

Amanda Knox: *Waiting To Be Heard*

Chapter 20: December 2007

When I first told Carlo and Luciano I wanted to talk to Prosecutor Mignini, I didn't think of it as a rematch between opposing sides. I saw it as a chance to set the record straight. Finally.

"I'm sure if I talk to him in person, I can show him I'm sincere," I told my lawyers. "I can convince him he's been wrong about me. It bothers me that everyone—the prosecutor, the police, the press, the public—thinks I'm a murderer. If I just had the chance to present my real self to Mignini I'm sure I could change that perception. People could no longer say I'm a killer."

Carlo and Luciano looked at me doubtfully. "I'm not sure it's the best idea," Carlo said. "Mignini is cagey. He'll do everything he can to trick you."

"I feel like it's my only hope," I said. "My memoriali didn't change anyone's mind—they just made the prosecution and the media portray me as a liar. I didn't get to tell the judge what happened before she confirmed my arrest. I think I have to explain face-to-face why I named Patrick. I've got to make Mignini understand why I said I'd met Patrick at the basketball court, why I said I'd heard Meredith scream."

"He can be intimidating," Carlo said.

"The thought of meeting with Mignini makes me incredibly anxious," I said. "I know what it's like to be bullied by him. But I have to try."

My thought was that I had misled the police. I needed to take responsibility for my mistake. It seemed like the right, and adult, thing to do.

"Nothing good is going to come of this," Luciano grumbled.

But when my lawyers came to Capanne the following week, they told me that they'd decided, reluctantly, to arrange a second interrogation.

"It's risky," Carlo said. "Mignini will try to pin things on you."

"He already has," I told them.

The first time I met Mignini at the questura, I hadn't understood who he was, what was going on, what was wrong, why people were yelling at me, why I couldn't remember anything. I thought he was someone who could help me (the mayor), not the person who would sign my arrest warrant and put me behind bars.

This time I was ready. This time my lawyers would be there. I'd be rested. My mind was clear. I was going in knowing what I was getting into. I'd take my time and answer all his questions in English. I didn't think I'd be released immediately, but I hoped that giving the prosecutor a clear understanding of what had happened would help me. Then, as new evidence came forward proving my innocence, Mignini would have to let me go.

I now had a standing Wednesday morning appointment with my lawyers. Each week, as I walked into the prison office that doubled as our meeting room, both men would stand up and say, "Ciao, Amanda." Then Luciano would tilt his head back, look up at the ceiling, and say, "Ciao, polizia," before he'd look back at me:

"Teniamoci conto degli altri ospiti alla festa"—"Let's keep in mind the other guests at the party."

Luciano's jaunty greeting was not my only clue that the room was almost certainly bugged. My lawyers had been clear: "Never repeat anything about your case to anyone," Carlo said. "I'm sure you're being watched and listened to. I understand your need to talk freely with your parents, but the police will take advantage of anything they can to build their case against you. Please be careful."

"Okay," I said.

But I wasn't good at censoring myself. I had only two hours a week with my mom and dad, and they were the only people I could open up to. It made me feel better to vent, and my parents needed to know what I was thinking. I couldn't see the danger in discussing with them my day-to-day prison life, my interactions with my cellmates and guards, or my case. Since I hadn't been involved in the murder, I figured that anything I said would only help prove my innocence.

I hadn't considered that the prosecution would twist my words. I didn't think they would be capable of taking anything I said and turning it into something incriminating, because everything I said was about my innocence and how I wanted to go home. I was saying the same thing again and again.

On their first visit after the knife story came out, Dad and Mom were telling me my lawyers' theory—that the police could be using the knife as a scare tactic to get me to incriminate myself. "The police have nothing at all on you," Mom said. "So they are trying . . . to see if you[']ll say something more."

"It's stupid," I said. "I can't say anything but the truth, because I know I was there. I mean, I can't lie about this, there is no reason to do it."

What I meant by "I was there" was that I was at Raffaele's apartment the night of Meredith's murder, that I couldn't possibly implicate myself. I hadn't been at the villa. I wasn't going to slip up, because I wasn't hiding anything.

Sitting next to me at the table in the room where we'd been reunited a few weeks earlier—the same room where I met with my lawyers—Mom held my hands in hers, nodding in agreement at me. Then we moved on to other topics, such as how we each were getting through this and what friends and family at home were doing to try to help.

The police did not move on. They seized on my comment, which they had on tape. A couple of weeks later, in early December, a convoluted version of what I'd said made international headlines, including the London Telegraph's "Tape 'Puts Knox at Meredith's Murder' Scene."

The article began, "Dramatic new evidence has emerged that may help prove that Amanda Knox, the American girl accused of murdering Meredith Kercher, was present when the British student died."

The police had leaked the false but enticing tale to the press.

Luciano and Carlo understood what I hadn't yet grasped: that the prosecution was so fixated on proving my guilt, they saw only what they wanted to see, heard only what they wanted to hear, found only what they wanted to find. Facts be damned.

I was indignant. "How can they do that?" I asked. "It's straight-up false!"

"Don't worry," Carlo said. "We'll be able to prove it's wrong once the prosecution gives us the transcripts. But please use this as a lesson, Amanda. The prosecution will pounce on anything they believe will serve their purposes. Please remember the room where you and your parents visit is bugged."

Being more careful in the future wouldn't immediately resolve this serious misunderstanding. A few days later the judge considered those words when deciding if I could be moved to house arrest. In another crushing blow that characterized my early months in prison, my request was denied. I was stuck alone behind bars.

Calling the intercepted conversation a "clue," the judge wrote, "it can certainly be read as a confirmation of the girl's presence in her home at the moment of the crime."

He went on to describe me as "crafty and cunning," saying that I was "a multifaced personality, unattached to reality with an elevated . . . fatal, capacity to kill again."

It wasn't until my pretrial, the following September, that a different judge agreed with my defense that it was obvious I was talking about Raffaele's apartment, not the villa, and removed this "evidence" from the record.

Just as Carlo had told me not to discuss my case, he'd also warned me to write down as little as possible, caution that I thought was borderline paranoid. I'd started keeping a journal as soon as I learned to write complete sentences, and I didn't see why I should stop now, when I needed that outlet the most. Even after my prison diary was confiscated, I didn't worry about anything I'd written. I wasn't guilty. I didn't think about what could happen once my words were out of my hands.

Not even my lawyers understood my journal musings on Raffaele and the knife that made their way into the newspapers. I'd written a hyperbolic explanation about him taking the knife from his apartment behind my back. I had to explain to Carlo and Luciano that I'd concocted it because the possibility of a knife with Meredith's DNA coming out of Raffaele's apartment had struck me as so preposterous:

Unless Raffaele decided to get up after I fell asleep, grabbed said knife, went over to my house, used it to kill Meredith, came home, cleaned it off, rubbed my fingerprints all over it, put it away, then tucked himself back into bed, and then pretended really well the next couple of days, well, I just highly doubt all of that.

But I didn't have the luxury of explaining what I'd written to everyone who read it. After my passage was translated into Italian and then retranslated back into English, it bore little resemblance to the original—and a great resemblance to the prosecution's theories about what had happened the night of November 1:

That night I smoked a lot of marijuana and I fell asleep at my boyfriend's house. I don't remember anything. But I think it's possible that Raffaele went to Meredith's house, raped her and then killed her. And then when he got home, while I was sleeping, he put my fingerprints on the knife. But I don't understand why Raffaele would do that.

Once I had my meeting with the prosecutor I'd correct all the confusion about me. I thought my upcoming interrogation would tie up all these loose strands.

Carlo and Luciano warned me once again that it might not be so simple. "Mignini will ask pointed questions to snare you," Carlo said, his face serious. "He will try to paint you as a liar. He wants to show that you have a connection to Rudy Guede. He'll try to prove that you lied about Patrick on purpose. Are you prepared for that, Amanda?"

"I know," I said. "I'm ready."

But I didn't—and I wasn't.

As the date for the interrogation approached, Luciano and Carlo offered me a few pointers. "Don't let him get to you. Don't say anything if you don't remember it perfectly. It's okay to say, 'I don't remember.' You don't have to be God and know everything. It's better to say, 'I don't know,' and move on."

I was a jumble of emotions—eager to set the prosecutor and the public straight on who I really was and nervous about putting myself out there. But the night before Interrogation Day, my nerves overtook my excitement. I couldn't eat much of the pizza my roommates and I made for dinner on our camp stove. I turned and tossed most of the night, thinking about what I wanted to tell the prosecutor. As I was being escorted to the prison compound's center building at 10 A.M. the next day, I was humming my prison anthem, "Let It Be," trying to calm some of my jitters.

The meeting took place in the same makeshift courtroom as my hearing to confirm my arrest five weeks earlier. The setting wasn't that much more pleasant than the questura office where Mignini had interrogated me the first time. Separate tables for the defense and the prosecution faced each other from opposite sides of the small, dim, bare room, with two barred windows set close to the ceiling so no one could see in or out.

The tension was instantly obvious. Mignini was sitting at his table with two police officers. Like Carlo and Luciano, he was wearing a black robe. The three men had come ready for a fight. I felt awkward and out of place, as though I'd stepped into the middle of a feud that had nothing to do with me.

But I was the reason for the feud—and the only person who could set things right.

I stood near Carlo and Luciano with an interpreter, waiting for Mignini to give me permission to speak. That never came. Instead of asking what I had to say, he started firing questions at me immediately.

What has stuck with me the most is that he never looked me in the eye. He stared down at the paper in his hand, on which his questions were written out. It's as if I didn't merit the effort it would have taken to look up.

"Do you have any Spanish friends?" he asked—Rudy Guede said he hung out with Spanish friends on Halloween.

I was calm and assertive. "No," I answered.

"What's the meaning behind your name Foxy Knoxy?"

"It's just a nickname," I said.

"But what is the meaning behind it?"

"There is no meaning behind it. It's a play on my last name, Knox. My soccer teammates started calling me that as a teenager."

"Why do you use it to identify yourself?"

"I don't. I don't introduce myself as 'Foxy Knoxy.' "

"Did you have problems with Meredith?"

"No. We didn't know each other long, but we were friends."

"Do you know Rudy Guede?"

"I met him," I said, "but I didn't remember his name until he was arrested."

Mignini grilled me about my drug use, the people I knew in Perugia, the friends I'd invited over to the villa. He asked me when I'd found out that Meredith had been stabbed, hoping to prove that I knew the details of her death before an innocent person would have had the chance to.

It bothered me that as I answered him as fully as I could through an interpreter, Mignini would usually repeat the question. I was afraid I wasn't making myself clear. At first, Carlo, acting as a second interpreter, spoke in measured tones. He would interrupt and say, "What she is really saying is . . ." or "She's already answered that question!"

My lawyers listened intently to Mignini's wording, to his repetitions, to the interpreter's translation of his questions and my responses, and jumped up to object to suggestive phrasing and misinterpretations. They came prepared to protect me from what they'd warned me against: aggressive and insidious questioning by a prosecutor whose interest wasn't to hear me out but to get me to say something incriminating. Luciano and Carlo grew less measured as the interrogation dragged on.

After five and a half hours of standing and fielding questions, I was tired, but I thought everything was going okay. During the short breaks, Luciano would put his hand on my shoulder, and Carlo would say, "You're doing well."

Then the conversation turned to my November 6, middle-of-the-night interrogation and how I could have said something without meaning to. I explained how much pressure the police put me under and how confused I was by their claims that I'd met up with someone, that I'd been to the villa that night. Mignini became defensive. "I was there," he said, referring to the questura the night of my interrogation. "I heard you saying these things."

I said, "You were telling me these things. I was saying, 'I'm not sure. I'm confused.' "

This interrogation was becoming more and more like the one I'd meant to correct. It wasn't a do-over at all. Mignini would ask a question, and when I answered, he would reject my response and ask again. He was trying to intimidate me, spewing words at me.

Luciano and Carlo were leaning forward in their seats.

"Where did the name Patrick come up?" Mignini demanded.

"From my cell phone," I said. "Because I'd texted a message to Patrick. I wrote, 'See you later.' "

"What did you mean by your message?"

"In English, it means 'Goodbye. See you later, as in sometime.' It's not like making an appointment to see someone. And I wrote, 'Buona serata'—'Have a good evening.' I had no plans to meet up with him."

"Why did you erase Patrick's message?"

"I sometimes erased the messages I received. I didn't have enough memory in my cell phone to keep them."

"Why did you say you didn't remember writing that message?"

"Because I didn't remember."

"Why did you name Patrick?"

"The police insisted I'd met the person I had sent the text message to."

"No. Why did you name Patrick?"

"The police had been asking me about Patrick."

"No! Why did you name Patrick?"

"The police insisted it was Patrick."

He was more and more aggressive about it. "Why Patrick?"

"Because of my message."

"That doesn't explain why Patrick."

"Yes, it does."

"Why did you say Patrick killed her?"

"Because I was confused. Because I was under pressure."

"NO!" he insisted. "Why did you say Patrick?"

I was more frustrated than I'd ever been. "Because I thought it could have been him!" I shouted, starting to cry.

I meant that I'd imagined Patrick's face and so I had really, momentarily, thought it was him.

Mignini jumped up, bellowing, "Aha!"

I was sobbing out of frustration, anger.

My lawyers were on their feet. "This interrogation is over!" Luciano shouted, swiping his arm at the air.

Carlo and Luciano sat me down and huddled around me, saying, "It's okay, Amanda, it's okay. You did a good job, and we'll talk about it the next time we come."

Then a guard walked me out. I was sobbing hysterically. I had done my best to explain everything, and I had failed completely.

As he left, Mignini apparently told waiting reporters that I hadn't explained anything or said anything new. All I did, he said, was cry.

That day changed everything for me. I understood that the prosecution's goal was not about trying to find out who had killed Meredith. I was left with the horrible certainty that I'd made a mistake and there was nothing I could do to fix it. There was nothing I could do that would make any difference to the prosecutor. In Mignini's hands, everything was distorted and bent to seem like more evidence of my guilt, and I was devastated.

Back in my cell, the Italian news channel was replaying a scene from the previous weekend, of Meredith's family, dressed in black, walking into her funeral service in England. I knew about the funeral from Don Saulo, and my spirit had been with Meredith all that day. As I watched her heartbroken family, I could only think, With all I'm going through, I'm the lucky one.