

Luigi's life in St Malo

The key to financial success was being able to move things quickly. Cash was fine provided that he didn't have too much of it on you at any one time, because you had to assume that sooner or later you would be stopped by the gendarmes and searched. Cash, up to a certain sensible value was explainable, although a few hundred Euros accompanied by the same in Pounds Sterling and Dollars would definitely look suspicious. On the other hand, jewellery and other peoples' credit cards were definitely not explainable and those were the items that he needed to be moved on quickly.

Most pickpockets worked in gangs of three or four; a lookout to raise the alarm if the gendarmes or security were nearby, a spotter who identified the target, and one or two lifters who did the pickpocketing. The importance of the gang was that, within seconds of lifting a wallet, it would be handed off to the spotter and then again to another gang member, all walking in different directions, and even if the target noticed they'd been robbed, they would never see the hand-off and so the lifter could never be caught in possession.

However, Luigi worked alone.

He had fantastic hands, quick and accurate, and only very rarely did anyone notice that he had lifted something from them. He moved easily and with confidence which was important too. If anything, he was too athletic and too good looking, both bad qualities that attracted attention from admirers, so he typically 'grunged down' and wore baggy clothes and a baseball cap. Discarding a baggy jacket or a cap was a very quick way to change your appearance if you were worried about being followed. Everyone would expect a thief to be nervous and conspicuous, but Luigi was calm and relaxed, moving away from the target as if nothing had happened, and never looking back.

There had been a few occasions, when he was younger and working in a gang, that someone had seen him lift a watch or something from someone's pocket, and raised the alarm, but that's when his athleticism came to the fore. He knew the streets of St Malo like the back of his hand, and could outpace most pursuers with ease, and had never even come close to being caught. Once a whole team of store detectives had chased him into the centre of the Old Town, and he'd had to take refuge in St Martin's church. The priest there, Father Stefan, was a good man and was never going to turn Luigi over. He guessed the priest believed that Luigi could be reformed, and that made Luigi feel a little guilty, because that was never going to happen. Luigi eventually found that working in a gang was certainly safer, but you had to split the take, and it just wasn't as exciting for him.

And so, Luigi worked alone.

On a good day, he would sell a dozen or more credit cards to the North Africans, who had a whole telephone setup to immediately start using the cards before they were reported stolen. The watches and other jewellery would go to the gold traders in the jewellery quarter, and Luigi would just accept what money they offered him. He wasn't greedy. He just needed enough to live off, and the gold traders wanted him to keep coming back, so they weren't too stingy in what they offered.

Luigi knew a lot of people, and enjoyed a varied social life, but he was a loner and didn't have any really close friends. His father was a drunk who was no longer big enough to push Luigi around. They shared an apartment but left each other alone. There were girls, Luigi was only human, but no-one that he had seen for more than a few weeks, and he liked to chat to young women who were just visiting, practice his language skills but wasn't looking for an attachment.

The pain of losing his mother was never far below the surface, and every year on her birthday, Luigi borrowed a car and went to The Mont St Michel, her favourite place, and ate in her favourite restaurant, the one she had taken him to when he was a young boy. He would toast his mother, and

then cry quietly to himself on the way home. His father would be unconscious when he got back, and they never mentioned his mother.

At school he had been quicker than most in his year and had a short attention span, which meant that he got bored and fooled around a lot. He'd been given a scholarship to Ecole Jacques Cartier, sponsored very strongly by the fearsome Dauphine, but he wasn't from a middle-class background like all the other kids at the school, and naturally felt apart and different to them all. The dilemma for his teachers was that Luigi was chatty and engaging with them, and with other pupils in his year, but just wasn't one to join in any team activities. He was a strong soccer player, but the school had a weak team, and Luigi played up front, scored a few goals, but never really broke into a sweat. He was an enigma to his teachers.

His father had been a lively and outgoing character, always singing, and joking with his pals, which was how he had won the heart of Luigi's mother when she was visiting St Malo as a young woman. She had been captivated by his confidence and charm, and he was totally besotted with her. Sadly, her death hit both of them hard, and they both retreated from the world in their own way, his father into a bottle of whisky, and Luigi retreated safely behind his winning smile and quick wit, keeping the world at arm's length.

Two loners, living together, both heartbroken.