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Life and Death in Palermo

Clara Hemphill

THE POLICE found eight bullet-ridden bodies at 7:30 on the morning of October 18, 1984, sprawled in the straw and manure of a ramshackle stone stable in a Palermo slum called Brancaccio. A man was dragging the body of his son away when police arrived; he said the horses running loose in the stables were trampling the young man's face and he couldn't bear to see him like that.

By midmorning, a crowd had gathered: newspaper reporters and photographers, television camera crews, bystanders and frantic relatives of men who had not returned home the night before. One woman wailed "Figlio mio, figlio mio"—my son, my son—and shook her fist in anger and despair. Police restrained her, grabbed her upper arms when she lurched forward. Relatives were not allowed to identify the dead until they had been taken to the city morgue. Mortuary workers with plastic gloves lifted the bodies into plain pine coffins and carried them off in black hearses. In the muddy square, a mangy dog sniffed, chickens pecked the ground, and pigs locked in a concrete pigsty lifted their heads to see what the commotion was about.

It was called the Massacre at Slaughterhouse Square, after the horsemeat slaughterhouse next to the stables. It was the biggest Mafia massacre in Sicily since 1947, when a band led by Salvatore Giuliano opened fire on a leftist May Day demonstration in the town of Portella della Ginestra outside Palermo, killing eleven men, women, and children.

I was part of the television crew that covered the October murders for CBS. We did our piece for the evening news and went home to Rome, but the killings continued to haunt me. They were not like other Mafia murders I'd covered in the past five years in Italy: the victims were not big-time mafiosi or drug dealers, or policemen or magistrates or other crusaders against the Mafia. Instead, they were obscure young men from the neighborhood: a butcher, a scrap metal dealer, men who made their living picking up odd jobs. A Mafia massacre, the police said, but the dead men were not mafiosi.

I returned to Palermo in November in hopes of finding out why the men were killed. I checked into the Hotel des Palmes, a marvelous old grand hotel fallen on hard times, where hordes of out-of-town journalists stay for months on end, to cover the Mafia; where the Mafia, according to local legend, used to hold its "Grand Councils"; and where Mafia wives still while away the hours at fashion shows in the gilded halls.

The police gave me the names and addresses of the men who were killed at Slaughterhouse Square. I hired a cab for the day and set out to talk to their relatives.

The victims lived in the vast, anonymous cinderblock housing projects on the outskirts of town, rising like tombstones among the vacant lots, where the

children play in the garbage on the streets and the only green is the weeds growing in the red piles of dirt and rubble between the buildings. The young widow was not at home at the first house I stopped at; try the cemetery, the neighbors said, on Sunday morning she goes to Mass and then to the cemetery.

The cemetery looks rather like the housing projects that surround it: a cinderblock mausoleum four stories high, with coffins that slide into the walls like drawers stacked six high on each floor. Two women dressed in black, with black scarves tied under their chins, cried softly as they put flowers on the graves of two brothers who were murdered, Cosimo and Francesco Quattrocchi. The women invited me back to their house to talk.

"We're not mafiosi. We're respectful, sincere people," said Pietra, Cosimo's wife, as we sat around the dining room table in their clean, simple apartment. "He was afraid of the sight of his own blood. He didn't like to watch the boxing matches on TV."

Cosimo Quattrocchi, who, at 38, was the oldest and the most prosperous of the victims, owned a small butcher shop in the historic center of Palermo, on a dark, narrow, flagstone street crowded with stands selling fruit and vegetables, hardware and clothing; where modern-day organ grinders blast rock music and hawk cassettes taped illegally. The butcher shop specialized in horsemeat, slaughtered in the stables in Brancaccio. Cosimo worked long hours, so Pietra and their four small children did not worry, at first, when he didn't come home the night of the 17th.

Cosimo's 34-year-old brother, Francesco, lived with his wife, Grazia, their nine children, his niece, and her husband in a small apartment nearby. Francesco, who was married when he was sixteen, made his living picking up junk, selling scrap metal, and occasionally working for his brother. Francesco was working with Cosimo the night of the 17th.

"They were hard-working men," said 35-year-old Grazia. "We never expected something like this to happen. What do I know about the Mafia? All I know is he's dead, for no reason."

Either they don't know what happened or they can't tell me, I thought. So I thanked them for their time and trouble and went on to the house of another victim, Antonino Federico.

Antonino, who was 25, lived with his parents, five brothers, and a sister in an apartment not far from the slaughterhouse. Three other sisters had married and moved away. Antonino was the only one of the six brothers not to work as a fisherman like their father. He picked up odd jobs, occasionally working at the stables.

His family began to worry when he was not home by 10:30 the night of the 17th. "My son has never stayed away from home," his gray-haired mother, Angela, said, wringing her

hands in her lap. "He was always home by 10:30, or he would call."

His father, Raffaele, couldn't sleep that night. The frail old man said he got up five times in the night to see if Antonino had returned, each time looking at the neatly made bed in the room he shared with two of his brothers.

At 8 a.m. on the 18th, Antonino's brothers left the house to go to the sea. When they saw all the police cars at Slaughterhouse Square, they rushed back to the apartment to get the rest of the family. "Police searched the houses, looking for drugs, arms," Angela said. "All they found was the wet laundry from the sea."

Why was Antonino killed? Maybe he crossed someone, got in someone's way. "It might have been a *fesseria*, a stupid little thing," said Antonio Sinagra, Antonino's brother-in-law who was visiting the afternoon I was there. But if anyone knows, he won't say. "Even if people want to talk, they don't, because they are afraid they will get killed too," he said.

A journalist from the Palermo newspaper *L'Ora* explained to me later what probably happened. Police, he said, believe the killers were after the butcher, Cosimo Quattrocchi, and that the others were murdered because they were in the stables with him and would have been witnesses to the crime if they had lived.

Quattrocchi had been buying horses to slaughter for horsemeat from a mafioso in the Sicilian city of Catania; the butcher then decided to eliminate the middleman and buy horses directly from the wholesaler in Bari, on the mainland.

The night of October 17, Quattrocchi went to the train station in Palermo to pick up his first shipment, eighteen horses arriving on the 6:30 p.m. train from Puglia. He and his friends loaded the horses into two trucks and took them to the stables in Brancaccio, carrying an oil lamp to light the way. They were gunned down as soon as they arrived. A lesson from the Mafia: don't eliminate the middleman if the middleman is a mafioso.

A mafioso is a person who is powerful, who gets things done, who grants favors. He dresses well and his wife probably has a fur coat. He may affect a "cultured" air and recite poetry; he certainly drives a nice car. He may be a doctor or a lawyer or a businessman or a politician or a priest, or he may work full-time as a criminal. He decides things: who gets the "concession" to steal car radios in the neighborhood, who gets the contract to build a school or open a new garage, who gets the millions of dollars in profits from the heroin trade between Sicily and the United States. He can help you get a job, or a bed in a crowded hospital, or a birth certificate for your newborn child—things that may be very difficult to get without his help.

"We're all mafiosi," a schoolteacher told me. She wasn't repeating the commonplace that all Sicilians are thieves, but she meant to say that all are trapped in a nightmarish system that touches almost every aspect of their lives, and that no one, regardless of his line of work or social class, can escape if he lives in Palermo. It's not a battle of cops and robbers that ordinary people can ignore; everyone is involved at some level.

A sociology professor at the University of Palermo told me how he tried to change his address on his national health card when he moved to the city.

"I went to City Hall," he said, "and they told me: 'Go to hell.'" The next day, he went to the university and asked around the department what he should do to get his new national health card; a colleague said: "Don't worry, I'll take care of it."

The next day, the professor went back to City Hall; the clerk who had been so rude the day before was now happy to help and issued a new card on the spot.

Some months later, the colleague came back with a request: please make sure a particular student passed her exams. She was the daughter of Vito Ciancimino, the former mayor of Palermo who was arrested in November on Mafia-related charges.

Outside City Hall and lurking in the hallways are men known to the locals as *spicciolfaccende*, speed-things-uppers. If you want a birth certificate, or a driver's license, or any other document, you pay a small fee to the men who have a "concession" to "speed things up." Sometimes the clerk behind the counter has the concession.

One man described registering a child's birth at City Hall. The clerk got to a certain point in the paperwork, raised her head and said: "Allora, prendiamo il caffè?"—now then, shall we have a coffee? That's the signal to pay the bribe, usually about 10,000 to 15,000 lire, \$5 to \$8. Woe be to the employee who doesn't follow the system.

"I have a friend at City Hall who was transferred six times because she did her job," Giancarlo Lo Curzio, a city planner employed by a labor union, told me. "People would come in, sign the forms, and she would give them back their documents." This wrecked things for the *spicciolfaccende* and no one wanted her around.

Lo Curzio described to me how the Mafia has infiltrated the hospitals and funeral homes in Palermo. Under the national health program, public hospitals in Italy are free, although they are sometimes crowded and there are sometimes waiting lists to get a bed. In Palermo, the quality of the public hospitals varies wildly—some have peeling plaster and ceilings caving in, while others are modern and efficient. A mafioso can help you get a room in a nice hospital—if you're willing and able to pay. Lo Curzio said a hospital administrator once asked him in the emergency room if he wanted to "buy" a bed. With money or influence, you can bypass the waiting lists.

The Mafia is also reputed to run the private ambulance companies and the funeral parlors in Palermo. The funeral parlors offer nurses a "bonus" of 350,000 (\$175) if they call as soon as a patient dies. That way, the funeral parlor can be the first to offer to make arrangements for the funeral.

The Mafia has even created a racket to profit from the signing of death certificates. In Italy, particularly in the south, a big wake is an important social custom. Italian law requires the permission of the health inspector to transport a corpse from the hospital to the home of the deceased. In Rome, it takes a few hours to get the permission; in Palermo, it takes a few days.

Most families are unwilling to wait a

few days after someone dies to take the body home for the wake and funeral, so the Mafia has devised a macabre ritual to profit from the bureaucracy. The funeral parlor pays the attending physician *not* to sign a death certificate when a patient dies in the hospital. Instead, the doctor signs a form releasing the patient from the hospital—as if he were still alive. The funeral home transports the body to the house for the wake, circumventing the law that requires the written permission of the health inspector to take corpses out of the hospital. Once the body is home, the doctor signs the death certificate, as if the patient had died at home. The doctor's fee for the service, and the funeral home's percentage, is tacked onto the bill for the funeral; just another cost of doing business in Palermo.

Lo Curzio and others explained to me how the Mafia has effectively blocked construction of schools for a decade. Most children in Palermo attend classes in apartment buildings while squabbles continue over who should get the contracts to build the new school buildings. The city government was suspicious when there were exactly six bids to build six schools and the six bids were from construction companies believed to be run by the Mafia. So it called off the bidding until a way could be found to keep the Mafia companies out. In the meantime, the city rented apartments in high-rise buildings—built by the same suspect companies—to be used temporarily as classrooms. There are no playgrounds or gymnasiums, the rents are high, and the money goes to the same companies that wanted to build the schools. A puzzling paradox, certainly, and not the only one in Palermo.

"Don't forget," a schoolteacher told me by way of explanation, "that Pirandello was a Sicilian." Indeed, the more time you spend in Palermo, the more realistic the absurdist playwright seems.

VITO Mercadante is the principal of the Antonio Ugo Junior High School in a working-class neighborhood in Palermo. He was one of the first teachers in Sicily to institute an anti-Mafia course in the curriculum, and he's written a book on the history of the Mafia to be used in the course.

It's not a bad school, by Palermo standards: cinderblock walls and linoleum floors, two stories high, set among vacant lots with weeds sprouting up among the piles of broken cinderblocks. "It's a model school," Mercadante says with an ironic smile.

The idea behind the anti-Mafia course is to counter the image of the mafioso as the super-cool tough guy on the block; to teach the students a kind of Marxist catechism showing the Mafia is the enemy of the working class, to convince them to report crimes they witness to the police, and to give them an idea there is an alternative to life in the slums of Palermo.

"Go ahead, talk to the kids," Mercadante told me. "Don't ask them 'What do you do if you see a murder?' They know they're supposed to say 'Report it to the police.' But ask them, 'If they steal your car, what do you do? Do you go and look for it by yourself?' They'll tell you, 'Go to the 'Man of Respect' in the neighborhood, he'll get it back for you.'"

"Ask them 'How do you get a job?'"

These kids know if they want a job, they have to go to the local mafioso. I tell them work hard and take exams but they know that's not what counts," Mercadante said.

The pupils have learned their lessons well. When asked "What is the Mafia?" they rattle off by heart: "The Mafia has its origins in the state's lack of concern for southern Italy. It has succeeded in infiltrating everything, as well as the political structure, and it influences economic choices that are made. It has infiltrated all social classes without taking into account the needs of the citizens."

But when they describe how it touches their lives, the fear is palpable. A few had witnessed murders. "People are afraid to talk because they could be eliminated," one girl said. "If I see something, I hide. I go in my room and close the door," another girl said. "Because it could happen to me too."

Their fear is not exaggerated. Murder is the usual punishment for anyone who informs to police. If the informer is safe in jail, the Mafia may kill one of his relatives outside. Or the Mafia may wait years to seek revenge, as it did in the case of Maria Benigno's family. Revenge, as the Sicilian proverb says, is a dish best eaten cold.

The way Mrs. Benigno tells the story, her family's troubles with the Mafia began when she was a teenager living with her parents in Brancaccio in the 1950s. Her father owned a stable and rented it to the local mafioso, Filippo Marchese. The mafioso sublet it; Maria's father complained. He was the owner and didn't want someone to be making a profit on it besides him.

"They blew the roof off the stable," Mrs. Benigno told me. "They said, 'The wind blew it off.' They threatened him, told him to get out."

Her father was killed in an automobile accident in July 1956 by a hit-and-run driver with out-of-town plates. Mrs. Benigno always suspected the Marcheses were responsible.

One night in 1967, someone tried to break down the Benignos' door. The next day, Maria's brother, Antonino, reported it to the police and one of the Marcheses was arrested. The Marchese family threatened Antonino and said "You are a spy. Now you must die," according to Mrs. Benigno.

"My brother left the house with a pistol," she recalls. "He went crazy, he started shooting people." He killed Filippo Marchese's brother and wounded three other men—Filippo's father and two others who had nothing to do with the family squabbles and just happened to be standing on the street.

Nine years later, after Antonino had served five years in a mental hospital (he was acquitted for murder for reasons of temporary insanity), he went to live with Maria and her husband. On the morning of December 16, 1976, Maria, her husband, and Antonino were returning from grocery shopping in the neighborhood. She got out of the car and closed the door. Just then, a car sped by and a gunman leaned out of the window, and sprayed the two men with machine-gun fire.

Mrs. Benigno says her neighbors avoid her. She thinks it's because she testified in court against the men she believes killed her husband and brother.

"People stay away from me," she said. "They won't talk to me. They think I'm

crazy. Anyone who tells the truth is considered crazy."

THERE is a feeling among some Sicilians that the Mafia has changed somehow, that it used to be the "Honorable Society" that defended the poor from Sicily's foreign invaders, never killing women or children or "outsiders." After the murders at Slaughterhouse Square, several people shook their heads and said "The Old Mafia would never do that." Tomasso Buscetta, the Mafia chieftain who was extradited to Italy from Brazil in September, said he turned state's evidence because the Mafia no longer respected its own code of honor. The nostalgia for the "Old Mafia," though, is based on a myth. The Mafia never defended the poor, and it's been killing women, children, and "outsiders" for decades.

The Mafia had its origins in the middle of the nineteenth century, when absentee landlords in Sicily rented their plantations and cattle ranges to *gabellotti* or leaseholders, who in turn rented out the fields to sharecroppers. The *gabellotti* settled boundary disputes, served as brokers between landlord and peasant, and hired private armies to protect the fields from cattle rustlers and bandits and to put down peasant revolts. The *gabellotti* and their private armies became the Mafia.

After the unification of Italy in 1861, the political strength of the Mafia grew. Historians agree that members of Parliament from Sicily were chosen by the Mafia, which delivered votes better than any big-city machine in America. The Mafia's power dwindled under Fascism. Mussolini, who couldn't permit a rival center of power, very nearly wiped the Mafia out with mass arrests and executions.

The Allied Army brought it back, springing Sicilian gangsters from jail in the United States to help conquer the island. The United States Army installed mafiosi as mayors of Sicilian towns and the Mafia quickly recouped the power it had lost under Mussolini. After World War II, the Mafia allied itself first with the Sicilian Separatists, and, within a few years, with the Christian Democrats.

In April 1947, leftist parties made gains in regional elections, posing a threat both to the Mafia and the Christian Democrats. Two weeks after the elections, in an attack ordered by the Mafia, a band led by Salvatore Giuliano fired on a May Day demonstration, killing eleven men, women, and children in a town outside Palermo. In the months that followed, the Mafia attacked nine offices of trade union and leftist parties with bombs and machine guns. The terror had the desired effect: in the national elections of 1948, the leftists suffered setbacks and the Christian Democrats made striking gains, both on the national and regional levels. The Mafia continued its war against peasants who rebelled against the system. Placido Rizzotto, who tried to organize a farm worker's union, was murdered in March 1948 in Corleone. An eight-year-old shepherd who witnessed the killing died after a Mafia doctor administered him a sedative, according to the British writer and historian Norman Lewis.

As the Mafia moved from the countryside to the city, it extended its control from the fields to the city's meat

and vegetable markets, to the construction business and to public works projects. The Mafia began refining heroin in Sicily after police broke up the "French Connection" in Marseilles in the early 1970s. The profits were staggering. Italian investigators estimated ten billion dollars a year worth of heroin passed through Sicily in the early 1980s. Gang warfare to gain control of the profits took hundreds of lives.

Not only gangsters died. Police, magistrates and journalists investigating the Mafia were murdered too. Boris Giuliano, a police investigator, was killed July 21, 1979, as he drank his morning coffee in a cafe near his house; Cesare Terranova, a magistrate, was killed while driving his car in downtown Palermo the morning of September 25, 1979; Piersanti Martella, the president of the regional government, was murdered on his way to Mass with his family January 6, 1980; Emanuele Basile, a policeman, was killed as he walked through the main square of Monreale during a festival for the patron saint May 4, 1980. He was carrying his four-year-old girl in his arms.

Gaetano Costa, a magistrate, was gunned down in front of a bookstall as he walked down a Palermo street August 7, 1980; Pio La Torre, a Communist senator, was gunned down in his car a few yards from his office April 30, 1982; Rocco Chinnici, an investigating magistrate, was blown up in a car-bomb attack July 29, 1983; Giuseppe Fava, a journalist, died in an ambush January 5, 1984. In each case, a murder in a public place, during the day or early evening; no witnesses testified, no suspects brought to trial. *Omertà*, the code of silence, protected the Mafia. The killers knew that no one inside or outside the Mafia would betray them.

The murder of General Alberto dalla Chiesa, along with his wife and bodyguard, on September 3, 1982, was one of the most spectacular. Dalla Chiesa, sent by the government in Rome to crack down on the Mafia, was the highest-ranking person killed.

It was a warm evening, and many people on Via Isidoro Carini had their windows open, big French doors that open onto the street on the ground floor and onto balconies on the floor above in the working-class neighborhood in the historic center. On warm evenings, people often bring their chairs out to sit on the sidewalks or the balconies overlooking the street, to escape the heat and to chat with their neighbors.

The killers opened machine-gun fire as dalla Chiesa's car passed through the neighborhood on his way home from work. Police said they interviewed 30 people that night, but no one would say he heard or saw anything.

"Strangely, even the people who were standing at their open windows had their backs turned," a detective in the homicide squad told me at the time. "They say they were watching television. No one heard gunfire." Almost three years later, no one has been brought to trial. *Omertà* is one of the Mafia's strongest weapons.

That's why the revelations of Buscetta, the mafioso arrested in Brazil and extradited to Italy in September 1984 on drug trafficking charges, were so significant. Other mobsters had turned state's evidence before, but none in such a high position, none who had

such a broad view of the workings of the Mafia. His depositions filled thousands of pages. He gave investigators information on some of the most spectacular Mafia crimes in the past decade. His confessions led to more than 300 arrests. By July investigators said they were ready to ask for indictments, and they hoped the suspects would go to trial in January 1986. Judges ordered a courtroom to be built next to the jail in Palermo for a huge trial.

Those arrested were not just suspected drug smugglers and murderers, but policemen and judges and politicians. Vito Ciancimino, the former mayor of Palermo long suspected of pocketing public funds, was arrested November 3, charged with "criminal connections with the Mafia." The equivalent of three million dollars was found in his safe deposit box.

The "Salvo cousins," said to be the richest men in Sicily, were arrested November 12, 1984. Nino Salvo and Ignazio Salvo, also accused of "criminal connections with the Mafia," accumulated their fortune by having the concession for tax collection on the island, which, until 1982, was a private concern in Italy. Private tax collectors received a percentage of whatever they collected; most got one or two percent. The Salvos got ten percent.

Then came the arrests of the mayor of Salemi, a Bank of Sicily executive, a judge in Turin charged with helping mafiosi get acquittals, a financier in Rome named Pippo Calò, who was said to be responsible for investing the Mafia's millions in legitimate business.

Buscetta's testimony had a ripple effect: a second mafioso, Salvatore Contorno, turned state's evidence and 56 people were arrested on the basis of his testimony. In all, sixteen mafiosi decided to cooperate with police.

There was a sense of euphoria among journalists staying at the Hotel des Palmes in Palermo the night the Salvo cousins were arrested. We went out to dinner together and talked about who would be the next to fall: an executive at a bank in Rome suspected of recycling drug money? a senator elected with Mafia votes? maybe even a Cabinet minister? Police, it seemed, were finally getting at the "third level" of the Mafia—beyond the foot soldiers and the neighborhood bosses to the white-collar criminals who are believed to be the real power behind the Mafia. Was there a chance the Mafia would be defeated?

We'd all been covering the Mafia long enough to know better, to know that it was just a matter of time before the mob regrouped and struck out again. It came soon enough. On February 26, gunmen opened fire as a man dropped his daughters off at school. In the schoolyard, girls in their blue Catholic school uniforms screamed and ducked for cover. Pietro Patti, a factory owner, was killed. His nine-year-old daughter Gaia, who was sitting next to him, was shot through the lung as the three older girls sitting in the back seat looked on in horror. Patti's wife said he was killed because he refused to pay the equivalent of \$250,000 in "protection" money to keep his dry-fruit factory open in Brancaccio.

On April 2, a car bomb exploded on the highway outside of Trapani, killing a thirty-year-old woman, Barbara Asta, and her eight-year-old twin sons,

Salvatore and Giuseppe. The bomb missed its intended victim, Carlo Palermo, a magistrate who had made his reputation investigating arms and drug traffic in the northern city of Trento. Palermo had been transferred to Sicily two months before and was investigating the ties between political power and the Mafia. The bodies were thrown two hundred yards from the explosion. All that remained of one child was a stripe of blood on the wall of a nearby building.

THERE are two kinds of nightmares in Palermo: the public and the private. Letizia Battaglia knows about both of them. She is a news photographer who has been taking pictures of the Mafia for fifteen years. The Mafia hates her because her photos make them look like bloodthirsty criminals, not the genteel "men of respect" they like to consider themselves. When a mafioso is arrested, he will sometimes try to throw his Burberry raincoat casually over his wrists to cover the handcuffs; it makes a more dignified photo, and *figura*, or image, is all-important to the Mafia.

There is nothing dignified about the Mafia in the photos Letizia Battaglia and her colleagues take. One photo shows a child coolly leaping over a river of blood. Another shows a boy hiding behind a friend and staring relentlessly at a corpse in front of them. A third shows a girl playing dead as a friend draws a chalk line around her on the ground like a detective draws a chalk line around a murder victim.

The photos show the decapitated heads of the Mafia's victims, and the gashes caused by the *lupara*—the shotgun with pellets that are square instead of round, that dig into a man's back, spin around, and lodge in the flesh, unlike regular shotgun pellets that cut straight through, leaving a clean wound.

The photo agency receives threats from the Mafia from time to time, letters or telephone calls telling the photographers to stop taking pictures that make them look so bad. That's the public nightmare, and Miss Battaglia copes with it pretty well. The private nightmare is what the Mafia has done to her family.

She lit a Gauloise as she told me her story.

Her daughter is married to a mafioso. Miss Battaglia hasn't seen her for seven years. The mafioso prohibits it. Miss Battaglia talks to her daughter on the telephone every day, but she has never seen her house, she doesn't know what her haircut is like (she used to have long hair, down to her shoulders). She has never met her grandchildren. She knows they scratch the word "police" off their toy police trucks—the word police is disgusting to them. They probably taunt their classmates on the playground with the latest Palermo kids' taunt: "Non fare il Buscetta," don't be like Buscetta, don't be a tattletale.

Miss Battaglia last saw her daughter in the delivery room when the first grandchild was born. She talked to her son-in-law in the parking lot, and, she told me, "I understood I couldn't see her anymore."

"When we talk, we talk about silly things—what did you eat today, that sort of thing. I won't say 'I'd like to see you.' They love each other very much. If I did that it would ruin their happiness. She says 'Pazienza, mamma'

(Be patient, mother). She hoped she could put the two cultures together."

Miss Battaglia said all this without a shroud of self-pity, almost matter-of-factly. But her eyes were a little misty and she was blinking more than normal and there would be a slight catch in her voice and then she would recover and I knew exactly the feeling of trying hard not to cry. Both of us must have remembered that just a few minutes ago we'd been joking about trying to make interview subjects cry.

"Yes, Maria was a great interview

subject," Miss Battaglia had said. "We even got her to cry on camera."

I had laughed and said: "Non essere cattiva"—don't be mean—and she said, "Come on, now, we're both journalists, you know what I mean." And of course I did and I asked her how you get people to cry on camera and she said well you ask them the right questions when you see they are about to cry.

But this time I was just quiet and she cleared her throat and opened another pack of Gauloise and we started talking about other things. □

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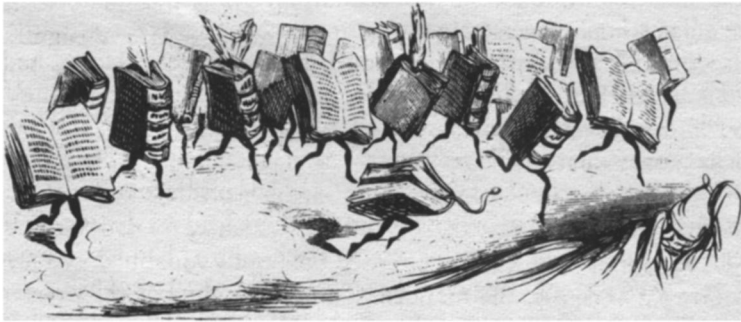
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