines. Halfway along, he saw the familiar face of Proust, and the face of Proust, and the face of Proust. Slipping his hands into the space before the first book and after the last, he said aloud, 'Now,' and extracted them in one block. He

stood and carried them over to Paola's desk, tilted his hands, and set them down in a wobbly pile, then patted them into order. He stepped back and counted the faces of Proust: seven.

He went to the kitchen and returned with one of the paper bags the city distributed to hold paper for collection. He opened it and lowered the Prousts carefully inside, then returned to the shelf, carrying the bag. He set it beside him, knelt again, and glanced more carefully at the remaining books, making a series of visceral judgements, adding the books to the bag without bothering to give them the opportunity to plead for their lives from the temporary safety of Paola's desk. *Moby Dick*; *The Man of Feeling*; *I Promessi Sposi*, which he'd been forced to read as a student in *liceo* and had hated. It had survived this long because, until now, he'd lacked the courage to believe a 'classic' could be such a bore, but into the bag it went. He came to four volumes of D'Annunzio's plays and poetry and knew instantly that they were for the bag: was it because he was a bad writer or a bad person? To settle it, he opened one of the books of poetry at random and read the first line of the first poem his eye fell upon. *'Voglio un amore doloroso, lento ...'*

Brunetti's hand, still holding the book, fell to his side. 'You want a love that's painful and slow, do you?' he asked the deceased poet. 'How about fast and painless?' He bent and picked up the sixteen centimetres of D'Annunzio and tucked them in beside Manzoni. 'If ever a marriage was made in heaven,' he said, looking down into the bag, content with his decision. The used book-store at Campo Santa Maria Nova would gladly have them all.

Brunetti studied the empty spaces on the shelf, wondering how he could fill them. Before an answer came, his phone rang.

He started to give his name, but a voice he recognized as Vianello's spoke over his, asking, 'Guido, can you meet me at Piazzale Roma?'

'It's Saturday, Lorenzo,' he told his friend and colleague. 'And it's raining and it's cold.'

'And it's important,' Vianello added.

'Tell me.'

Pausing only long enough to give a heavy sigh, Vianello said, 'I had a call from Fazio.' It took Brunetti a moment to recognize the name, a sergeant on the Treviso force and someone with whom both he and Vianello had worked. 'Alvise's been arrested.'

'Alvise?' Brunetti asked, unable to disguise his astonishment. Then, to be sure, he repeated, voice lower but no less shocked, 'Alvise?'

'Yes.'

'Where?'

'There. Treviso.'

What in God's name, Brunetti wondered, would Alvise be doing in Treviso? Indeed, what would anyone be doing there, especially on a day like this?

'What was he doing there?'

'He was at the protest.'

Brunetti paused a moment and searched his memory for any protest threatened for that weekend. Not the train drivers, not the remaining No-Vax, not the workers at Marghera – who seemed in a perpetual state of protest – and not medical professionals, who had protested two weeks before.

'Which one?'

'Gay pride,' Vianello said with absolute dispassion.

'Gay pride?' Raising his voice, Brunetti repeated, 'Alvise? We don't have anything to do with patrolling Treviso,' he reminded the Ispettore.

'He wasn't on patrol.'

'Then what was he doing there?'

'That's why we're going to Treviso. To find out.'

'What happened?'

Over the line came the sound of a vaporetto changing into reverse to slow for a station stop. A voice – not Vianello’s – came over the line: ‘Ca’ Rezzonico.’

Brunetti was already walking towards the door, where he’d left his raincoat and umbrella that morning after coming home from having a coffee and picking up the newspapers.

Switching his phone to his left hand, he felt in the pocket of his raincoat for his house keys. ‘All right. I’ll meet you in front of the taxis,’ he said. Then, before Vianello could disappear, Brunetti asked, ‘What was he arrested for?’

‘Resisting arrest.’

Brunetti could find no words.

‘And violence to a public official,’ Vianello added.

Brunetti had no trouble making the translation from police vocabulary to reality. ‘Violence? Alvise?’

‘Fazio wasn’t sure what happened. He called me when they brought Alvise into the Questura. He asked me to come. And bring you,’ Vianello said.

‘All right. I’m leaving now.’ Brunetti broke the connection.

Despite the rain and cold, Brunetti chose to walk: the vaporetti would be overheated and crowded in weather like this. The thought of the feral mug of warm, damp air in the passenger cabin only confirmed the wisdom of his choice.

As he made his way towards Piazzale Roma, he considered what Vianello had told him. Alvise? Alvise had been on the force for as long as Brunetti, but in that time, while Brunetti had increased in rank, Alvise – slow, polite, inept, thoughtless, well liked although generally considered a fool – had remained a simple officer. Even with all of his contradictory qualities, Alvise had still become the mascot, one could even say the beloved mascot, of most of the Questura. He had never fired his gun and had never had the sudden realization of who was responsible for a crime, but he had more than once put himself in danger to help

a fellow officer. His hair had thinned a bit, the sides growing white; his face had aged, and he'd put on some weight. He never talked about himself, was interested in his colleagues, remembered the names of their spouses and children, was loyal and did his best. And now he'd been arrested in Treviso at the gay pride parade and had, it seemed, struck another officer.

Brunetti tried to recall ever having encountered Alvisè beyond the Questura or his position as a policeman and found it impossible. Alvisè, perhaps by virtue of his not being taken seriously by his colleagues, did not register fully with them as a person. Brunetti stopped involuntarily at the realization that he might not recognize Alvisè if he saw him out of uniform. He turned his head and stared into a shop window for a moment, trying to recall what Alvisè looked like: the best he could come up with was a roundish face, no moustache or beard, hair still mostly brown, eyes that contracted when he smiled, and a general inability to remain entirely still when standing. Beyond that, Alvisè was pretty much a cartoon figure of a man in uniform, his hat always seeming one size too big for his head.

Brunetti muttered, 'It's like he doesn't really exist,' which led him to wonder how many of the other officers didn't really exist for him, and that led him to wonder if all of them had managed to separate their private lives from their professional lives. He turned from the shoes in the window and resumed walking, having calculated the time Vianello's boat would arrive.

He tried to recall incidents in which his colleague had been involved, and in all of them Alvisè had managed to cause confusion: he'd gone to the wrong address to make an arrest, had left a briefcase full of witness statements on a bus. But he had also disarmed a man who was threatening his wife with a kitchen knife and had once prevented a fight in a restaurant when a client, seemingly displeased with his dinner, had thrown a plate of pasta at the waiter and turned over the table where he

sat. Somehow, Alvise, at the next table, managed to calm the man down, spoke with him for a few minutes, then suggested that he apologize to the waiter and help him put the table upright again.

The man's mother, Alvise had told the owner, was in the hospital and not expected to live: the pasta had been so much like hers that it had broken him. The man's apology was both tearful and sincere. The next day, the story had filtered into the Questura. Alvise had said no more than that it had been a waste of very good pasta.

He saw Vianello, wearing corduroy slacks and a thick parka, waiting at the head of the line of taxis, and joined him. When he saw Brunetti, the Ispettore leaned forward and opened the back door of the cab, then went round and got in on the other side. Before Brunetti could say anything, the Ispettore gave the address of the Questura in Treviso and sat back.

'Well?' Brunetti asked.

Vianello leaned forward and slid the glass panel between them and the driver closed. He turned to Brunetti and, keeping his voice low, said, 'The parade was the usual thing: about two hundred people, holding signs and chanting slogans. Fazio said there was a lot of good feeling, even with the rain.'

'Where'd they begin?' Brunetti asked.

'In front of COIN. They had permission to go along Via Lazzari. There was supposed to be singing and maybe a few speeches, but they hadn't figured on the rain, so things got confused, and it was after eleven by the time they left COIN.'

'So?' Brunetti asked. Being late when you had two hundred people seemed hard to avoid.

'That's when some people began giving them trouble,' Vianello went on.

'What?' Brunetti asked. In this rain? On a Saturday morning?

'Fazio was there. He said there were about twenty of them. The usual: fat men with biblical texts printed on signs. No women. Name-calling, telling them they were damned.'

'They sound as crazy as the anti-abortion people.'

'Don't forget the No-Vax,' Vianello said.

Brunetti nodded and sighed, remembering one particularly unpleasant demonstration in front of the hospital. 'What happened?'

'Fazio was detailed to go along. In uniform. He said that one of the anti-marchers ...' Vianello paused to consider that word, shook his head, and went on, '... came running at the people in the parade, holding his sign stuck out in front of him horizontally, and deliberately ploughed into them. Three or four were knocked down.'

'Hurt?'

'Not really. Surprised more than anything.'

'What happened?'

'Fazio said the guy started waving his sign around, swinging it at people. So he ran towards him, but before he could get there, one of the people from the parade grabbed the sign, pulled it away from him and slammed it on the ground a couple of times. Broke it into pieces.'

'What did the other man do?'

'Fazio said he started screaming at the guy who'd taken his sign – the usual: "fucking faggots", "you're all sinners". But then Fazio had a radio call from his lieutenant, and when that finished, he looked around and saw that one of his men was putting handcuffs on the guy who'd trashed the sign.'

'Are you going to tell me this was Alvis?' Brunetti asked, unable to keep the surprise from his voice.

Vianello nodded.

'Did anyone see what happened?'

‘Fazio managed to get the names and addresses of a few people who were there, but – you know how it is – no one saw anything.’

Brunetti knew how it was. Unless they filmed it on their phones and could boast about that, few people were willing to say they had witnessed a crime, reluctant to be caught up in the slow-grinding maw of the justice system.

The car slowed, and Brunetti glanced out of the window of the cab. They were in front of the Questura of Treviso.

Vianello paid and got out of the taxi; Brunetti followed him and, as he had the first time he was there, stood and gawked at the multistorey building and again tried to count the floors. As ever, he failed, defeated by the architect, who had granted more than one horizontal window to each floor. Brunetti gave up and followed Vianello into the building. As the Ispettore led him down corridors, no one asked them who they were or why they were there. Brunetti had no idea if this was lack of security or whether the two of them somehow looked like policemen and were thus left alone. Or perhaps, as many criminals had told him, it made no difference where you tried to go: so long as you looked like you knew where you were going, no one would interfere with you. He followed Vianello into the elevator, got out with him on the second floor, and stayed close behind him as the Ispettore turned right and then left, ending in front of an office with the name ‘Danieli’ on the door.

Vianello knocked, a male voice said something, and they went in. A short, thick man sat behind a desk. His hair was equally short and thick, dark, and cut close to his head. He was wearing a grey suit with a white shirt and a red and blue striped tie. He looked up and got to his feet: his eyes were a very pale blue and tilted faintly upwards at the outer corners. ‘Ah, gentlemen, I’m glad you could come. I was told he’d called you.’ He turned his

attention to Brunetti, somehow scinting that he was of superior rank, and said, 'Danieli.'

Brunetti gave him their names and Vianello's rank. Instead of offering his hand to the men, Danieli waved it towards the chairs in front of his desk and waited until they were seated before he sat down again.

Brunetti was searching his memory for the name, which he had recognized, although he couldn't remember why.

'You're here about your man,' Danieli said, making it a statement and not a question, aimed at either one of them.

'Yes,' Brunetti said, 'Alvise.' Then, summoning his first name, added, 'Dario.'

A file lay open on Danieli's desk; he glanced at it before asking, 'How long has he been on the force in Venice?'

Brunetti turned to Vianello, who said, 'Decades.'

'What's your assessment of him?' Danieli asked, using the plural so either could answer.

Brunetti said, 'He's reliable, honest, deals well with people.'

Danieli looked at Vianello, who said, 'He's one of the most popular men on the force, has never had any disciplinary problems, and more than once has managed to defuse potentially violent situations.'

Brunetti nodded in agreement.

'Has his homosexuality ever caused any difficulty?'

Stunned, Brunetti leaned back in his chair, almost as if the word had given him a shove. He folded his hands and studied the map of Treviso on the far wall. Alvise? Finally he said, 'Not that I can think of, no.' That was certainly true. Then, hoping to divert the course of this conversation from wherever the other man was trying to direct it, he added, 'I like to think those times are over.'

'What times?' Danieli asked politely.

‘The times we all lived through,’ Brunetti said, ‘when our gay friends had to lie and pretend, and – some of them – get married, even have families.’ He shrugged, glanced at Vianello and then back to the other man, and asked, ‘For what?’

‘To keep their jobs, chiefly, I suppose,’ Danieli answered. ‘And what used to be called their respectability.’

Vianello interrupted here and asked, ‘Excuse me, Signore, could you tell me why you asked about that?’

Danieli closed the file – which Brunetti noticed contained no more than a single page – and said, ‘I’ve heard conflicting stories about what happened. Someone who was there said that your officer resisted my officer when he put the handcuffs on him.’ Before Vianello could say anything, Danieli continued, ‘Another person said that my officer was deliberately, and unnecessarily, rough in treating yours.’

‘What has Officer Alvise said?’ Brunetti asked.

Danieli tapped at the cover of the file with his forefinger. ‘So far, he hasn’t had the chance to say anything to anyone.’

‘Meaning that he’s sitting by himself in a cell, waiting for us to come and get him out?’ Brunetti enquired.

Danieli, as Brunetti had intended, smiled at the question. ‘Yes, something like that. He was put there when he was brought in. One of the men on the squad at the protest recognized him as being on the force in Venice.’

‘I see,’ Brunetti said.

‘So I asked Fazio to call someone on the Venice force he knew – and trusted – and tell him that we had one of their men here and we’d like someone to come out and help us find a way to settle this.’

‘Settle it among friends?’ Brunetti asked.

‘Of course,’ Danieli answered without hesitation. ‘The last thing any of us needs is the *Gazzettino* banging on about police brutality.’ He looked past them, as though there were a

projection of the first page of the *Gazzettino* flashing on the wall behind them. 'You'd think this was the Bronx, the way they go crazy anytime someone claims to have been injured while they were being detained.'

Brunetti noted that word, 'detained' rather than 'arrested'.

'It happens, doesn't it?' Vianello asked.

'Rarely,' Danieli answered in a flat voice. He glanced back and forth between them. 'I think you'd have to admit that.'

Brunetti nodded, followed by Vianello, who said, 'It's probably because Venice is such a small place – tiny gene pool – so it's always possible we'll be detaining the cousin of someone we know or our son's mathematics teacher.' Brunetti liked it that Vianello had repeated the word: 'detaining'.

'Notoriously violent, mathematics teachers,' Brunetti said to inject a lighter tone.

Danieli gave a small laugh and said, 'So, shall we try to settle this like colleagues?'

Brunetti, noting that 'friends' had been demoted to 'colleagues', paused a moment before asking, 'Can we speak to Alvisè first?'

Danieli made no attempt to hide his surprise, but answered calmly. 'Certainly. I'll have him sent up.' He reached for the phone on his desk and punched in two numbers. While he waited for someone to answer, he waved his hand around the room and said, 'You can talk to him here.'

Before they could protest his generosity, he held up a hand and spoke into the phone. 'Gianluca, could you bring that man who was detained this morning up to my office? He's in one of the holding rooms on the ground floor. Two men are here to talk to him.' He paused a moment, then answered, 'Yes, at the protest march.' The other man said something; Danieli thanked him and hung up. Looking up at them, he said, 'Shouldn't be long.'

This was the moment, Brunetti knew, when the three of them should engage one another in talk about sports or any one of the

conversational methods men used to fill up time. But they all lacked the will or simply had nothing to say.

Four minutes passed, which is a long time for people who are waiting for something to happen.

There was a crisp knock at the door. Danieli called out, *'Avanti,'* and the door opened.

A uniformed policeman entered and made a semi-salute towards Danieli, then stood aside to allow the man behind him to enter.

Alvise, hands at his sides, took a few steps into the room. Seeing Vianello, some of the tension disappeared from his face, only to return when he saw that Brunetti was there with him. He brought his feet together and snapped out a salute in Brunetti's direction, but did not speak.

It was Alvise, good old Alvise, dressed in jeans and a thick dark blue sweater that zipped up the front, a dark blue wind-breaker over it, the sort worn on a boat or on a rainy day.

Out of uniform, he looked less like the Alvise they knew; smaller, somehow, but more clearly seen. Making him seem even less like himself was the dark red bruise that was gathering on his left cheek and the large bloodied bandage on his forehead that covered most, but not all, of what looked like a graze wound, as though his face had been dragged along a rough surface.

Without thinking, Brunetti stood and pulled another chair over towards them. *'Have a seat, Alvise,'* he said.

Perhaps uncertain how to behave in the company of men who outranked him, Alvise did nothing but salute and stand rigid to attention.

Vianello slipped into Veneziano and said, *'Good God, Alvise, what happened to you?'*

Still rigid, fingers apparently stuck to his forehead, Alvise took the opportunity to answer in dialect, and finally said, *'I fell down the stairs.'*

2

Taking this as his cue, Danieli closed the folder on his desk and got to his feet. To Brunetti, he said, 'I'll leave you to speak to your officer, Commissario. When you're finished, I'll be in the first office on the left.' Leaving the file on his desk, Danieli let himself out of the room.

Alvise, still statue-straight and motionless, lowered his hand to his side.

Vianello stood and moved the third chair closer to Alvise. 'Sit down, Dario, and tell us what happened.'

As they watched, Alvise slowly unfroze and took a few steps towards the chair. He placed his hand on the back and walked around it, then sat. He looked at Vianello and then at Brunetti, and then closed his eyes, as if afraid they were going to begin yelling at him.

The officer finally turned his head towards Brunetti and said, 'I didn't really fall down the steps, Commissario.' His lips closed after he said that, part of him apparently reluctant to go on.

They waited, silent, and finally Alvise said, 'I don't want to get the guys here into trouble.'

'Forget what you want, Alwise,' Brunetti said in a voice he kept level, 'and tell us what happened.'

Alwise lifted his shoulders for a moment, lost interest in them, and let them fall. 'It doesn't really matter, Commissario. Besides, it was only one of them.'

'Which one?' Vianello asked.

'Petri,' Alwise answered. 'I've known him for a while.'

Vianello nodded, as though he also knew the man.

'He used to work in the city,' Alwise said, obviously meaning Venice, 'but he transferred to Treviso two or three years ago.'

'Did you ever work with him?' Brunetti asked.

'A few times, sir,' Alwise answered, unable to hide his reluctance to say more.

'And he didn't recognize you?' Brunetti asked, making it clear that this was not a question but a request for an explanation.

Alwise slipped his hands, palms down, under his thighs, as though he feared they would betray him with a gesture, and said, 'He decided not to recognize me, sir, so I think I don't want to recognize him.'

'And cause him trouble?' Vianello interrupted.

'And cause anyone trouble,' Alwise answered.

'Could you tell us a little more, Alwise?' Brunetti asked.

The officer's hand was halfway to his forehead before he realized they were seated and Brunetti was making a request, not giving an order. He changed its flight path and flew his open-handed fingers through his hair before landing them on the arm of his chair.

'He's ... ' Alwise began, but failed to find the next word. 'Umm ... some of the guys have had trouble with him.'

'But you never did?' Vianello asked.

'Not until today,' Alwise answered, looked at Vianello and then bowed his head as though he'd caught himself in a lie. 'Physical, that is.'

It took Brunetti a moment to work this out, and when he did, he asked, 'So you've had other trouble with him?'

Brunetti saw that this question had put Alvisè on the cross: to say yes might lead to trouble, and to say no might be a lie.

'Verbal trouble?' Brunetti asked.

Alvisè's face contracted as he worked out the meaning of Brunetti's question. When he did, he asked, 'You mean did he ever say things to me?'

'Yes,' Brunetti answered, quelling the impulse to congratulate Alvisè for having understood the question.

'He was like that, sir,' Alvisè said softly, almost as though he were offering a defence of Petri or, more likely, avoiding the question. Brunetti found Alvisè's reticence interesting.

'What's that supposed to mean?' Vianello interrupted again.

'Well, he says things to people. And about people.'

'For instance?' Vianello asked, still sounding angry.

Alvisè directed his attention to the cuffs of his sweater and carefully folded back first one, then the other. He suddenly looked up and met Vianello's eyes. 'You know Biozzi, don't you?'

Vianello and Brunetti exchanged a sudden glance. Who on the force didn't know Biozzi, or know about him? Or about his wife, murdered by the lover she'd taken six years after her divorce from Biozzi.

Both men sat quietly, waiting for Alvisè to explain.

'He was in the squad room when he came back to work.'

Biting back the urge to pick Alvisè up and shake him, Brunetti said, 'I'm not sure who these "he's" are, Alvisè.' He glanced at Vianello, as if to ask if he'd been a bit confused as well. Vianello nodded in agreement.

'Petri was in the squad room,' Alvisè clarified. 'And Biozzi came in.' He looked around; both his listeners nodded, understanding now. 'It must have been about three years ago.'

‘Petri was talking to someone – I don’t remember who it was.’ Alvisè raised his hands in a cancelling gesture and started again. ‘He must have seen Biozzi when he came in. His voice got louder and he said something like, “If nothing else, it’s more direct than getting a divorce.”’

Alvisè paused and a look of disgust crossed his face, making Brunetti regret having shown his impatience.

‘What happened?’ Brunetti asked.

Alvisè didn’t answer.

‘Well?’ prodded Vianello.

Overcoming his reluctance to speak, Alvisè said, ‘I was reading the paper. So I stood up and grabbed it and walked over to Petri’s table and slapped it down – hard – in front of him. Then I went over and put my arm around Renato’s shoulders and said it was good to have him back.’

None of them said anything else for a long time, until Brunetti finally returned to what was important and asked, ‘So when they brought you in, only Petri knew what had really happened?’

Alvisè looked at him in surprise and nodded. ‘Yes, Commissario, and all I wanted to do was get out of there before anyone learned I was a cop.’ He shrugged and added, ‘I didn’t want any fuss, and I certainly didn’t want to bother you and the Ispettore, sir.’

‘So far, the only thing that bothers me is that they pushed you around at the demonstration.’

‘It was only one of them, sir. I heard someone else tell him to stop it.’

‘Are you sure it was Petri?’ Vianello asked.

Alvisè gave what in another man would have been a considered pause, then said, with audible reluctance, ‘No, Ispettore. They were behind me.’ With wide-eyed curiosity, Alvisè asked, ‘Does it make a difference?’

‘Probably not,’ Vianello answered. ‘If we’re going to get you out of here,’ he began, and then slowed his speech and spoke every word slowly and carefully, ‘then it has to have not happened.’

It took Alvisè a moment to figure this out, but when he did, he said, ‘That’s best, isn’t it?’

After giving it some thought, Brunetti said, ‘For all of us, probably.’

‘What about this?’ Alvisè asked, tapping the bandage, ignoring the bruise he couldn’t see. ‘How do I explain this?’

Vianello’s response had the softness of restrained impatience. ‘You already did, Alvisè. You fell down the stairs.’ Then, to prevent Alvisè from pointing out that there were no stairs outside, Vianello said, ‘When you got to the Questura.’

Both Brunetti and Vianello watched as Alvisè digested this. ‘Of course, sir. I remember now.’ His smile showed them that he finally understood.

Brunetti stood and took two steps towards the door, then paused to look back at them. ‘Are we agreed on this, Officer Alvisè?’

‘Oh, yes, sir,’ Alvisè answered. ‘I just have to lie, and it will become the truth,’ he said. Was this irony? Brunetti wanted to know. Or sarcasm? Or was Alvisè simply being himself and telling the truth slant? Brunetti paused to give Alvisè time to explain or elaborate, but the officer smiled at him and nodded, so Brunetti assumed they had an agreement.

He opened the door and went along to knock on the first door on the left. Danieli came over and answered it, saying, ‘That was quick.’

‘Alvisè told us what happened,’ Brunetti said casually. ‘He remembers now that he was so upset when he was brought here that he missed his footing and tripped on the stairs.’

Danieli's smile was broad. 'That's exactly what I thought might have happened, Commissario. I'm very relieved to hear it confirmed by ...'

'Alvise,' Brunetti supplied.

'Indeed,' Danieli agreed. 'Then let's do the paperwork and let you all get back to Venice.' The manner in which he said this made it clear how relieved he was to have the matter settled.

'I'm glad you're pleased with the result,' Brunetti said.

Hand already on the handle of the door, Danieli turned back to Brunetti and said, 'It's not often that things can be resolved so easily, Commissario.' Then, making no pretence of asking an idle question, he asked, 'Did he tell you who hit him?'

Rather than answer, Brunetti posed his own question: 'Why do you ask that?'

'Because I don't like bullies.'

Brunetti, who hated fewer things more, nodded and said, 'I think it's his business to decide to say who it was, not mine.'

Danieli nodded. 'I'd do the same thing if I were in your position.' He extended his hand and offered it to Brunetti. 'Filippo.'

'Guido,' Brunetti said, smiling, offering his own.