

An extract from the book “Not here nor anywhere else” by Gianrico Carofiglio.

Following the phone call from Giampiero, 3 friends meet after 20 years. They are in their 50s. They are from Bari. They have got a very good job, They are well off. They are talking about the old times when they were schoolmates and university students in Bari. Their memories are mixed with their present situation.

They are sitting at the Gasperini café, one of the oldest café in Bari.

**Giampiero:** I'm glad to see you two. If I hadn't called you, we might not have met at all.....or perhaps one day in 2040. Come on , guys, let's go and have a coffee at the café Gasperini... let's stay in the open air...it's a nice evening though it is winter the temperature is so mild here... like it used to be when we were kids.. .

**Paolo:** I remember we never wore coats in winter...simply because we didn't have to ...after all Bari is in the south...on the Adriatic Sea ....

**Gianrico:** Do you remember what Bari was like in the 70s?I was ten when I first became aware of the city where I lived. I remember I was amazed to see all those palm trees in the streets, and thought that though Bari looked a lively modern city to me, all those amazing trees reminded me of some kind of tropical town like the ones I used to read about in my childhood. I don't know but I still find it a bit strange. By the way, Paolo what brought you here from the States?

**Paolo :** Uhm...I had to...well...I've come to sell my family house.... my parents have passed away..you know my sister and I have finally decided to sell it ...she lives here... if it hadn't been for the house I wouldn't come...it's such a long flight ...too many hours...the jet lag and all that stuff... but then here I am...

**Gianrico:** ehi..don't get so upset....I guess it won't be a long stay, will it?

**Paolo:** hopefully not ...everything will be done by tomorrow morning and by this time tomorrow evening I'll be flying back to the States ...you know there's nothing else that keeps me here....

**Gianrico :** ...how long have you been living in the States?

**Paolo :** For twenty years. I left because I won a scholarship. Once there I found it the ideal place to work..... so I decided to settle down and start a new life there.

**Gianrico :** Was it all???

**Paolo :** ....Well you both know that I was an ambitious guy....,

**Giampiero:** you were the cleverest of all in our class, do you remember when the principal came in...

**Gianrico:** come on... let him speak ... go on Paolo.

**Paolo:** What I was saying is that apart from ambition I needed a challenge ...you know after university I wanted to ... prove myself that I could make it in another country...just for my professional merits...

**Gianrico:** and you made it....I know you are a well known Professor at the university of..

**Giampiero:** come on guys let's not get too serious ... Paolo, are there any Apulian restaurants in Chicago?

**Paolo:** I don't know...I guess there are quite a lot as anywhere else in the States but... let me think ...I must admit I don't know anything about Apulian restaurants in my city either...

**Gianrico :** What is the place like where you live?

**Paolo :** It is a small village by the lake Michigan not far away from Chicago. ... The lake is beautiful , it looks like the sea sometimes...

**Gianrico :** do you miss the sea?

**Paolo** : .....oh yes , I do. To tell you the truth... I miss the smell of the sea, especially of the sea salt. ..I also miss the deep blue colour of the sky when the Mistral wind blows and..... the different shadows of blue.. green and grey of the sea water.....the contrast between the yellowish colour of the stones and the blue that wonderful blue of the sky that you can only find here.

**Giampiero:** Smells...colours?.....it's a very funny thing you are saying..

**Paolo:** Not exactly if you live on the other side of the world where nothing reminds you of the place where you were born....you start daydreaming... trying not to lose the memory of it...I don't know I can't explain...

**Giampiero:** I can understand now... sorry about that Paolo.

**Paolo:** It's ok...I can understand you too....You've never left....Your job is here you are a well known esteemed notary in Bari, a nice family and ...

**Giampiero:** You know....It's not all gold that shines! Everyone has got his troubles....his worries

**Paolo:** Troubles, worries??You!!Come on ...don't pull my legs....

**Giampiero:** what the hell you know about my troubles? Do you want to know what my deepest sorrow is ....ehi.. are you sure you want to know, doctor?... It has to do with my daughter....my loving precious daughter... my only child...she suffers from autism!

**Paolo:** I'm sorry, Giampiero....I didn't know ....sorry....how stupid I am....

**Gianrico:** calm down...Giampiero...I didn't know either...you know.. we live in the same place and we've never met after university...

**Giampiero:** I wish I had told you about it before...there are moments I think I go mad...no one to talk to...my wife ...better leave her alone ...she's devoted her life to my child and nothing else matters to her....

**Paolo:** I know how it feels...but you know... science is making progress ...I'm sure doctors will find the right treatment for your daughter...keep trying

**Giampiero:** Thanks, we'll see...ehi guys... I don't want to upset you further...let's change subject...now it's your turn Gianrico...what the hell have you been doing all this time? Were you not the one who longed for leaving this place ?

**Paolo** : Yes, I remember you wanted to leave and start somewhere else in the world..

**Gianrico:** well as you see I'm still here....you know I've always had mixed feelings about leaving or staying...you know this is a very strange city...you hate it and at the same time you know that you'll be missing it if you leave it forever...don't you agree Paolo?

**Paolo:** in a way it is as you say...

**Gianrico:** anyway, I remember that the opportunity to leave Bari occurred to me once in my life and it was when Claire broke into my life ....a long time ago ..

**Giampiero and Paolo:** Claire???Who's that girl?

**Gianrico:** She was a French girl from Paris who came here on her PHD. She was so loving and caring that of course I fell in love with her. She, too. We used to spend almost every day together but never I touched her or gave her a kiss..I don't know...I was too shy or just a clumsy boy at the time.

**Giampiero:** you were just an asshole that's it...

**Gianrico:** maybe...anyway when she finished her PHD she had to leave and of course she was... we were both sorry... Then I got a letter from her ..she wrote the most beautiful things one could imagine, then she asked me to go there... to Paris and live together...

**Paolo:** what did you do then?

**Gianrico:** you know what? I wrote a nice letter in reply...a nice ... formal letter as if we were just friends,...I don't know...I had thrown away hundreds of letters before sending that one ...full of

bullshit...just a crap of a letter and that was the end of the story.

**Giampiero:** I was right you are just an asshole!!!

**Paolo:** well ..to me..it simply means that you were not in love with her....

**Gianrico:** I don't know...maybe I didn't want to commit myself or I was scared ....the point is that I didn't want to leave this place and this is exactly the conclusion I came to at the time...Although I still have mixed feelings about Bari... I feel I can't leave it...I think this is the right place to leave for me....in the end I must admit that I love it as it is.

**Giampiero:** Why leaving then? You've become a famous writer, your books have been translated into all languages.... you are invited everywhere... in Italy... abroad so your life seems to be perfect you go and come whenever you want ...isn't it just perfect like this?

**Gianrico:** I suppose so.

**Paolo:** uhm,I'm a bit hungry...By the way, are they still there..the women who fry"sgaglioze"?

**Giampiero:** it's amazing....you still remember what they are called...those little pieces of fried polenta....yes sure, they are still there under the wall near Saint Nicholas Cathedral and piazza Mercantile....But why are you smiling?

**Paolo:** I'm smiling because I still remember the old woman who used to wrap scaglioze in the newspaper and .....

**Gianrico:** You know... sometimes it seems to me that nothing has changed since we were children.... I remember I started wondering around in Bari when I first got my dog Randy. My parents didn't want pets in the house but I managed to have a stray dog once. In the end, they gave in provided that I took care of him. Anyway, ... where was I? Oh yes, my daily walks with Randy ....there were lots of bookshops then and since I was fond of reading....

**Giampiero:** Oh yes we all remember you were a nerd and I guess you are still the same....

**Gianrico:** come on let me finish...

**Paolo:** he's right... let him go on....

**Gianrico:** I remember I was attracted to that sort of know-how books "How to become a true magician, the complete course for beginners" or "Fit like a marine, the full physical training to get strong" you know all that stuff. At the time I was a bit confused about what I wanted to be in the future....almost every day I changed my mind ...one day I wanted to become a sailor ...another day an astronaut....and again ...a scientist....a gardener.

**Giampiero:** as far as I remember you were very good at writing at school and ...

**Paolo:** yes, you got the best marks in Italian... no surprise you've become a well known writer....your parents must be proud of you...

**Gianrico:** I don't know actually, the funny thing about my parents was that when I was a child whenever I told them about my future dreams they just didn't take it seriously ...as far as I know I could have told them my utmost aspiration was to become a murderer they wouldn't worry at all ... after all... to them I was just a child ...by the way ... we were talking about bookshops... there are still a lot of the old ones today: The Laterza, Adriatica, Feltrinelli to mention just a few.

**Paolo:** and what about the cinemas? Remember we used to go there almost every day, there were lots of them in town. How about the Odeon my favourite...?

**Gianrico:** fortunately, it's still there! But most of them have been turned into those hellish bingo places! Not all of them of course...I remember the cinema where we used to go and see independent movies. In a way I always felt surprised when I thought that though we lived in a relatively small town in the south of the world we had the kind of entertainment of a city of the north... I can't fully explain it but it felt strange to me at the time..

**Paolo:** not to mention the theatre, The Petruzzelli, one of the best in Italy, classical ballet, modern dance, opera, the best actors and opera singers of the world have come here....

**Giampiero:** Don't tell me you didn't hear the news about the fire!...

**Paolo:** what fire are you talking about?

**Gianrico:** It was in 1993 when it got burnt by a fire which was deliberately started by criminals ...you know the funny thing about it if you want to see something funny in it ...well.. the night when it got burnt it was after the performance of the Norma by Bellini the final scene was actually a fire... a fake one of course ... and soon after a real one broke out... ten years passed by before those criminals were caught and brought to prison but still a mystery about who the true instigator of the whole affair was.

**Paolo:** I can't believe it! Is it still there?

**Giampiero:** Yes, no worries, It took centuries but finally it got rebuilt and now it is like once ...but you know it's not the same ....It is like being mortally injured... I mean for the people like us ....

**Gianrico:** ...and do you remember the Taverna del Maltese? When we were university students we used to meet in private clubs like the Taverna,.. nowadays young people prefer meeting outside in the open air cafès...at night...very late actually....young people... they are so different than in the past when we were young.....

**Paolo:** you're right...they are different than us and they are the same everywhere ...also in the States....and the cities.. you know.. they are all alike nowadays....and people seem to be the same everywhere...they do the same things....

**Giampiero:** this is called globalization guys...no surprise they are all alike.....

**Paolo:** ehi guys....what's this smell ....I can smell focaccia!

**Gianrico:** that's because we are sitting quite close to Magda, the pizzeria where we used to go after school to buy a piece of that tasty delicious focaccia ...don't you remember?

**Giampiero:** I still go there in the evening when I finish my work...it's part of my daily routine before going home...uhm... those fresh tomatoes and black olives....on that soft steaming pastry...

**Paolo:** come on guys...I'm craving for a piece of focaccia..let's go there then

**Gianrico:** yes let's go...like we used to.

## **The end**

Gianrico Carofiglio was born in Bari on 30 May 1961. He got a degree in Law and was a judge. In 2008 he announced his candidacy for the Democratic Party in the Senate, and in the elections of the same year he was elected senator . He started his literary activity writing short stories then in 2002 he made his debut in fiction , with "Involuntary Witness" a novel that opened the vein of Italian legal thriller .The events of the lawyer Guido Guerrieri led the author to several awards for his first novel. Following his literary success he decided to leave the judiciary to be a full-time writer. Since then he has written lots of novels translated in many languages and sold all over the world. He has received lots of Literary Prizes and Awards. Some of his novels have become well appreciated movies in Italy.