

Venetian Thrillers - Episode VIII

Stefanin

Gabrielle.

16th of November, 1994. Highway near Venice-Mestre; 100 yards from the Castellana/City Center exit; 3:30 am.

Gabrielle Musger, 28 year old prostitute, walks around the truck stop built under the columns of the overpass. There are almost a dozen rigs parked behind the diner. The truckers pay well, they're easy-going and have a cosy bed in their cabs behind the driver's seat. They're not the cleanest. That doesn't bother Gabrielle. But instead of the usual long hauler, a pleasant young man is the first to come up and negotiate a night of love with Gabrielle. Tall, blue-eyed, dark hair, a little baby-faced. Gabrielle doesn't say no. She gets into the car of Gianfranco Stefanin.

About 30 minutes later, the automobile is lost amidst the fields, somewhere between Padua and Venice, the so-called "Lowlands": a unique countryside. A vast cultivated expanse, a few houses, a lone crossroads becomes a town. A desert, in short. The midlands of the Italian Northeast. Gabrielle exchanges a few words with Gianfranco: affable, courteous, reassuring. The two of them reach Stefanin's farmhouse, near a small town: Terrazze. Gianfranco lets the girl out of the car and invites her in.



The Toy Shop.

A striking scene. The house is filthy beyond all belief. The kitchen is brimming with boxes and heavily encrusted dishes. On the table: piles of pornographic magazines of a special variety: fetish and sado-masochism. But what really terrifies Gabrielle is that the whole place is an armoury of ropes, leather collars, whips and chains.

Stefanin, exactly like Dr.Jekyll, suddenly transforms: he forces the young prostitute to perform disgusting acts. Then he beats and rapes her. Gabrielle maybe only succeeds in saving herself by confessing to having 25 million lire in cash at home, her life savings. Stefanin is stunned, he frees Gabrielle, he tells her to get in the car and he heads back to the Venice highway. He seems, once again, like the initially calm, nice young man, well educated and above any suspicion. What really happened? For the man it was only a dream, as he declares in the following interrogation.

Anything could have happened from one moment to the next, if not, on the way, a police patrol stops the car for a routine check: lying forgotten on the rear seat, is a pistol. Loaded, with a bullet in the chamber. Stefanin is arrested.

The Bone Collector.

At this point there is a chain of related events to add to the story which are, to say the least, disturbing. On July the 3rd, 1995 Stefanin is set free. Just seven months after his arrest: he plea-bargained his sentence for kidnapping and rape. He is awaiting his appeal, and is under house arrest. Incredible, a walking time bomb has been released: it is obvious that Stefanin is not capable of controlling his compulsions. The same day, a labourer who works for the Stefanin family finds a plastic bag in a ditch that contains a mutilated female torso.

Gianfranco Stefanin's parole is revoked and he is returned back to prison. The policed are confronted with a real enigma. Stefanin is flabbergasted. He seems sincere, to the extent that the authorities are about to look elsewhere in their investigation, until the Stefanin house is gone over: a purely routine action. The scene which presents itself to the eyes of the Carabinieri is even more chilling than Gabriella Musger's testimony.

The experts from the Parma Crime Special Investigation Unit find female clothing, silk stockings, nylon and jute ropes, duct tape, various women's handbags. And blood, everywhere. On the walls, on the floor. Photographs - there are 7000 pictures. Torture, of all kinds. Some fake, others real. Blood, and not only: images of the corpses of young women. Identity documents appear, bearing the names of two girls from the East, who we will call Chicca and Biljana.

Perhaps the torso that was found belonged to one of the two girls? In the meantime, Stefanin's cousin - who is evermore and increasingly confused and flustered, and vehemently denies everything - while he is plowing one of the family's fields finds the decomposed body of a young woman. It's Biljana.

At this point, the Carabinieri are forced to call in the military engineers from the battalion barracks in Verona. They dig around and about the Stefanin household for three days.

Darkness.

Gianfranco, in prison, continues to demonstrate himself stupefied, dumbfounded. The psychiatrist that examines him almost suspects that Stefanin has completely blocked out the terrible homicides. But something in his behaviour contradicts this: Stefanin slowly takes on the tone of a child caught with his hand inside the sweets jar. Chicca is also found. The police officers are horrified: Stefanin had wrapped her up tightly in cellophane, the body is mummified.

Stefanin is now wavering between the theories of a plot and that of a terrible nightmare, of which the man has difficulty in fitting the pieces together. He doesn't seem able to remember anything about Chicca, about Biljana or about Blazenka Smollo: perhaps his last victim. Blazenska was found in a plastic sack that was thrown into a canal. The body was mangled and bound with a huge cable.

From the 7000 photos, the Carabinieri dig up 100 names of missing prostitutes. The Stefanin case becomes one of the most horrible examples of sexual perversion and necrophilia ever.

The Lost Girls.

The trial starts. On one hand Stefanin is perfectly capable of reasoning and understanding, but on the other he is subject to infantile regressions: he plays with his victims in the same manner a child would play with toy soldiers. It is difficult to distinguish which of these two personalities needs to be tried.

The final word of a difficult investigation is written by the Attorney General of Venice, in May 2000 at the Supreme Court in Rome, all partial assessments were literally thrown out, on March the 23rd, 2001 Gianfranco Stefanin is condemned to life imprisonment.

And yet, even today, no one can say with certainty, exactly what is hidden beneath the earth of the Stefanin fields, near Terrazze.