

THE SMELL OF THE NIGHT

ANDREA CAMILLERI

Translated by Stephen Sartarelli



PENGUIN BOOKS

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Table of Contents

[Title Page](#)
[Copyright Page](#)

[Chapter 1](#)
[Chapter 2](#)
[Chapter 3](#)
[Chapter 4](#)
[Chapter 5](#)
[Chapter 6](#)
[Chapter 7](#)
[Chapter 8](#)
[Chapter 9](#)
[Chapter 10](#)
[Chapter 11](#)
[Chapter 12](#)
[Chapter 13](#)
[Chapter 14](#)
[Chapter 15](#)
[Chapter 16](#)

[Author's Note](#)
[Notes](#)

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—*Rocky Mountain News*

“Camilleri once again thrills with his fluid storytelling and quirky characters.”

-*Publishers Weekly*



A PENGUIN MYSTERY

THE SMELL OF THE NIGHT

Andrea Camilleri is the author of many books, including his Montalbano series, which has been adapted for Italian television and translated into nine languages. He lives in Rome.

Stephen Sartarelli is an award-winning translator. He is also the author of three books of poetry, most recently *The Open Vault*.

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The shutter outside the wide-open window slammed so hard against the wall that it sounded like a gunshot. Montalbano, who at that moment was dreaming he was in a shoot-out, suddenly woke up, sweaty and at the same time freezing cold. He got up, cursing, and ran to close everything. The north wind was blowing so icy and insistent that instead of brightening the colors of the morning as it had always done, it was carrying them away, erasing them by half, leaving behind only afterimages, or rather faint blotches of the sort made by a Sunday watercolorist. Apparently the summer, which several days earlier had already entered its final throes, had decided during the night to give up the ghost and make way for the season to come, which should have been autumn. Should have been, because, in fact, to judge from the entry it was making, this autumn was already looking like the depths of winter.

Lying back down, Montalbano started elegizing on the disappearance of the transitional seasons. Where had they gone? Swept up like everything else by the ever faster rhythm of human existence, they too had adjusted.

Realizing they represented a pause, they had died out, because nowadays no pause can ever be granted by this increasingly frenzied rat race and the endless verbs that feed it: living, eating, studying, fucking, producing, zapping, buying, selling, shitting, dying. Endless verbs that last only, however, a nanosecond, the twinkling of an eye. But weren't there once other verbs as well? To think, to meditate, to listen, and—why not?—to loaf, to daydream, to wander ... Practically with tears in his eyes, Montalbano reminisced about spring and fall clothes and the lightweight duster his father used to wear. Which made him realize that, to go to work, he'd have to put on a winter suit.

Making an effort, he got up and opened the armoire where he kept his heavy clothes. The stink of several tons of mothballs assailed his nostrils. At first it took his breath away, then his eyes started watering and he began to sneeze. He sneezed some twelve times in a row, mucus running down from his nose, head ringing, the pain in his chest growing sharper and sharper. He had forgotten that Adelina, his housekeeper, had forever been waging her own personal, all-out war against moths, from which she always, implacably, emerged defeated.

The inspector gave up. He closed the armoire, went over to the chest of drawers, and pulled out a heavy sweater. Here too Adelina had used chemical weapons, but Montalbano was ready this time and held his breath. He went out on the veranda and laid the sweater down on the table, to air out at least some of the smell. But when, after washing, shaving, and getting dressed, he came back out on the veranda to put it on, the sweater—the very one, brand-new, that Liyia had brought him from London—was gone! How was he ever going to explain to her that some son of a bitch had been unable to resist the temptation and had reached out and grabbed it, thank you very much? He imagined exactly how the conversation with his girlfriend would go:

“Well, fancy that! It was to be expected!”

“What do you mean?”

“Because it was a gift from me!”

“What’s that got to do with it?”

“It’s got everything to do with it! Everything! You never attach any importance to the things I give you! Like the shirt I brought you from—”

“I still have it.”

“Of course you still have it! You’ve never worn it! And what is this, anyway, the famous Inspector Montalbano getting robbed by some two-bit thief? It’s enough to make you bury your head in the sand!”

And at that moment he saw it. The sweater, that is. Buffeted away by the north wind, it was rolling along the sand, and as it rolled and rolled, it got closer and closer to the point where the water soaked the beach with each new wave.

Montalbano leapt over the railing and ran, sand filling his socks and shoes, and arrived just in time to snatch the sweater away from an angry wave that looked particularly hungry for that article of clothing.

Walking back to the house, half blinded by the sand whipped into his eyes by the wind, he had no choice but to accept that the sweater had been reduced to a formless, sodden mass of wool. Once inside, the phone rang.

“Hi, darling. How are you? I wanted to let you know that I won’t be at home today. I’m going to the beach with a friend.”

“You’re not going to the office?”

“No, it’s a holiday here. Feast of San Giorgio, patron saint of Genoa.”

“The weather’s nice up there?”

“Fabulous.”

“Well, have fun. Talk to you tonight.” This was all he needed to make his day. Here he was, shivering with cold, while Livia would be lying blissfully in the sun. Still further proof that the world was no longer turning the way it used to. Now up north you died of heat, and down south you’d soon be seeing ice, bears, and penguins.

He was getting ready to reopen the armoire, holding his breath, when the phone rang again. He hesitated a moment, but then the thought of the upset stomach he would get from another whiff of mothballs persuaded him to pick up the receiver.

“Hello?”

“Oh, Chief, Chief!” yelled the tortured, panting voice of Catarella. “Is that you yourself in person, Chief?”

“No.”

“Then who is this with whom I’m speaking with?”

“This is Arturo, the inspector’s twin brother.”

Why was he fucking around with that poor idiot? To vent his bad mood?

“Really?” said Catarella, astonished. “Excuse me, Mr. Twin Brother Arturo, but if the inspector’s like roundabout the house, couldja tell ’im I need to talk to him?”

Montalbano let a few seconds go by. Maybe the story he’d just invented could come in handy on another occasion. He wrote down on a piece of paper, “*My brother’s name is Arturo,*” then greeted Catarella.

“Here I am! What’s up?”

“Oh, Chief, Chief! All hell’s breaking out! You know the premises where that broker Gragano got his office?”

“You mean Gargano?”

“Yes. Why, ain’t that what I said? Gragano.”

“Never mind. I know where it is. What about it?”

“What’s about it’s a man with a gun’s about it. Sergeant Fazio seen ‘im when he was just chancing to be passing by by chance. Looks like he’s got a mind to shoot the lady that works there. Says as how he wants all the money back that Gragano stole from ‘im or he’s gonna kill the lady.”

The inspector threw the sweater onto the floor, kicked it under the table, and was out the door. The time it took to get in the car was enough for the north wind to send him into seizures.



The *ragioniere* Emanuele Gargano, a tall, handsome, well-dressed forty-year-old with always the right shade of suntan, looked like an American movie star. He belonged to that short-lived breed of businessman that is the fast climber, short-lived because by the age of fifty they’re already so worn out that they’re ready for the scrap heap (the latter being a favorite expression of theirs). *Ragioniere* Gargano, by his own account, was born in Sicily but had worked a long time in Milan, where, in short, and again by his own account, he’d made a name for himself as a kind of financial miracle worker. Then, judging himself sufficiently famous, he’d decided to go into business for himself in Bologna, where, still by his own account, he’d brought fortune and happiness to dozens of small investors. Some two years back he’d surfaced in Vigata, to work towards what he called “the economic reawakening of this beloved and unlucky land of ours,” and in just a few days he had set up offices in four of the larger towns of Montelusa province. He was a man who was never at a loss for words and had great powers of persuasion over everyone he met, always with a big, reassuring smile on his face. In a week’s time—spent racing from one town to the next in a shiny, eye-popping luxury car, a kind of lure for his prey—he had won over about a hundred

clients, average age sixty or more, who had turned their life savings over to him. After six months had passed, the aging pensioners were called in to pick up, risking heart attacks on the spot, a twenty-percent return on their investment. The *ragioniere* then summoned all his clients from the surrounding province to Vigata for a gala dinner, at the end of which he let it be known that, in the coming semester, the returns might even be slightly higher. The news spread and people began lining up at the counters of his various local offices, begging Gargano to take their money. Which the *ragioniere* magnanimously accepted. In this second wave, alongside the oldsters were handfuls of kids anxious to make money as quickly as possible. At the end of the second semester, the returns of the first group of clients increased to twenty-three percent. It was smooth sailing for a while, with a stiff tail wind, but then, one day towards the end of the fourth semester, Emanuele Gargano failed to show up. His agencies' employees and clients waited two days and then decided to phone Bologna, where the general management office of "King Midas Associates"—the name of the *ragioniere*'s investment firm—was supposedly located. Nobody answered. A quick investigation led to the discovery that the premises of King Midas Associates, leased by said firm, had been turned back over to their legal owner, who for his part was furious that the rent hadn't been paid for many months. After a week of pointless searches yielded not a trace of Gargano in or around Vigata, and after several riotous assaults on the agencies by people who had invested their money with Midas, two schools of thought emerged concerning the *ragioniere*'s mysterious disappearance.

The first had it that Emanuele Gargano, after changing his name, must have moved to an island in Oceania, where he was now living it up with beautiful half-naked women, laughing all the while at those who'd placed their trust and savings in his hands.

The second found it more likely that the *ragioniere* had carelessly made off with some mafioso's money and was now serving as fertilizer six feet underground or as fish feed in the local waters.

In all of Montelusa province there was one woman, however, who saw things differently. Only one, and her name was Mariastella Cosentino.

Fiftyish, stocky, and homely, Mariastella had applied for a job at Midas's Vigata agency and, after a brief but intense meeting with the boss in person, had been taken on. That's how the story went. Yet however brief the meeting, it had been long enough for the woman to fall hopelessly in love with the *ragioniere*. And while this was the second job for Mariastella—who, after getting a degree in accounting, had stayed home for many years to help out her parents and later her widowed father, who'd become more and more demanding before he died—it was, in fact, her first love. For Mariastella had been promised since birth to a distant cousin she'd never seen except in photographs and never known in person because he died of an unknown illness in his youth. Things were different this time, however, and Mariastella had not only seen her beloved alive and speaking on several occasions, but had even, one morning, got so close as to smell the scent of his aftershave. That incident drove her to do something audacious—so audacious, indeed, that she would never in the world have thought herself capable of it. She took the bus to Fiacca to visit a relative who owned a

perfume shop and, after smelling bottle after bottle, found the aftershave used by her beloved. She bought a flask of it, which she kept in the drawer of her bedside table. On certain nights, when she woke up alone in bed, alone in the large, empty house and overcome with distress, she would uncork it and inhale the scent, and this allowed her to go back to sleep, murmuring, “Good night, my love.”

Mariastella was convinced that Emanuele Gargano had not run away with all the money entrusted to him, much less been killed in some row with the Mafia. When questioned by Mimi Augello (Montalbano had no desire to get involved in the case, claiming he didn’t understand a damn thing about money matters), Miss Cosentino had stated that, in her opinion, the *ragioniere* must be suffering from temporary amnesia and would reappear sooner or later and set all the wagging tongues to rest. And she’d said this with such lucid fervor that Augello was in danger of believing it himself.

Armed with her faith in Gargano’s honesty, Mariastella would open up the office every morning, sit down and wait for her love to return. Everyone in town laughed at her. Everyone, that is, who hadn’t had any dealings with the *ragioniere*, since those who’d lost their money were not in a laughing mood. The day before, Gallo had told Montalbano that Miss Cosentino had even gone to the bank to pay, out of her own pocket, the rent that was due on the office. So why had the guy now threatening her with a gun got it in his head to take it out on her? Poor thing, she had nothing to do with the whole affair. And why, in fact, had the distraught investor come up with his brilliant idea so late, some thirty days after Gargano’s disappearance, in other words at a time when most of the *ragioniere*’s victims had resigned themselves to the worst? Montalbano belonged to the first school of thought, the one that believed that the *ragioniere* had split after screwing everybody, and he felt very sorry for Mariastella Cosentino. Every time he happened to pass in front of the agency and saw her sitting there calmly behind the counter, he felt an ache in his heart that would stay with him for the rest of the day.



There were about thirty people in front of the King Midas office, heatedly talking and wildly gesticulating, and kept at bay by three municipal policemen. Recognizing the inspector, they surrounded him.

“Is it true there’s a man with a gun inside?”

“Who is he? Who is he?”

He forced his way through the crowd, shoving and yelling, and finally reached the entrance to the building. But here he stopped, slightly bewildered. Inside he saw, recognizing them from behind, Mimi Augello, Fazio, and Galluzzo, who looked as if they were involved in some strange kind of ballet: first bending their upper bodies to the right, then to the left, then taking one step forward, one step back. He opened the glass outer door without a sound and got a better look at the scene. The office

consisted of a single, spacious room divided in two by a wooden counter with a sheet of glass and a teller's window on top. Beyond this partition were four empty desks.

Mariastella Cosentino was sitting at her usual place behind the teller's window, very pale, but calm and composed. One came and went between the two sections of the office through a small wooden door in the partition itself.

The assailant, or whatever he was—Montalbano didn't know how to define him—was standing right in the little doorway between the two sections, so that he could keep his gun trained simultaneously on Mariastella and the three policemen. He was an old man of about eighty whom the inspector recognized at once, a respected land surveyor named Salvatore Garzullo. Partly because of nervous tension, partly because of fairly advanced Parkinson's, the pistol—which dated surely back to the days of Buffalo Bill and the Sioux—was shaking so badly in the old man's hands that whenever he aimed it at one of the inspector's men, they all took fright because they couldn't tell where an eventual shot might end up.

"I want back the money that son of a bitch stole from me, or I'm going to kill the lady!"

The land surveyor had been yelling this same demand without variation for over an hour, and by now he was getting worn out and hoarse. More than speaking, he seemed to be making gargling sounds.

Montalbano took three resolute steps, walked past the line formed by his men, and held out his hand to the old man, a smile beaming across his face.

"Dear Mr. Garzullo, what a pleasure to see you! How are you?"

"I'm doing all right, thanks," said Garzullo, confused.

But he recovered himself immediately when he saw Montalbano about to take another step towards him.

"Stay where you are or I'll shoot!"

"For heaven's sake, Inspector, be careful!" Miss Cosentino said in a steady voice. "If someone has to be sacrificed for Mr. Gargano, let it be me. I'm ready!"

Instead of bursting out laughing at the melodrama of these lines, Montalbano felt enraged. If he could have had Gargano in his hands at that moment, he would have slapped his face to a bloody pulp.

"Let's not be foolish! Nobody here is going to be sacrificed!"

Then, turning back to the land surveyor, he began his improvisation.

"Excuse me, Mr. Garzullo, but where were you yesterday evening?"

"What the hell is it to you?" the old man retorted combatively.

"For your own good, answer me."

The old man pursed his lips, then finally decided to open his mouth.

"I'd just got back home. I was four months in Palermo hospital, and that was where

they told me Gargano ran off with my money. Everything I had, after a life of hard work!”

“So yesterday evening you did not turn on the television?”

“I didn’t wanna hear any of that bullshit.”

“So that’s why you don’t know!” said Montalbano, triumphant.

“What is it I’m supposed to know?” asked Garzullo, dumbfounded.

“*Ragioniere* Gargano’s been arrested.”

The inspector looked out of the corner of his eye at Mariastella. He was expecting a scream, or any reaction at all; but the woman remained immobile, looking more confused than convinced.

“Really?” said the old man.

“Word of honor,” said Montalbano, in a superb performance. “They arrested him and confiscated twelve big suitcases stuffed full of money. They’re going to start giving the money back to its rightful owners this very morning in Montelusa, at the Prefecture. Do you have the receipt for the amount you gave to Gargano?”

“I sure do!” said the old man, tapping with his free hand against his jacket pocket, where he kept his wallet.

“So there’s no problem, it’s all been settled,” said Montalbano.

He walked up to the old man, took the pistol out of his hand, and set it down on the counter.

“Think I could go to the Prefecture tomorrow?” Garzullo asked. “I’m not feeling so well.”

He would have collapsed onto the floor if the inspector hadn’t been ready to catch him.

“Fazio and Galluzzo, quick, put him in the car and take him to the hospital.”

The two policemen picked up the old man, who, as he was being carried past Montalbano, managed to say: “Thanks for everything.”

“Not at all, you’re very welcome,” said Montalbano, feeling like the biggest heel in the world.

Mimi meanwhile had rushed over to help Miss Mariastella, who, though she remained seated, had started swaying in place like a tree in a windstorm.

“Want me to get you anything from the café?”

“A glass of water, thank you.”

At that moment they heard a burst of applause from outside, accompanied by shouts of “Bravo! Long live old man Garzullo!” Apparently many of the people in the crowd had been swindled by Gargano.

“But why do they hate him so much?” the woman asked as Mimi was leaving.

She was wringing her hands and had now turned, in reaction, from pale to tomato-red.

“Well, they’ve probably got their reasons,” the inspector replied diplomatically. “You know better than I that the *ragioniere* has disappeared.”

“Of course, but why must people immediately think the worst? He might have lost his memory in a car accident, or after a fall, I don’t know ... I even took the liberty of telephoning ...”

She broke off, shaking her head disconsolately.

“Never mind,” she said, concluding her thought.

“Tell me who it was you called.”

“Do you watch television?”

“Sometimes. Why?”

“I’d heard there was a program called Anybody Seen ‘Em?, which is about missing persons. So I got their telephone number and—”

“I get the picture. What did they tell you?”

“They said they couldn’t do anything, since I was unable to give them the necessary information, age, place of disappearance, photographs, that sort of thing.”

Silence fell. Mariastella’s hands had become a single, inextricable knot. Montalbano’s accursed police instincts, which had been dozing off, suddenly popped awake for no apparent reason.

“You, signorina, must also take into account the fact that a lot of money disappeared with Mr. Gargano. We’re talking about billions and billions of lire, you know.”

“Yes, I know.”

“And you haven’t the slightest idea where—”

“I only know that he invested that money. Where and in what he invested it, I can’t say.”

“And you and he.... ?”

Mariastella’s face became a blaze of fire.

“What.... what do you mean?”

“Has he contacted you in any way since his disappearance?”

“If he had, I would have mentioned it to Inspector Augello, when he questioned me. But I’ll repeat to you what I said to your assistant: Emanuele Gargano has only one goal in life, and that is to make others happy.”

“I have no problem believing that,” said Montalbano.

And he meant it. He was convinced that *ragioniere* Gargano was making some high-class prostitutes, nightclub owners, casino managers, and luxury-car dealers very happy on some lost Polynesian island.

Mimi Augello returned with a bottle of mineral water, a few paper cups, and his cell phone glued to his ear.

“Yessir, yessir, I’ll put him on right away.”

He handed the contraption to the inspector.

“It’s for you. The commissioner.”

What a pain in the ass! Relations between Montalbano and Commissioner Bonetti-Alderighi could hardly be said to be characterized by mutual esteem and sympathy. If he was calling the inspector, it meant there was some unpleasant matter to discuss. And Montalbano, at that moment, had no desire for any such thing.

“At your service, Mr. Commissioner.”

“Come here immediately.”

“Give me an hour at the most, and I’ll—”

“Montalbano, you may be Sicilian, but surely you studied Italian at school? Don’t you know the meaning of the adverb ‘immediately’?”

“Just a second, I’ll need to think that over. Ah, yes. It means, ‘Without interval of time.’ Am I right, Mr. Commissioner?”

“Spare me the wit. You have exactly fifteen minutes to get here to Montelusa.”

He hung up.

“Mimi, I have to go see the commissioner right away. Grab Garzullo’s pistol and take it in to headquarters. And Miss Cosentino, allow me a word of advice: Close this office right now and go home.”

“Why?”

“Because in a very short while, you see, everyone in town will know about Mr.

Garzullo's stroke of genius. And it's not beyond the realm of possibility that some idiot will repeat the stunt, and that this time it will be somebody younger and more dangerous."

"No," said a resolute Mariastella. "I'm not leaving this place. What if Mr. Gargano were to return? He'd find nobody here."

"Imagine the disappointment!" said Montalbano, furious. "And another thing: Do you intend to press charges against Mr. Garzullo?"

"Absolutely not."

"So much the better."



The road to Montelusa was jammed with traffic, and Montalbano's dark mood worsened as a result. He was, moreover, in a wretched state from all the sand scratching between his socks and skin, collar and neck. At one point, about a hundred yards up the road, on the left and therefore on the opposite side, he saw the "Trucker's Rest Stop," where he knew they made first-rate coffee. When he was nearly parallel to the spot, he put on his blinker and turned. A riot, a pandemonium of screeching brakes, blaring horns, shouts, insults, and curses ensued. By some miracle he reached the parking lot in front of the restaurant unscathed, got out of the car, and went inside. The first thing he saw were two people he immediately recognized, even though they had their backs to him. It was Fazio and Galluzzo, each knocking back a glass of cognac, or so, at least, it looked to him. Cognac, at that hour of the morning? He wedged himself in between the two and ordered a coffee from the barman. Recognizing his voice, Fazio and Galluzzo turned around with a start.

"To your health," said Montalbano.

"No ... it's just that ... ," Galluzzo began, trying to justify himself.

"We were feeling a little upset," said Fazio.

"And we needed something strong," Galluzzo added.

"Upset? Why?"

"Poor Mr. Garzullo died! He had a heart attack," said Fazio. "By the time we got to the hospital he was unconscious. We called the attendants and they rushed him inside. After we parked the car we went straight back in, and they told us..."

"It shook us up," said Galluzzo.

"I feel a little shook up myself ... ," Montalbano admitted. "Listen, I want you to do something. Find out if he had any relatives and, if not, track down some close friend and report to me after I get back from Montelusa."

Fazio and Galluzzo said good-bye and left. Montalbano drank his coffee calmly,