

# THE DARK WOOD

# 9

In the middle of the journey of our life I came to myself within a  
dark wood where the straight way was lost.

— *Dante Alighieri, The Divine Comedy (Hell)*

All that is necessary for evil to succeed is that good men do nothing.

— *Edmund Burke*

He had felt for some time that certain people were acting a little differently towards him.

Not everyone and not all the time. At work, the greeting of the occasional customer visiting to inspect or collect his goods was awkward, where before it had been jovial and unrestrained. When he entered the boardroom and the directors were discussing how to deal with the latest strikes of the workers protesting about their pay in these hard times, there was still affection and recognition but glances were exchanged and papers shuffled to fill the momentary silence before Kilpin left the room and the murmuring picked up again.

The lads were always the lads though. Still laughing, joking and grumbling, although Hans Mädler and his Swiss compatriots were getting agitated by the shenanigans going on within the corridors of power at the Italian Football Federation.

The National Gymnastics Federation had never accepted Genoa's title of first football champions of Italy. Essentially it had been a *'foreign'* team, galvanized by the Englishman James Richardson Spensley. Now Milan, with their own English leader and group of Swiss players were threatening to dominate the game as Genoa had until five years ago.

Initially Giovanni Camperio had resisted, for purely selfish reasons. Milan were in line for three successive

championships, but ever the pragmatist he could see which way the wind was blowing. Italy's economy was in trouble, the workers were revolting and the magic solution for the country was clearly greater moral energy and devotion to the Fatherland, unity within Italy's borders and suspicion towards those on the outside.

'What the fuck have they done and how can they do it?' was Hans Imhoff's double question.

'Hans, I'm impressed by your command of Italian, encompassing such colourful language. They've done it because they can.'

Kilpin was angry too but he wasn't going to let anyone know it, because this was something that needed cool heads to resolve.

The Italian Football Federation had finally caved into pressure from the gymnasium clubs and decided that the coming 1908 championship season would be reserved for Italian players.

The Italian contingent piped up, led by Gerolamo Radice.

'We need to hit them where it hurts, undermine their credibility. We're the champions of Italy and we're not going to take part this year.'

Kilpin felt pride but again didn't betray his emotions.

'That's very noble Gerolamo, but the team won't have this chance again to win three titles in a row. Seize it now. I'll sit out the campaign and shout at you all from the sidelines.'

The Swiss were amazed. Hans Imhoff continued to speak for them.

'Herbie, you can't seriously mean that. We weren't around but we know how this all began, how no one was excluded...'

Kilpin was pleased Imhoff wasn't taking this lying down. Why should he?

Sandro Trerè spoke up.

'No, Hans is right, we're not going to play. I hear Torino and Genoa have already told the Federation where to stick their championship and Juventus are about to do the same.'

Andrea Meschia probed. He wanted to know what the President thought.

'What does Edwards say?'

'Well he'll never be happy about losing out on any glory but he needs to know Milan is Milan, not Milano, and that we're all in this together: no matter how many Italian backsides he licks, his tongue will always have an English accent.'

Kilpin had watched and listened. 'Our dear President Alfred isn't the problem.'

Everyone knew to whom he was indirectly referring. Gianni Camperio was in his element. Once upon a time brotherly love and internationalism had been all well and good, but they weren't going to help the communists and the factory workers get a bigger slice of a diminishing pie. The English and Swiss had played their part and started the ball rolling, but now it was time for Italians to make

the game of football or, rather, ‘*calcio*’, their own.

Camperio had challenged the arguments of the Federation for as long as he could: like Edwards he was attracted to silver and didn’t want to give up the chance of a straight treble without a fight. But resistance was going to be futile and he realised fast that Milan would have to adapt.

Nevertheless he kept up the pretence of resistance long enough to force the hand of the Federation and to secure a symbolic concession, when he accepted their summons and turned up at their offices one day with a long face.

‘Gianni, we want to make clear that we don’t condone Milano refusing to take part in this year’s championship but we acknowledge you are not going to win for a third successive season and as a gesture of gratitude and recognition for the club’s achievements in recent years we propose to award Milano the Spensley Cup on a permanent basis.’

At this point one of the committee members leaned over to his neighbour.

‘Even though we helped them out with the first one, forcing Juventus to contest the replay here in Milan...’

Camperio did his very best to look dissatisfied and short-changed but he was smiling inside.

Alas, his work didn’t manage to cheer up his colleagues when word reached them.

‘Fuck, fuck, fuck. Prostitutes and whores,’ was Hans Imhoff’s considered view.

‘Hans, your command of the Italian language improves by the day, although I think you’ll find you’ve repeated

yourself in your rather accurate description of our esteemed administrators. Soon you’ll have gone completely native and no one will realise that you are, in fact, Swiss.’

‘Herbie, this has gone beyond a joke and you know it. What has Camperio done? We sit out the championship but he goes above everyone and accepts the trophy. The lads in Turin have been asking us what’s going on. How can we seriously carry on at this club when he kicks us in the balls like this?’

‘We all know this year’s cup will be meaningless. How do you think I feel, starting this club from nothing, living in the shadows of Genoa for so long, winning it all, losing it and then building again, only for these bureaucrats to knock us off the top.

‘My dream was to win it three times in a row, so we could get our name on a cup, just like Spensley, but that’s not going to happen, so we move on...’

‘Yes, Herbie, it looks like we do have to move on...’ Lana said sadly.

After all the planning, cajoling, travelling, running, tackling, all that whisky, Kilpin wouldn’t get the chance to lead Milan to a glorious hat-trick of consecutive championships. He’d managed everything within his power but had been thwarted by matters beyond his control, by the decisions of suits playing games at the Federation’s headquarters.

Politics had reared its head but what really hurt Kilpin was the way it was tearing his beloved club apart. The club ratified Camperio’s acceptance of the Federation’s

permanent award of the Spensley Cup as a consolation for depriving the club of any chance of winning it on the field of play.

But for Milan's large Swiss contingent this was unforgivable complicity in a decision that was just wrong. Foreigners playing alongside Italians had underpinned the club's success. These dissidents would remain true to the founding spirit of Milan Foot-Ball and Cricket Club that had been truly internationalist, even if the club's management had let the flame die.

A breakaway club was founded on 9th March 1908 at the Clock restaurant near the opera house, a stone's throw from Milan's first base at Fiaschetteria Toscana, as Football Club Internazionale Milano, (forty four members) with the declaration that they would call themselves '*International*' because they were brothers of the world. The group gathered at the restaurant that Monday evening included Bossard and Lana, who had stood with Kilpin in solidarity the previous year when the entire Milan line-up had appeared in English in the *Gazzetta dello Sport*.

The *Gazzetta* now announced the arrival of Internazionale.

**It's the name of a new club founded a couple of days ago in Milan, the result of a deplorable schism that a number of trouble-makers have created at the heart of the Milan Club, and comprising mainly footballers and lots of supporters.**

**The greatest intentions are at the heart of this new club that promises good things. The main aim of the new club is to allow foreigners resident in Milan to play football and to enthuse the youngsters of the city to play and to whom the club reaches out.**

**For our part we wish the new club a long and prosperous life and most importantly, harmony, in the certain belief that its founders will ensure that all the good intentions shown come to fruition.**

Kilpin looked on with the sadness of the ageing patriarch, his family falling apart before his eyes. He couldn't undo what had been done and Gianni Camperio had a lot to answer for.

Camperio had been there right from the start with Kilpin, a founding father, subscribing to the inclusive ethos of the new club of this bustling, cosmopolitan city. He'd scored one of Milan's goals in its first final when the team had won the King's Medal in May 1900 and a year later had lined up with the team for its victorious photograph showing off the Fawcus Cup.

But he had posed in the group picture in his suit and boater, not in the team's kit. Keener on playing the game of power behind closed doors, his ambition was channelled into the machinations of committee meetings and boardrooms.

Giovanni Carlo Camperio II was a true 'player' all right.