

The Idiot Englishman

by Martin Bourne

“He’s an idiot, she was screaming in Italian. This idiot will get our poor Gianni killed. This is a crisis and they send me an idiot.”

She carried on like that a few times but I did my best to ignore her. She was the Mama, matriarch of the family and it was her job to do the best for her boys. But now one of them was under threat of being executed. Of course she was going to shout and scream. I explained to her husband and her two other sons that they should try and keep her out of the way when I was on the phone.

I could see why they thought it was a crisis, but to me, this was what I thrived on. A crisis for me was something like a family illness. This was the day to day stuff. The stuff that wears you out. My dad was a miner, faced pit falls, flooding, all sorts. He just got on with it. He used to say he was an idiot, and that any idiot can deal with a crisis; its the day to day stuff that wears you out.

Now I was in Italy negotiating with kidnappers. This job came about as a result of 404 syndicate having underwritten a kidnap policy for a wealthy Italian family renowned for jewellery and perfume. One day a gang of crooks decided to kidnap the youngest son and the kidnappers demanded millions. I got the call from underwriters with the insistence from both kidnappers and family that the police were not be involved. Well, you couldn’t trust the Italian police then anyway. They’d have probably wanted a cut. So off I go.

“Do you know anything about negotiating with kidnappers, Bob Simmons, chief underwriter had asked?”

“I negotiated with plenty of villains in the police,” I replied, “these guys won’t be any different.”

By the time I got to Italy, there had been plenty of calls from the kidnappers, and with every call they had upped the threat level of what damage they were going to do to little 18 year old Gianni.

The eldest brother Luka was the head of the family due to his father being overwhelmed by the situation. Luka spoke a little English.

“Listen. The next time they call, tell them they need to speak to me in English if they want any money.”

The kidnappers called the next morning and Luka explained we needed an English speaker. “We want five million or we will cut his balls off,” said a heavily accented voice.

“Don’t asking for five million. That’s a ridiculous amount. We can’t just find that sort of money, and by the way, if you cut his balls off, he will probably die of blood loss so you’ll get nothing.”

“Don’t be a fool Englishman, or we will cut off his ears.”

“OK, let me tell you how this is going to work. Think of Gianni as a fabulous shiny Italian car, and we are going to pay for that shiny car. But if you start scratching it or damaging it in anyway, then you will get less money. This is a simple business deal. We have something you want and you have something we want. We will not pay for damaged goods so it’s in your interest that the boy is returned unharmed.”

Of course they threatened, and I continued to hold my position and eventually we got the boy back for a million, with the kidnappers having no idea that the policy had a limit go 10 million. And Gianni, well what a jumped up little shit he was.