



# Indecent Secrets: The Infamous Murri Murder Affair

*Christina Vella*

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On a hot summer day in Italy in 1902, the brutally stabbed body of Count Francesco Bonmartini was discovered, by means of its decomposing stench, inside his locked apartment. He was a typical Italian provincial aristocrat in all but one way: he had married into a prominent but deeply troubled family. His father-in-law was one of the nation's most famous doctors. His wife, Linda, a young freethinker, was the apple of her father's eye. Linda's brother dabbled in anarchism. Linda's lover was her father's top assistant. Her relations with them were illicit, incestuous -- and murderous.

The scandal that erupted was a top news story in Europe and America for three consecutive years. Investigators uncovered successive layers of a conspiracy that constantly twisted and changed its shape. The suspects included all these men as well as their servants and lovers. There was a diverse array of murder weapons, including knives, heavy pellets, and poison. There were rumors of missing accomplices. Intimate relations among many suspects were uncovered through sensational letters and testimonials. Witnesses died mysteriously. A suspect tried to kill himself. One question lingered throughout and still haunts researchers today: what role did Bonmartini's widow, Linda, known as "The Enchantress," play? Was she the spider at the center of the vast web, or did the plot originate with the key men who loved her so desperately?

Scholar and writer Christina Vella combines meticulous research with a novelist's eye for a great story. As she unspools the tight, tense drama, she offers a fascinating picture of Italian society in the early 20th century, with a historian's insights into life at both the top and the bottom. From sexual dysfunctions, to prison conditions, to the patronage systems that permeated medicine, law, and politics, the Bonmartini murder provides a window into a rich world.

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