

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 505: Leonarda Cianciulli: The Soap-Maker of Correggio

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Hey weirdos, I'm Alina.

I'm Ash.

And this is Morbid.

Yeah, girl, we're going to get real morbid today, my friends.

Yeah, Alina is back and better than ever.

You never really went anywhere, but thank you.

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But you know, this is a little far away from the spooky season silliness of it all.

I would say because, you know, like spooky season, we like to go a little more haunted, a little more loosey-goosey with it.

But then we know that you guys like, you know, you want to hear the real stuff too and I'm going to get very real on you today.

Oh, God.

We're going to be talking about the story of Leonardo Cianciulli, who is also referred to as the soap maker of Correggio.

I don't know how I personally feel about that.

Yes.

And whatever your first thoughts were when I said that.

Yep.

Yep, correct.

Also, I'd like to just give a quick little trigger warning here.

She has a very tragic story, as does her mother.

So like traumatic upbringing.

And there's some sexual assault in here.

There's some like trauma.

It's the whole beginning is pretty rough.

There's also going to be some talk of pregnancy loss and, you know, that kind of thing.

So just if that's not really your bag, then I think you can skip a little ways through and we'll get through all that and then you can get into even more horrible things.

Okay.

But yeah, this is going to be a rough one.

So just everybody sit tight.

So Leonardo Cianciulli, her story begins tragically with her mom's story, to be honest.

Her mother, Amelia Dinolfi, she was born in Montella, Avellino, which is a small village in the south of Italy.

Oh, okay.

Amelia grew up as the teenage daughter of one of the wealthier families in the region.

She grew up very well off, had everything she needed, very easy life relatively at the time.

She grew up to be an attractive girl.

She was kind.

She was well liked by her neighbors and her friends, like really just kind of had it all grown up.

Yeah.

And in the summer of 1893, as Amelia was coming into adulthood, in that time we're in the late 1800s.

So of course they immediately were like, got to find her a suitor.

Let's marry you off.

And of course at that time there was no shortage of suitors lining up for her.

She again came from a wealthy family, high social status.

So there was an understanding in that time that she was only really going to be entertaining

dates and courting from men of similar class and status at that time.

Like legit suitors.

Yeah.

So this kept certain men out of the running.

Certain men like Mariano Cinciulli.

Unlike Amelia, Mariano was older, middle-aged.

He was very impoverished at the time.

And he was known around the village for his cruel, nasty, pigish nature.

Fantastic.

I did notice his last name though and I'm nervous now.

But he really liked Amelia.

I don't like that.

They had never met.

He just liked how she looked.

But he just knew her by sight and by reputation.

That year Mariano developed pretty much an obsession with her.

Like he kind of stalked her.

And again, they had a very large age gap.

He was middle-aged.

She was just coming into like adulthood, which means like 17, 18.

I was going to say, right.

And he knew very well that he had no chance in this whole courting of her.

Because he's impoverished.

Exactly.

He was impoverished.

He was older.

He was just totally out of everything.

But he took this as an opportunity to let his true, pigish nature out because Ryan Green, the author of *The Curse*, a shocking true story of superstition, human sacrifice and cannibalism.

Little spoiler there.

Okay.

Wrote, quote, he wanted to tear her down from her pedestal to make her no better than him.

He wanted to ruin her.

Oh God.

That's dark.

So one summer evening, Mariano, remember, he's like stalking her.

He's obsessed with her.

He followed Amelia to a party she was attending with one of her suitors.

And he waited outside this estate that she was in.

He just lurked in the shadows.

He drank and drank and drank.

Oh no.

After several hours, she came out of this huge estate.

She said goodbye to her hosts.

And apparently she started down the path alone, which I was kind of shocked to read that her suitor was not bringing her home.

But he was not.

And she started down the path.

I think it was pretty close by her house.

I don't know if that had anything to do with it.

She was being followed and she had no idea.

At first, Amelia thought she was being robbed.

And she told whoever was attacking her that she had no money on her.

But then she quickly realized it wasn't money that he was looking for.

And he ended up brutally raping her outside in the dark.

That is horrific.

Yeah.

When he was done with the assault, he just got up and walked away.

What?

Leaving her completely confused, terrified, and alone in a muddy field.

In the dark, in the middle of nowhere.

And she had seen him, like, and she knew she had seen him around the village.

Like she knew once she saw him, she realized who it was.

She knew of him kind of thing.

And she just laid there for hours before she got up and made her way home.

Now Amelia at the time had a Catholic upbringing.

And again, high social status, Catholic girl in the 1800s, this comes with a lot of stuff.

At the time she knew nothing of sex other than that it was what two people did after they were married.

And even then you did it to procreate.

That was it.

Yeah.

You had no context for what had even just happened.

Like this was just so, this was so traumatic.

It's traumatic anyways.

And then there was all this confusion along with it.

Right.

That's the thing.

Cause when that happens, like people have something to call it.

I can't imagine.

Oh yeah.

I can't even.

That happening and you don't even really know what it is.

You don't even know what this is.

But you can feel.

Inside of you.

That's wrong.

That's wrong.

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Yeah.

And she also, because of this whole upbringing, she had come to believe that she committed a terrible sin.

Oh God.

It was her fault.

She did it.

And then they were, she felt it every time she had to walk around in the market or anywhere else in the village and see him.

Cause she didn't say anything at first cause she was feeling so much shame and so scared and confused.

So her feelings of shame only became heightened when she realized that she was pregnant as a result of the rape.

Oh God.

While she managed to keep everything for a time being quiet after three or four months of pregnancy.

It was pretty obvious.

Starting to show.

Oh.

They didn't respond how loving parents should respond.

Instead, they immediately quote threatened to go house to house visiting all of her suitors until they found the one who defiled her.

Oh God.

So she was terrified because who wants to do that?

That's like pure humiliation.

And now you're just having that shame that she's feeling spread around the entire town.

So she came forward and said, oh, I know who did this.

Right.

And this is how it happened.

So in response, her parents had Mariano brought to the house and they confronted him.

And as far as Amelia's parents were concerned, there was one option here.

Marriage.

He was going to marry their daughter.

Dude, that is, I, it's so fucked, fucked as an even the word.

My brain can't even wrap around this.

And what's worse is Mariano was pleased.

Of course.

That's what he wanted.

Cause now he can do that forever.

Like legally, weirdly.

Look what he did.

He took what he wanted.

That's what he's thinking.

Wow.

I mean, I was out of the running and here I took it into my own hands and look, I'm getting

rewarded for it.

Oh, that's so heinous.

Like what a fucked up way to do it.

Like I'm the layers of fucked up here.

Wow.

And her parents immediately made arrangements for a priest to be brought to the house.

They were married in a secret ceremony.

And at this point, Amelia and Mariano had never spoken a word to each other.

Of course not.

Until he raped her in the dark and now they're being forced to get married and she's having his child.

And she's going to move into his home, I'm assuming.

Yep.

Because after that wedding, she was sent to live in what he basically had a shack in like the worst part of the village.

And her parents just sent her there.

Oh, they wanted nothing to do with her after this.

Oh my God.

Yep.

And according to Green, who I mentioned, who wrote that book that we will link in the show notes, the home was completely unfurnished and quote, the bathroom was outside and shared with the others on the row of houses.

So she, this is completely just like turn your lifestyle on a TED.

Talk about, so she's this confident, happy, loving, well-known in the community, well-liked, healthy, you know, of privilege and is walking around being courted by these men of similar status.

And then she goes through the most traumatizing thing you can imagine and her parents forced her to be just indebted into this.

Wow.

And have it all taken away because if she did nothing to have this happen.

No, of course not.

And now she's being punished and he's being rewarded.

It's so wild.

I have this picture of him and in my mind is this like vile character have never seen ever after.

Yes.

You know, when she gets sent to live with that fucking nasty guy and she's going to like cut him open.

That's what I'm picturing him as.

And what's worse is he had no job and he had no prospects of work and instead he just ordered Amelia around at work, physically abused her, verbally abused her whenever she'd and also continued forcing himself on her.

This is such a nightmare.

This is beyond nightmare.

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It's tragic in every way it could be tragic.

Now remember, she's pregnant.

Right.

Leonardo Chin Chuli was born April 18th, 1894.

And she was born after a long, very painful, very traumatic birth that took a very large toll on Amelia.

She lost consciousness on more than one occasion during the birth.

Like it was bad.

Now from the moment that Leonardo was born, she was very unwanted.

Amelia was still dealing with, she's a young girl and she's dealing with the aftermath of the trauma of sexual assault and still is being raped and beat by this man and dealing with torture shock.

And so she could not, she could not connect and she didn't want to connect.

She just ignored, basically neglected her, didn't want anything to do with her, which is awful.

Oh, that's so sad.

The whole thing is awful.

And it only got worse as Leonardo got older because again, her mother would ignore her completely, Amelia.

But it was honestly preferable to the times that she paid attention to her because later Leonardo would say that she was frequently physically and verbally abused by her mother.

So she just took out all of her anger on her child, which is horrific.

And her, and Amelia would criticize her all the time.

Anything Leonardo did was criticized and that took a big toll on her later.

Because she would criticize and brutalize her for the smallest mistake.

She was probably taking out all of her anger just on that one child.

Her anger at her parents, her anger at Mariano, her anger at everything around her.

She was taking it out on this poor innocent child that she did not ask to be here.

She's probably not even seeing like this child as her child.

She's seeing it as his child.

As the product of what happened to her.

And it's like, there's so many layers of psychological trauma here.

And the physical and emotional abuse that she suffered at the hands of her mother led to years of loneliness, isolation.

She had horrible self-esteem.

And by the time she reached 13, and this is trigger warning for suicide and suicidal thoughts, she attempted to kill herself at home.

And she was found and stopped, but instead of looking at this and expressing sympathy or trying to empathize with her or anything, Amelia told her daughter that she was disappointed that she didn't succeed.

Oh my God.

Which is literally unthinkable.

That is, that's inexcusable.

Unthinkable.

Unthinkable.

I can't, I'm reading that, my brain like wouldn't even take in the words.

Wow.

And a few years later, she actually attempted again.

And this time she attempted by swallowing glass.

Oh God.

Jesus.

And it was stopped again.

It didn't, it was not, it did not happen.

But so she was suffering very much so with her mother.

And her father, Mariano, was basically nowhere to be found.

He just, like, not that he would have been helpful, but of course not.

He basically spent most of his time drinking with friends and would return home in the middle of the night if at all.

Anytime he was, he just was nowhere.

And one evening, they actually, Amelia and Leonardo had to go out looking for him because they couldn't find him.

And they found him passed out in one of his usual drinking spots, but he was totally unconscious and they could not wake him up.

So they didn't call the doctor, they just carried his body back to the house and put it in an empty room and he died there.

Oh.

So.

Okay.

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Not long after that happened, Amelia married again.

This time she did marry a more respectable and kinder man and she hoped that this whole thing was going to change how her parents would think of her, that she would be welcomed back into her family.

Is it going to change how she mothers at all?

No.

She was hoping that that would happen, but her parents were still very uninterested with having anything to do with her, even though this guy was a step up from Mariano.

That's so fucked up.

So she couldn't get back in her parents' good graces, couldn't get that social standing that Amelia was used to having and wanted back.

She got a new plan that was going to get herself out of poverty.

She said she figured she wasn't going to use her own skills.

She wasn't going to use her own anything to climb that social ladder.

She was going to scheme to find a wealthy suitor for Leonardo and hope that her daughter, who she treated like absolute dog shit her entire life, would pull her out of this situation.

I'm sure that's going to work out.

It's like you get what you give, my friend.

And the problem was though that Amelia did not tell Leonardo this.

She was scheming in the background.

Scheme it on the low.

And Leonardo had already begun meeting and dating men.

Right.

She was like taking-

She wanted to get the fuck out of there.
And so she eventually met this man named Raffaele Pensardi.
Leonardo met this man and eventually like fell in love with him.
They had like an actual relationship and he was a little older than her, nothing crazy.
And he had what at the time would be considered a low status job.
He was a registry clerk.
And he was truly the first person in Leonardo's life to treat her well in real respect.
Okay. I'm so happy you said that because as soon as you said she met someone,
I was like, I'm so nervous right now.
And he proposed marriage.
She happily said yes.
And this meant that she was going to get the fuck out of there, be free of her mother.
But remember, she wrecked Amelia's plan.
So she was pissed.
And when she heard of the engagement,
Amelia quote, told her daughter that she had placed a curse on her and Pensardi
for ruining her life for a second time.
What?
Leonardo had been abused her entire life and had been criticized.
She had had a self-esteem slam down at every turn.
So hearing this from her mother, imprinted inside her.
And she left with the thinking, I've been cursed
and I'm going to live a life of tragedy because I did this.
Jesus.
So it turned out that when she left her mother's house to marry Raffaele,
Leonardo would never see her mom again, which is for the best.
But it didn't turn out well for anybody.
You know, Amelia had done so much psychological damage,
even though she never contacted her again and never saw her again to let her inflict more.
It was in her.
That influence was going to be felt for the rest of her life.
She had changed her fundamentally.
And although Raffaele was by all accounts that we could find a very kind man
who treated Leonardo very well, was patient, was loving,
they had a very loving relationship.
Yeah.
A lifetime of abuse had left her waiting for the abuse to start.
And so she was constantly paranoid about disappointing or irritating everybody.
So she was just always on edge and always worried all the time.
She probably had so much anxiety.
And the abuse never came with Raffaele.
He never abused her, but she was always waiting for it.
And it only grew as she got further into married life.
She was just not able to accept this gentler environment and a partner that didn't criticize her.

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So she turned the criticism into herself and became her own worst critic.

Oh no.

Every mistake she made or any even perceived mistake that she would make, she would lob crippling criticism at herself.

And that can be frustrating for your partner too when they're trying to be like, I love you.

No, you're great.

You're fine.

Like stop talking like that about yourself.

Exactly.

And she would fall into emotional turmoil.

She cried a lot.

She had a lot of intense bouts of emotions, fear, anxiety.

Depression.

She was dealing with probably PTSD or some form of that.

Absolutely.

And she didn't understand it.

Her husband at the time couldn't understand it like they, you know, this is again, this is like the 1800s.

I was going to say exactly.

You know, well, at this time, it's like, you know, we're getting into the 1900s here.

But he did do his best to be supportive and sympathetic.

He did not turn on her like he, you know, he was there.

And all of this was also exacerbated by the fact that she was now having seizures that she started having after she moved in with Raffaele.

And they, it's believed that she had this untreated illness as a child that this was a lingering consequence of and she was physically abused.

Could have been a result of that.

Definitely.

So again, she was raised to devout Catholic and she was in a very Catholic country at the time.

But she also had some interest in some like superstitious beliefs and other beliefs.

And by early adulthood, she had a big interest in supernatural stuff and, you know, magic and the occult.

I wonder if the thought that she was cursed had anything to do with that interest.

Yep.

And she was, you know, through that lens, the various negative parts of her life, like the, you know, the negative emotions, all the crying, the anxiety, the seizures, the paranoia, it all kind of made sense to her because she was like, it's the result of the curse that my mother had placed on me because I married Raffaele.

And as far as she could tell, the curse was affecting her husband as well because given her low social status, Raffaele's marriage to Leonardo was looked upon pretty poorly by his coworkers and superiors.

So her low, low status because he was a couple of steps above her.

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And whenever there was an opportunity to like get a promotion at work, he was always passed over because they had married her.

They use that against her.

That's so fucked up.

Regardless of how long he had worked at a place.

Yeah.

Like the marriage has nothing to do with the job.

So desperate for any kind of guidance or any, anything here, Leonardo turned to the Romani community, hoping that the things she had heard about them being able to, you know, help you with these kinds of things, like take the negative portions of your life and like help you turn them around, like tell you the, tell you your future, help you manifest, all that good stuff.

She was hoping it was all true and she was like, I just need some guidance here.

So one fall afternoon, she went to a local fair and she's seeked out a fortune teller who could help her.

She, so she had been feeling, you know, dealing with the seizures, dealing, she had headaches, she had crippling depression, anxiety, all this awful shit happening to her for months and months.

And she was honestly at this point convinced that she was dying.

She thought she was on the verge of death and she just wanted someone to tell her, no, you're not.

Right.

And so she located this woman and the woman literally was walking her into the tent and Leonardo said, am I going to die?

Is that what the curse is going to do?

That's the first thing she said.

And so the lady looked at Leonardo's palm and told her, no, you're not going to die, at least not anytime soon.

Okay.

And she said, if that was any relief, it was definitely short lived because you said, you're going to live a long life, but it will be a life full of sadness.

You're going to outlive every one of your children.

Oh, God.

Now this was an early 20th century Italy.

It was pretty understood that she was going to want and eventually have many children.

Yeah, it was part of the whole deal here.

And this seemed like a very cruel premonition.

Yeah.

But it didn't stop her from wanting to start a family.

It was just a very scary thing.

And it was also something that just compounded on top of her already fear, anxiety, paranormal, paranoia, depression.

Now she's, because she's already kind of obsessing over this idea of this curse that her mother has placed on her.

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And now she's hearing this and she's going, oh shit, this is the curse.
This woman's nervous system.
I can't even imagine.
I can't even fathom.
And so after three years of trying, Leonardo became pregnant in 1920.
Okay.
Unfortunately, it was an immediate source of anxiety because of that lingering thought.
And she's already got so much anxiety anyway.
Yeah.
And eventually the seizures returned because her anxiety got so bad and she had some falls, some accidental injuries because of the seizures.
Right.
And three months into the pregnancy, she had a seizure that caused a fall and she had severe abdominal pain and bleeding and they went to the doctor and the doctor said, I'm sorry, but you've miscarried.
Oh God.
So this was devastating, obviously.
She really wanted to become a mother because one of her things was she wanted to be the exact opposite of her mother.
And to be able to get that opportunity exactly through.
And it also was reinforcing her belief that her mom's curse was real and she was going to have a life of tragedy and misery.
Raffaele wanted to be supportive.
So he was like, you know what?
Nothing's keeping us here in Montello where we are.
Let's relocate.
Let's put all this bullshit behind us.
Let's start somewhere new.
So they packed up the things they had and they moved, they left Montello and they kind of bounced around to a couple of towns looking for work and somewhere to settle.
And they finally went back to Raffaele's hometown of Lauria Potenza in 1921.
Okay.
And they had had some temporary jobs along the way.
So they had some money saved and they were able to save enough to buy a small house in Lauria and they both found work and they settled down.
And it seemed like it was a new start for them.
Now that was more than a hundred miles away from Montello.
So they were thinking, you know what?
We left that in the fucking dust, like by, but just after a few months into starting their new life, her anxiety was starting to, you know, slip away.
It was getting better.
It felt like it was like, okay, the seizures were lessening because she wasn't as anxious.
And soon after she was like, you know what?

Maybe he's right.

Like maybe this curse is bullshit.

Maybe we just needed a fresh start.

We had to get the hell away from my mom.

And you know, like maybe I don't need to worry about fate so much.

Maybe I need to like just create my own shit.

I'm waiting for the other shoe to drop.

A year later in 1922, Leonardo became pregnant and she gave birth to a boy and they named this boy Giuseppe.

And from the moment he came into this world, she was determined to be an infinitely better mother than Amelia was to her.

She devoted every waking moment to this child, his health, his happiness, but she kept hearing that curse in the back of her mind.

And along with the premonition told to her by that fortune teller.

And so she now had a whole host of new anxieties to start rolling around in her brain here because I mean, any new parent, the new anxieties that come with that are indescribable and a plenty.

So for someone who is already suffering from a monumental amount of trauma and anxieties and depression and paranormal and fear, this is just unthinkable.

A recipe for disaster.

And it caused her to be hyper vigilant and overprotective of Giuseppe.

And although the pregnancy wasn't a bad pregnancy, which is good, it did require her to leave her job at the time.

And so they were getting by on only Rafael's paycheck.

And she didn't, even though she didn't want to be away from her son, she wanted to find a job because there was a second fear she had of like, she wanted his health and safety.

And she was also so scared that they would lose all their money and that he would be in, you know, it was always back to him.

Like I can't let something happen to him.

Oh God, I feel, I'm like feeling for her so much.

It's sad.

It's a whole story.

It's very sad.

But the problem was that Leonardo didn't have a lot of marketable skills at the time and also she was a woman at the time.

So she was at a pretty big disadvantage.

And so she was, she just took whatever job she could and she eventually found one as an after hours cleaner at a local tavern.

Now, when she was at work, she was just plagued with fear and worry about what might happen to Giuseppe while she was away from him.

Yeah.

And when she was home, she spent all her time just obsessing, micromanaging her son in order to protect him.

And initially he was just like, oh, you know, like she's, she's just, you know, she's just mom, like it's fine.

Yeah.

But then he got older and he started socializing and he started seeing other parents and he was like, oh, like this is smothering and like a lot of problem.

And then she started kind of isolating him from other children because she was discouraging him from socializing because she, you know, she was so obsessed. So there's a lot of psychological issues happening here.

Very much so.

Obviously that's going on that I'm not going to sit here and diagnose because I'm not a doctor, but like clearly there's other things going on here that abuse has played into, that all kinds of manner of things have been played into.

Definitely.

And it's now it's like, even though she's going a totally different route than her mother went.

It's not a great route.

It's also not a positive thing.

It's like we're going to the pendulum swinging too far the other way.

But despite the fears and stress that motherhood brought and the physical demands of her work now, Leonardo and Raffaele were wanted more children. And unfortunately, their attempts to have more children were kind of thwarted for a while because she had, they had a lot of miscarriages over the next few years and they had multiple in a row.

And finally, after some heartbreaks, she gave birth to two girls in a very short period of time back to back.

And then after that, a son came again.

Okay.

So now she's got four sons, two daughters.

Um, and each time she was like, you know what, like I'm that curse, Merce, like this is going to be fine.

But within a few years of them being born, the children began getting sick.

And first her son, the youngest son, the one that was born more recently, not Giuseppe, was getting rashes and they would get very severe.

And then one of the girls got a terrible cough and this one daughter, her lungs were filling with fluid and she was coughing.

Anytime she was laid down, Leonardo would sit upright every single night holding her up so that she could sleep.

Oh my God.

That's also not helping with her mental health.

No.

Because now she's not getting sleep.

She's, she's so fearful that all this is going to happen.

And she did everything she could.

And I'm sure Raffaele did too, but she ended up passing away.

Well, girl, um, just a few months later, they woke one morning to find their youngest son had died in his sleep.

Oh my God.

What, like just could have been SIDS.

Wow.

And who knows?

Like at that point, I don't know, right.

Again, given they were so young, like babies, because they were all born in very quick succession, which is just something that happened there in the era in which they died.

There wasn't an autopsy or anything, you know, to say what happened to these children, because this was unfortunately a little common.

Now, this is tragic.

She's lost two children and this is a very short period of time, her fear of the curse and the premonition.

And she was just inconsolable.

Of course.

And according to Ryan Green, the author I mentioned earlier, she abandoned her part-time jobs entirely and devoted every waking moment to paranoid observation of her surviving children, which I can't even fathom this.

I really can't.

And things only got worse a few months later.

That second daughter contracted the same coughing illness and died of the same illness.

So now she just has Giuseppe again.

Oh my God.

Now three of your children die.

The death of any child is incomprehensible and such a deeply traumatic experience that anybody would just fall into the void.

But when you add like a curse and several deaths of children, the idea of a curse and all that, and there's no way there's no autopsy to tell you that like this isn't a curse.

This is like a congenital scientific thing, some kind of hereditary thing.

This is a, this is a SIDS kind of thing where you couldn't have avoided it.

It's just, you know, like all this stuff, but whatever the real explanation was, as far as Leonardo was concerned, this is just proof of the curse.

And she was sure that this was just going to continue happening and that it was going to come for Giuseppe eventually.

So the incredible loss caused a bout of depression, unlike anything that she had ever experienced before.

And I mean, the anxiety ramped up, the seizures were now ramping out.

She was in very poor health at this point.

And, you know, Raffaele was also struggling with the same grief, like as the father,

but he was also trying to help her and trying to keep her from succumbing.
It's actually really, really loved her.
He did.
He really stuck around and he really, he really loved her.
He wanted her to be better.
And so he was, he tried to like console her and then he was like, you know what,
like this was a bad time in our lives.
But again, we're of that era too, where he was like, let's have more children.
Oh God.
And he was like, that's what makes you happiest is being a mom.
So let's, you know, let's just fill our house with children again.
I was like, that is really what compounds her anxiety to.
Yeah, it's like this, I can, I know the intention.
Totally.
But oh God, like watching from out here, you're just like, oh no.
Well, and then he was so sad.
Also probably thinking about all of this falling onto Giuseppe as well.
And he's, and he, and he's trying to fill a void in his own, you know,
like it's all very sad and like very incomprehensible, truly.
That's why I'm like, even the word, I can't even like put my own opinion in here
because I can't even go there.
No.
And she was reluctant at this point because she was reluctant to tempt fate.
But eventually they did try to get pregnant again.
And in a few years that after that, she did successfully deliver five healthy baby boys.
What?
Yeah.
So she had four kids before that and then had three of them passed away
and then she had five more baby boys.
She had nine fucking kids, all of them died.
What?
Yes.
How?
And there was no, from all the sources, there is no sign of abuse.
There is no sign of, and her children, like, you know, there's no nothing
that said that they were abused or killed or poisoned.
But there's also no autopsy around to.
Yeah.
But there was no like, Raffaele didn't claim that there was any kind
of shenanigans going on and they all died very young.
Wow.
I don't know what to think of it.
I think it's a horrifying and staggering number of children to lose.
And she obviously becomes a murderer.

Yes.

So it does make you question it slightly.

Absolutely.

But we don't know.

No idea.

All I know is that all the sources are saying that it's without explanation.

I wonder if there's any possibility of Munchausen's autopsy?

Yeah, I don't know.

Or if it's just fucking tragedy on tragedy.

Yeah, it's all tragic, regardless.

And later, when she spoke about this, she was quoted as saying, almost every night I dreamed of small white coffins swallowed one after the other by Black Earth.

Oh my God.

Yeah.

So the grief drove her deeper and deeper into depression and despair.

You know, and she's just becoming more paranoid, more anxious, more upset.

And it was so bad that like Giuseppe, you know, he couldn't let his guard down for even a minute with her.

Like she was on him 24 seven.

Giuseppe was the focal point of everything.

I bet.

And luckily, at this point, thanks to the connections that Raffaele had made in the community through his job, because he was a really hard worker.

And like we said, a kind guy.

Right.

They found more work for her as an after hour cleaner at a local bank.

OK.

So it was a, you know, a better environment.

According to like, she liked it better.

And now she could focus on hopefully focus on something else.

Yeah.

And the job suited her for a time.

And she didn't mind, you know, it was repetitive.

It was kind of isolated the hours and all that, but she didn't really mind it.

OK.

The only complaint she really had was that after she had to pay out of her pocket for cleaning supplies.

Oh, that's true.

And after that, she was left with very little.

So it was like she was away from her son and not really bringing home enough to really make it worth it.

Right.

So in an effort to change this, she started making her own soap

and her own cleaning supplies.

Right, right.

And at this point, she's just making her own soap and cleaning supplies.

But even that wasn't really a much of an improvement in what she was taking home.

And she was still obsessing over what was happening to her son when she wasn't there.

Oh, God.

Now, one evening after everyone had left the bank for the evening, she went into the manager's office and she created a fake account for herself in one of the bank ledgers and transferred a not so subtle amount of money into her account.

How much was it?

I don't know the exact amount, but it wasn't subtle.

Not like 20 bucks.

And she ended up slipping out of the office.

She was like, no one's going to know that, but this is 1930.

This is 1930.

But like even in 1930, banks keep meticulous books.

They know when there's a discrepancy.

And so when she came back to work the next afternoon, she was met by the police who arrested her on a fraud charge.

Oh, shit.

Now, the arrest in the criminal charge were definitely a source of embarrassment and anxiety all by themselves. Of course.

But then she quickly realized that by doing this to try to help her family, she could affect her family greatly with this, most importantly, her son.

And unlike her usual fears and anxiety and paranoia, this wasn't a really unreasonable one to be worried about.

No, that's legit.

Because although Raffaele, like we said, he was well respected, well liked, the shame and suspicion of this could have fallen back on him at his job where they could say he had something to do with this or knew about it.

And she realized this and she was like, oh, shit.

So in order to place as much distance between that happening and her, she went out of her way to make sure everyone knew that she did it by herself, that he had nothing to do with it.

Raffaele did not know about it.

She said, I only did it because I was, quote, seized by madness.

OK. But she made sure like he did not know about it.

Yeah. Do not punish him for it.

She's clearing her husband's name.

Yeah. Or trying to, at the very least.

They did love each other.

It sounds like it's one thing that I truly believe.

Yeah. Now, she went before a judge in 19 it was 1927.
So when I said 1930 before, I meant like almost 1930, not exactly.
And she was found guilty of fraud and sentenced to 18 months in an institution
that had once served as a nunnery and was still operated by the church.
Hey, weirdos, we want to thank you for keeping it weird with us,
traveling back in time with us and journeying through the strange
and very unusual with us.
I have a question. What is it?
You love getting it early.
I love getting it early.
Well, good, because prime members can listen to new episodes of Morbid one week early
and all episodes are ad free on Amazon Music.
And it doesn't even stop there.
You can listen to all the Morbid podcast network shows,
including Colt Leader, That's Spooky, Alone at Lunch.
And that was pretty scary early and ad free on Amazon Music.
You know why you get all that early?
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That's [amazon.com slash truecrime ad free](https://amazon.com/slash/truecrime%20ad%20free)
to catch up on the latest episodes without the ads.
Now, according to Geneviva Ortiz,
who is the author of The Deadly Soapmaker of Correggio,
the true story of Leonardo Cianciulli,
what would have been considered a very grueling sentence
and mistreatment at the hands of nuns
because it was not a nice place.
Any other woman who was in that institution
was just in a hell of their own making at that point.
Oh, no. It was child's play.
It was child's play to Leonardo.
She had gone through so much.
You kid me, I grew up with Amelia.
This is nothing.
She dealt with physical and psychological abuse of her own mom,

so she was like, yeah, this doesn't even faze me.
She was not fazed, unaffected.
That's so fucked up.
She got through every day easy as pie, didn't bother her,
and she said what got her through it was thinking
about Giuseppe waiting for her on the other side.
Yeah, she probably just had a level of disassociation
that none of us can imagine.
Now, Leonardo went through her sentence, no incident,
and was released a little over a year later,
and when she got home, though, it was not great
because Raffaele had lost his job because of the crime.
Oh, no.
He was like, regardless of her trying to distance it,
they were like, no, we don't buy it.
Oh, no.
So his reputation was tarnished in the community.
And his hometown, too.
And his family.
It was tarnished throughout the whole thing.
Oh, no.
And after years of being super supportive
and super patient and super understanding,
he got a little resentful at that point.
And he figured, and to him, he was like,
where has my patience gotten me?
I mean, yeah.
This is what happened.
And according to Ortiz, for the first time in their marriage,
he'd become openly critical of a mistake.
And it's a hard one, man.
And given the shame that she, in the end of the turmoil
that she had brought to her family now,
and the ways that her crime had affected everything,
Raffaele borrowed a small amount of money
and was like, we got to get out of here.
Like, we can't stay here.
No way.
So they relocated to Lacedonia, Avelino,
and they hoped to start over again.
Now, for the second time, they had uprooted themselves.
They were going to start a new life,
but now they have a child with them.
So they can't sleep in strangers' hay barns

and in exchange for a day's labor and all that,
which is what they did the last time they relocated.
And it was just like adventure together as a couple.
This is different.
Now they have a child.
This has got to eat.
When they finally reached Lacedonia,
Raffaele found a clerical job,
and they were able pretty quickly to afford
a very small house and a very rural village.
It took a few months, but they settled in.
And once the move was behind them, things calmed down.
So Leonardo and Raffaele were able to reconnect.
Everything calmed down.
The tension kind of chilled out.
And she, again, found herself pregnant.
Which just brought back the same anxieties and fears
that the baby was going to die like all the other ones.
And fortunately, she was spared that tragedy right away
because she did end up having a healthy baby.
And she ended up having another healthy baby right after that.
So she was 12 pregnancies, I thought?
I was just going to say I've lost count at this point.
It's either 11 or 12.
So now she has Giuseppe and two other babies.
They were very quick together.
Yeah, and it's so, at this point,
the children seemed to be doing okay.
And her and Raffaele's relationship was on the mend,
seeming to put the mistakes in the past,
and we're going to just pretend that didn't happen.
But she was just unable to shake this fear
and unable to shake this paranoia and the feelings of suspiciousness
that something's going to, the other she was going to drop.
And whenever she had the chance to visit
another traveling fortune teller, she would do it,
which only fed her anxieties.
And one afternoon, about two years after they came to Macedonia,
she visited another one and this woman took her hands and hers
and looked at them and then looked her in the face and said,
in your right hand, I see a prison.
In your left, a criminal asylum.
Oh, wow.
Which also makes me think like, damn, these were like the real deal.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 505: Leonarda Cianciulli: The Soap-Maker of Correggio

I was going to say that.

And Leonardo just left this woman and went home.

And this is, she went right back to obsessing over possible future tragedy because that doesn't sound great.

It's like, girl, that is in your control.

Yeah.

And on 1930, about three years after arriving in Macedonia, there was a violent and destructive earthquake that struck the region.

Oh no.

It killed more than a thousand people and caused so much damage, including Leonardo and Raffaele's house.

It was completely destroyed.

Oh no.

So they were devastated, but they were able to collect what they had in the rubble and had to relocate again.

And lucky that they still had their whole family.

Yeah.

They ended up going to the city of Coregio.

And the residents of Coregio, they knew of this devastating earthquake and they welcomed all the people that were displaced from Macedonia.

And these people in Coregio did everything they could to make sure these people felt welcome.

And gave them opportunity.

Like they were super warm, super hospitable to these people.

That sounds great.

And so they were so nice that they helped Raffaele find a good job right away.

Wow.

And community.

Yeah.

And it's like for the first time since the whole jail thing happened and since they went to Macedonia, things weren't as fucking terrible as they have been.

It seemed like, okay, they were stable at this point because they had an income now.

Raffaele got a pretty good job.

The children were healthy.

They were making friends.

They weren't doing well in school.

Everything seemed like it was on the up and up, but Leonardo was still unsettled.

Was waiting.

She was just waiting.

And the earthquake had affected her so deeply.

It shook her in a way that the other tragic events hadn't yet.

It was like after this event, she internalized all the collective horrible events that had happened.

And she was like, this was all my fault.

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It was my fault for marrying Raffaele in the first place.
And that curse, this is it.
She cannot look at this all and go, it's in the past.
I just got to move forward.
I got to look at my happiness that I have and move forward.
She just can't seem to do it.
No.
And as a result, she went the other way and just gave up the hypervigilance because she was like, you know what?
I can't protect them from this curse.
So I just have to live.
So it was almost like a positive thing when she got hyper, hyper, hyper obsessed.
And she couldn't settle herself down about it.
And then it got so bad and so unsettled, even though everything was so stable, that she just went, fuck it.
And then it was like she was able to just for a moment, it was difficult, but she was like, I'm going to let go and I'm going to try to just live.
And I'm going to try to like be in this moment.
But then, and she started to feel a little bit stable.
She started to gain a little bit something she probably never felt before.
So I'm sure it was a scary feeling.
And she was kind of trying to like integrate back into like being a human and being.
So she started, you know, she made friends in the community.
She participated in community events.
And she and Raffaele eventually became a very well liked and very well respected couple in the community.
Wow.
They were working and eventually friends and neighbors like helped her buy this, open this little storefront in the village.
For soap.
And it was attached to the family home.
And so she did.
And she sold handmade soaps, other handicrafts, because that's what she was good at.
And she was popular in town.
Like everybody was like, Leonardo and Raffaele.
Like everything was like, what the fuck is this?
This is like the most on its head from what it was.
It's like, it's such a like six.
You would think it's a success tale, but this is just like, holy shit, you came out of the brinks of just despair and like the depths of despair and just awfulness.
Look at you.
You're feeling it.
I'm so worried.
And by 1940, unfortunately, Italy had found itself drawn into the Second World War.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 505: Leonarda Cianciulli: The Soap-Maker of Correggio

You know, and the war effort was ramping up and they needed soldiers and the Italian military employed a campaign of nationalism to convince young men to join the fight.

Somebody who was very enticed by this was Giuseppe.

Yeah.

He saw the war as an opportunity to, you know, fight for his national pride, but also get away from his overbearing mother.

And so Leonardo didn't find out from Giuseppe that he joined the army.

She found out from neighbors at the market.

That's not good.

And she had gone through her entire existence,

just trying to protect these children from this perceived curse.

So this was pretty devastating for her because at this point,

the war hadn't reached its peak combat violence, but the risk was undeniable here.

Of course.

There was a very high certainty that something bad would happen to him.

And after all the years that she had obsessed over protecting him and watching him, she was like, I can't let this go.

I'm not letting this happen.

So she was literally unwilling to let this happen, but he was an adult now and able to do it.

So she decided to turn back to her interest in, you know, books on the occult and superstitions and like old texts.

And she was like, I'm going to find a way to save his life,

to like keep him from something bad happening.

Okay.

I wish she looked up a way to like lift a curse.

Yeah.

You know?

Or just like, you know, at that point, self-help wasn't really like a thing.

No, that's the thing.

That's the unfortunate time period of itself.

That's your self-help.

Lift the curse.

Yeah, you know, now in the years since they'd moved to Correggio,

Leonardo had relaxed, like I said, and settled into this kind of like less anxious existence, but this just turned it all on its head.

Of course.

I was waiting.

Yeah.

And Leonardo had continued sporadically visiting fortune tellers and had become come a little bit of a student of the occult at that point.

Just like, you know, it wasn't bothering her at that point.

And she was learning about magic and learning about fortune telling and like,

you know, like the cunning women that we talked about, like, you know,

in previous episodes of like the 1600s.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 505: Leonarda Cianciulli: The Soap-Maker of Correggio

Fun shit.

And she ended up getting this huge collection of books that she was collecting about the different subjects.

All healthy.

Yeah.

Until then.

Until then.

So she went looking in this collection, trying to find something that could help her son and keep him safe.

Sure.

And she found what she thought was the solution in a book called The Law of Equivalent Exchange.

Mm-hmm.

Oh, okay.

I see where we're going.

Yeah.

So according to the book, she could ensure to set peace safety, but in order to do so, she would have to offer another life as exchange.

An equal exchange.

According to Genevieve Ortiz, who I mentioned before, the thought of human sacrifice deeply disturbed Leonardo.

That's good.

But she felt she had no other choice.

That's not good.

No.

If she wanted to protect him, she was going to have to exchange someone else's life.

Oh, wow.

As we can see, there is something deep happening here.

There is a mental illness that lies with it and begin to describe it.

And I think, I don't think there's just one.

I think there's many.

Oh, several.

And it'll compound it.

It'll compound it.

A lot of trauma, a lot of everything.

So Leonardo started collecting all the things she was going to need to create an effective poison to do this.

And she began to think about who her victim would be, who her sacrifice would be.

If you say Rafi Eliemo, no.

No.

Okay.

Okay, good.

But she settled on a woman named Faustina Setti, who was a 76-year-old spinster.

Oh my God.

And as far as Leonardo knew, she didn't really have a lot of family and not a lot of ties in the community.

She's still a 76-year-old woman.

Now, in the years since she opened that shop in Correggio, Faustina had been one of the many women who would come by regularly. Even supported her business and you're going to sacrifice her.

And she would come by to just chat with her, share her like, you know, her woes kind of thing.

And she would lament a lot about how lonely she was.

That's horrible.

And her social position as a spinster meant that the community kind of looked down on her as sort of like somebody deserving pity a little bit.

And that's really it.

It's like, okay, you've been there before too, Leonardo.

Exactly.

And Leonardo was able to convince herself that she would actually be doing Faustina a favor by ending her life.

I murdered her.

I'm just ending her misery.

And she figured that it was going to ensure that Faustina's life became meaningful because she was sacrificing her to save Giuseppe.

So she was convincing herself that this was fine.

So once she figured that out, she invited Faustina to the shop and she said, I found a man who is interested in meeting you.

And so, I mean, Faustina was desperate to be married to get out of this spinster hood. Even at 76.

And so Leonardo told her that she'd been exchanging letters with a man in Pula.

And once he'd seen a photo of Faustina, he was in love, thought she was beautiful.

This is so cruel.

So she totally, cruelly exploited this woman's loneliness.

And unfortunately it worked.

Of course.

And Faustina was so happy, she immediately made arrangements to travel to Pula to meet this man.

And knowing that she had at least like a couple of family members in the area and scattered around the country, Leonardo said,

oh, you should write a series of letters to your family members so people don't become concerned about your absence and they won't interfere with your new relationships.

So just let them know that you're going to be gone.

This is cold-blooded.

See, we start, it's like a switch flex.

Seriously, like this was already in her.

Yeah.

Somewhere.

Yeah, it was.

Somewhere.

Because we get to a point where you go, huh, what was that about?

Like nothing makes sense here even with your,
your try to validate it in your own mind.

Yeah.

And Faustina did it all.

She wrote the letters and Leonardo promised to mail the letters a few days after she had left.

So on the morning that she was supposed to leave,
she went to Leonardo's shop and she was so excited, so nervous.

This is so mean.

And Leonardo invited her to sit down and have a drink of wine to calm her nerves.

It obviously never would have occurred to her that this was a bad thing to do
because Leonardo was her friend.

Yeah.

So she did.

She sat down, but the wine was drugged.

So she became very drowsy, very ill, very out of it.

And she was starting to panic and becoming a little immobile from the effects.

And Leonardo went into another room and came back in holding an axe.

Oh, later Leonardo would tell authorities that she, what her intention was to
swing the axe and cause a single blow to the back of her head to kill her quickly.

But she misjudged.

And the axe came down hard into Faustina's shoulder and shattered her clavicle.

Oh my God.

The woman was paralyzed in agony, like just screaming.

Leonardo had to literally like rip the axe out and then brought it down again and again
and again.

And she said all she thought about was Giuseppe's safety as she did it.

No.

So what ended up, what it ended up being was a fucking massacre and a nightmare.

In her shop, right?

It was, yep, and it was covered in Faustina's blood.

There was tissue, all manner of biological matter all over the room, covering Leonardo.

Wow.

Later, in her published memoir titled *An Embittered Soul's Confession*, she said this.

This is me just backing into the trees like over Simpson right now.

Her fucking, these are her words.

I threw the pieces into a pot, added seven kilos of caustic soda,
which I had bought to make soap, and stirred the whole mixture into the pieces dissolved
in a thick dark mush that I poured into several buckets and emptied in a nearby septic tank.
As for the blood in the basin, I waited until it had coagulated, dried it in the oven,
ground it, and mixed it with flour, sugar, chocolate, milk, and eggs,

as well as a little bit of margarine.

Needing all the ingredients together, I made lots of crunchy teacakes and served them to the ladies who came to visit, though Giuseppe and I also ate them.

I.

Yeah, that's how I acted when I first read that.

My mouth, tongue, and I just had nothing to say.

She literally used her blood to make crunchy teacakes and served them to unsuspecting patrons of her shop and also ate them herself and served them to her child, who she is protecting question mark.

What the fuck?

Did she say that like the book said he had to eat it?

So there's nothing.

This is just her own little sprinkle of magic on top of it.

That's an upsetting way to describe that.

I don't have words right now.

What the fucking fuck, you absolute monster.

Yep.

See how it flips the whole time you're sitting there going,

my God, this poor woman, the tragedy she is endured.

And this is when you look back and you go, she went mad.

She went fucking mad.

And a lot of death happened around you.

That's the thing.

And I don't know.

There's nothing that says she did anything to her children and I will remain there, but I'm just saying this and we don't have.

It's questionable at the very least.

When you look at this, you go, well, fuck.

Yeah.

But again, there's nothing that says that she did anything to her children.

But my goodness, this is her first kill.

Wow.

Now according to the law of equivalent exchange,

the sacrifice should have ensured an easy exchange.

But as far as Leonardo could tell, this wasn't an easy exchange.

She was like, you know what?

This was not easy.

It ended up being very messy and very horrific.

And then I made cake about it.

Yeah.

You know, and then she said the flesh and the fat that she was actually, because you know, she made the blood into tea cakes.

She was thinking, you know what?

I can have this equivalent exchange and save Giuseppe.

I can also make tea cakes out of the blood.
And I can also use the fat and the flesh to make some soap.
And I can get some, you know, a lot of good stuff out of this.
But she said, you know, because it was such a messy murder,
it was all kind of rendered useless.
She couldn't use the fat and the flesh.
It didn't work.
So she said, I don't know.
I don't think it went that well.
So, you know, there was a lot of mistakes, a lot of mishaps here.
And so she believed, I don't think I did it correctly.
I don't think it's going to work.
I don't think the magic is going to work.
And you know what?
Giuseppe's safety is on the line here.
And I don't think it worked.
Giuseppe's safety is a scapegoat at this point.
I also think that.
I think that's a bunch of bullshit.
And so she said, got to do it again.
No.
One murder is one murder.
Too many.
Like that is not okay.
And after several weeks passed,
without anyone really suspecting any foul play
in Faustina's absence, you know,
they didn't think she was murdered.
Because remember.
They thought she just went to see her mans.
Yeah.
Leonardo began making plans for the second sacrifice
and found her next victim would be Francesca Soavi.
Now, unlike Faustina, Francesca was a former school teacher
and active member of the community.
And she didn't have any children of her own,
but she was actually a widow, a recent widow.
And Francesca was going to be missed and noticed.
Yeah.
She's young.
So very different for like,
unfortunately from Faustina,
like she really tried to pick somebody
that didn't have a lot of ties.

And yeah.

And but Francesca was in desperate need of work at this moment since her husband had passed away.

Yeah.

And so she turned to Leonardo for advice.

No, thank you.

Now on a visit to the shop,

Francesca explained the whole thing like, oh geez, like I need to find work.

Like this is awful.

And Leonardo said, wow, lucky, lucky solution here.

Because she said, I happen to know a very good and well-paying job at a girl's school in the northern city of Piacenza.

I believe it is.

I'm sorry, Italian listeners, but, you know, you got to get there quickly to apply.

It's not going to be vacant for long.

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So, you know, she was desperate.

She was excited for an opportunity

to get out of her space and their grief at this point.

Yeah, of course.

And so she didn't ask a lot of questions.

She was just like, sure, awesome.

Leonardo's a good lady.

I like her and Raffaele.

Why would I worry about this?

They're so well respected.
So one September morning,
she arrived at Leonardo's shop early
before she planned to leave to go apply for this job.
And Leonardo was like, sit down,
write a couple of postcards to loved ones
telling you why you're, you know,
telling them why you're leaving.
You don't want to worry them,
but you got to get there.
Like, because you got to get there so quick
that we don't, you don't have time to tell everybody.
And she said, don't tell anyone where you're headed
because people might try to stop you from taking this job
because they won't want you to move away from them.
So, so don't tell them where you're going.
Just tell them that you're going to take a job
so they don't stop you.
Oh man, she is fucking wild, dude.
That's the thing.
There's so much fucking cold callousness here and cunning.
Involved in this and like manipulation.
And just, oh, just, yeah.
And so she said, you know what?
Sit down, have a glass of wine before you leave.
And she poured her a glass of poisoned wine
and quickly it disoriented her.
She disappeared into the back room
and returned with an ax in her hands.
She's going to do the ax again.
Well, this time she knew what to expect.
And she said she swung with confidence this time.
She hit Francesca on the back of the head.
The ax buried directly into her skull.
And it was hard and did the job in one swing.
Now, certain that she had killed her,
Leonardo went through her belongings,
taking anything that was of value.
What?
So wait, I thought this was a sacrifice to protect your son.
Why are you stealing her shit?
That's not an even exchange.
Because she just got rid of the rest.
She kept the stuff that was valuable.

What?

Yeah.

It's also like, honey, people are going to find that.

Yeah.

And then she dismembered her body.

This time she was careful in the execution of this because she wanted to use that flesh and fat to create some soap.

The blood was dried and eventually went into more popular tea cakes.

The remaining flesh and other useless parts, what she deemed useless,

were tossed into a vat of caustic soda and then thrown into the sludge pit behind the house later that evening.

Later, after she had been arrested, Leonardo said she only killed this woman because of her deluded belief that doing so would protect her son during the war.

And obviously that is deeply irrational.

This would have been a plausible explanation if you look at it as like she is deeply disturbed and sick and needs to be taken away.

Taken care of.

That you'd be like, okay, maybe she thinks that.

And if it was one person.

That's the thing.

Because it would still be horrific.

You could only, and you could almost look at it as she's saying that first one didn't feel right.

So put the law of equal exchange says that it needs to be easy and it wasn't easy.

So I was worried that I fucked it up and that it wasn't going to work.

So you could almost understand why a sick person would delude themselves into believing that they need to do it correctly.

You could almost believe that if you're looking at it like this is a sick person, you know what I mean?

Like not any rational person thinking this, like looking at the sickness.

You could almost think that.

But given that the murder, you know, this murder, the second murder of Francesca Suave, it should have satisfied the law of equivalent exchange

that would ensure Giuseppe's safety, correct?

Like you did it according to the deluded
and irrational and deeply disturbed
and sick thinking of Leonardo.

Yup.

This, you did it in one swing.

It was quote unquote easy relative to the first one.

Yup.

Postina.

Yup.

This should be it, correct?

One would think, well, and one would think
that also you wouldn't steal her things
and make her into tea cakes and soap.

Thank you.

One thinks a lot, I guess.

This was also not the last murder that she committed.

Yeah, I know.

And I didn't even know that to be fact, but I just know.

You just know now.

Her third victim was completely senseless.

They all are, but even by her own rationale,
it would make this victim completely senseless.

This one also comes off as very personal and petty.

Somebody pissed her off, huh?

Yeah.

So in Couragio, there were not a lot
of like famous people walking around.

It was a pretty small village,
but there was one notable resident.

Her name was Virginia Cacioppo.

Okay.

She was actually a former opera star.

Oh, shit.

And Cacioppo had retired from the stage
because it was after her husband had died
several years earlier.

Oh, so much death.

But you know, she was a wealthy patron of the arts.

She was a beloved resident in Couragio.

And according to Ortiz, quote,

Leonardo resented and admired Virginia in equal amounts.

She was jealous.

She wanted to be her.

Now remember, Virginia is very well respected.

So is Leonardo at this point.

Yeah.

Remember, she's a high, you know,
thought of very respectable in this community.

So they became close friends several years earlier.

And when Virginia decided, you know,
I miss the excitement of like urban life
and she wanted to move to a larger city.

She was like, I got to get out of here.

I want to leave.

Leonardo took this as a personal betrayal
of their friendship that she was leaving her,
but she was just abandoning her.

That's wild.

And she said, and she thought, you know what?

According to Ortiz, she said,

if she wanted someone good enough to kill for Giuseppe,

Virginia was as good as it got in a place like Couragio.

But she already killed someone twice for Giuseppe.

So I think we can let go of that theory.

Yep.

Now she used a pretty similar tactic
as she had in the first two victims.

She told Virginia that there was an available
secretarial job in Florence.

And you know, that was really good for her skill set.

It was a pretty cute job.

You know, like it was going to be a city.

And when Virginia arrived at the store
on the morning of September 30th, 1940,

things got off to like not an easy start for her plan
because Virginia repeatedly refused

Leonardo's offer for wine.

She was like, no, thank you.

She kept insisting, kept insisting.

And after a while she was like, fine,

I'll have a little drink with you.

Uh-oh.

But it took a long time and some real zhuzhing.

And she took her time drinking that wine.

She ended up finishing the entire glass
as she sat and talked with her.

And that's when the poison began to work.

Oh no.

Virginia became immobile and Leonardo laid her on the floor of the shop and carefully, as she is conscious, but immobile, removed all her expensive jewelry and anything of value on her and stuffed them all in her own pockets.

Oh my God.

So I don't think it's to save Giuseppe anymore, everybody.

That's not an even exchange to save Giuseppe.

I mean, none of it would have been an even exchange, but this is definitely not.

And then she left the room as Leonardo's laying there immobile or no, um, or excuse me,

then as Virginia is laying there immobile

and she returns with an axe

and she raised it above her head

as in Virginia's laying on the floor.

And she brings it down on Virginia's chest.

And shattered several of her ribs in one blow.

And Virginia was said to let out one small gasp

and then died on the floor.

Wow.

Leonardo quickly dismembered the body

as she had done previously,

saved any usable parts for soap and tea cakes again.

And recalling this whole thing,

Leonardo wrote in her memoir,

she ended up in the pot like the other two.

Her flesh was fat and white.

When it had melted,

I added a bottle of Cologne.

And after a long time on the boil,

I was able to make the most acceptable creamy soap.

I hate it.

I gave bars to neighbors and acquaintances.

The cakes too were better.

That woman was really sweet.

That is so disturbing.

So disturbing.

That's monstrous.

So, so disturbing.

That's monstrous.

That's not, I'm doing this for the sole purpose
of my child's safety.
This is like, I like doing this.
And later to write in your memoir
and try to make it like a...
That woman was really sweet.
Like the tea cakes were better.
And, and trying to say like,
she was so sweet,
like that has a double meaning.
Yeah.
You know what you did there.
Oh yeah.
That's fucking atrocious.
And now apparently,
remember Giuseppe is a grown boy here.
At war.
Grown man.
A few days later,
after she'd finished making the soap
from Virginia's remains,
Leonardo took a bar home
and insisted that Giuseppe wash himself with it.
He was a teenager at the time
and he was like, no,
like that's weird that you're just giving me
this random bar soap to wash with.
And making you use it.
So he, she dragged him into the tub,
pulled off his clothes for him
and washed him entirely
from head to toe with it.
And then she brought him to the kitchen
and made him eat some tea cakes.
This is...
That were made with Virginia's blood.
No, that's, that's another crime.
So in the first two cases,
she had successfully avoided suspicion.
You know, neither one of the women
had huge family ties.
I guess like, you know,
Francesca had more than Faustina, but...
But still not very many.

Virginia, it was like she went up in each time
with how many people were gonna wonder where they were.
Well, and with Francesca,
she had her right letters,
but she didn't have Virginia right any letters.
Now just a few weeks after the murder,
Leonardo was beginning to feel as,
you know, I think I did satisfy
the law of equivalent exchange.
Like, I think I'm good.
And then Virginia's sister-in-law,
Albertina Fanti,
came knocking on the door looking for Virginia.
And basically, Virginia had told her, Albertina,
about the potential job in Florence,
and had told her,
I heard about it from Leonardo.
Right.
So she decided to go straight to the source.
And she's like,
listen, your tea cakes are fucking weird lately.
Leonardo had not accounted for this possibility happening.
So she just stared at her.
And then this woman is peppering her
with direct questions,
being like, what the fuck happened here?
So she just apologized and closed the door.
Curly.
I mean, I'm glad that it went that way,
because like, that's us, but...
So Albertina was like...
That's weird.
That's weird.
So she went about town asking about her sister
and this whole thing.
And at one point,
she learned that two other women from town
who had disappeared after going to Leonardo's shop.
Uh-huh.
And eventually she took her suspicions to the local police
who started to investigate all the disappearances.
But hello, I'd like to report a crime question mark.
Now, Leonardo had been careful to cover her track.
She did a very thorough job of cleaning up after herself.

There was really not a lot in the way of evidence for the investigators to work with.
And it's the 40s?
Yeah, at this point, it's the, yeah, 40s.
So we don't really have like DNA or anything like that.
We don't have anything like that.
But what they did have with a postcards
So the postcards and letters that she had these women, right?
They were all mailed by Giuseppe.
She had had her son mail these and just like,
just being like, can you run this errand for me?
Yeah, of course he didn't know.
And in this case, so Giuseppe had mailed these letters.
They knew this now.
Yeah.
So now, just like when she was arrested for the fraud case, it hit her, oh fuck.
Giuseppe's gonna go down.
I'm gonna get him in trouble for this.
So her son was arrested because he was connected to it now.
And she went straight to the police and confessed to everything.
What?
She went to the police.
I didn't see that shit coming.
That's what I'm saying.
This is a twisty tourney.
You cannot understand any of it.
No, but she wasn't even suspected.
He was only arrested because his name, he was the one who mailed those things.
They were like, he did it.
He obviously killed these women.
She went, confessed to all three murders, insisted he had nothing to do with anything.
He didn't know about anything.
I told him just to mail these letters.
She said that she committed all three letters with the intention of protecting,
or all three murders, excuse me, with the intention of protecting him.
And at first the investigators were like, yeah, right.
I don't believe that at all.
And they were also like, you're a respectable woman in town.

I don't believe this.

Like you're trying to cover for yourself.

Like I don't believe that you murdered three people.

Like that doesn't make sense.

But then she sewed them the soap and tea cakes

made from Virginia's remains,

and also showed them all the valuables

that she'd stolen from all three women,

and took them to the sludge pit behind the house

where she disposed of liquefied body parts.

I have to go.

And what she said to them in her written confession that she did,

she wrote, I used to mix human blood with chocolate

and add an exquisite flavor made of tangerine

and aniseed, vanilla, and cinnamon.

Sometimes I added a sprinkling of powder from human bones.

What the fuck?

So the investigators were fucking horrified,

but were also like, pretty open and shut case, I guess,

since you just showed us literally every bit of evidence

that we never would have found and confessed all of it.

So she was immediately arrested and taken to jail.

You don't say.

But because the war was raging across Europe at the time,

all local prosecutions were temporarily on pause.

So she was held in a jail cell until they were going to prosecute her.

It was six years before she stood in front of a judge.

Holy shit.

That is me and Drew's entire relationship.

Damn.

Holy shit.

She was convicted of murder and sentenced to 30 years in prison.

And during that time, her family, including Giuseppe,

completely disowned her.

The town all turned their back on her.

And they referred to her as basically a monster,

and they referred to her as the soap maker of Correggio.

I don't like that personally.

And throughout her entire incarceration,

she expressed no remorse, no regret.

She did what she had to do to protect her son,

and she wasn't going to apologize for it.

And she said it was completely worth it to ensure that he was safe.

No, she doubled down.

That's the thing.
So she's sitting there saying that.
She came forward and confessed when he was going to be put on trial for it.
But they don't align.
Nothing aligns here with what she is saying.
I think because she's just so mentally ill.
What they should have just been one sacrifice
if that's what she was going with.
You know what I mean?
Yes, absolutely.
You would have think that would satisfy her,
deluded in very sick beliefs.
Reasoning, yeah.
But it didn't.
No.
And then you would think,
okay, in her delusion and her sickness.
She didn't do it right, quote unquote.
She didn't do it right.
So she did this awful second thing.
Yeah.
But then that third one was completely senseless.
She did not align with any of this.
Very petty, very.
She's stealing from these women as she goes,
which is not part of the whole thing.
She's very clearly somebody who gets some kind of pleasure from murdering people.
That's the thing.
So I think it's just, I think part of her
was obsessive about her child due to all the trauma
and all the curse nonsense and all that.
I do believe maybe it started off like that.
I think she was a very, very, very, very, very disturbed.
Very sick and disturbed and unhelpable human being,
to be quite honest.
Yeah.
And I think there was also a part of her
that came from this tragedy and this trauma
and it was in her somewhere.
Yeah.
Somewhere.
This monstrous way of being was in there somewhere.
Yeah.
I think it's a little bit of like,

oh, where did that come from?

That was lying dormant in there somewhere
because you can't just bring an axe on three different people
and chop them up and making them into tea cakes and soap
without having a little bit of something off in there
that was always there to begin with.

That's a couple of screws loose, my dude.

Now, Leonardo died in prison on October 15th, 1970.

Wow.

Never answered any more questions
that any authorities, reporters, anyone asked her
wouldn't answer anything.

She did what she did.

She told you why she did it.

I have nothing else to say.

That's the good of that.

I gave you all the information.

I gave you all the evidence.

I don't regret it.

This is why I did it.

She was like 90 when she died.

Yeah, she lived long.

Holy shit.

Hey, that fortune teller, you're going to live a long life,
but it's going to be sad.

Do you know if she outlived Giuseppe or could you not find out?

Dad, I don't know.

Actually, that's a very good question.

Interesting.

I'm sure Giuseppe kind of faded into the background after that.

Yeah, I don't think he wants to, you know,

I'm not going to go search him.

No, no, no.

But when it comes to the true murder,
the true motive for the three murders
of these poor women in Correggio,
of like Faustina, Francesca, and Virginia,
I just want to see their names.

Yeah.

We're not going to know whether what the motive really was.

There was no, I don't think there really was.

I think the motive started off with protecting Giuseppe,
and then I think she just lost her mind.

And I think she used to justify it.

Yeah.

Yeah, because it's like even the stealing of the valuables, she was running her own shop at that point.

Raffaele had a good job.

They were stable.

They weren't struggling.

Well, and it wasn't like she tried to sell them.

She was well respected.

She was, people came to her.

They came to her shop.

It wasn't like she was, so she didn't need to do,

like there wasn't even the robbery

and like financial distress and all that.

I think she just derived some pleasure from it

and probably like looked back on those items.

And I think the fact that she was feeding the teacakes to people,

like that was for laughs.

Well, that's the thing.

That was for kicks.

Give people teacakes made with human remains

and sell them bars of soap made from the fat

and flesh of three murder victims.

No.

For any other reason than besides you wanted to do that.

You got kicks from that.

You pulled the wool over people's eyes.

Like you were like, oh my God, look,

they think I'm this sweet and they're sitting there washing with this

and they have no idea.

And then the whole like washing just,

Giuseppe with the soap.

Yeah, it's a fucking bonkers.

And making him eat the tea and you cheat the fucking teacakes.

It's bonkers.

It's on another level.

I don't think we'll ever understand this.

And I don't think we ever should.

I don't think we should.

I don't want to.

No.

It's a tale that just blew my fucking mind apart.

Yeah, my oh fucking my.

And that is the story of Leonardo Chen Chuli,

the soap maker of Correggia.

Yeah, after this we're watching Buffy
and I have never needed a palate cleanser more in my fucking life.

Yeah.

So holy shit.

Yep.

You just really sent me with that one.

That was what I intended to do, so I'm glad.

Wow.

Well, we hope that you keep listening after that.

We hope you keep it weird.

But not so weird that you decide to protect your kid
by murdering others and chopping them into bits
and then making soap out of them.

Because that is not weird.

That is fucking insanity.

Woof.

What the fuck?

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a new anthology series of terror.

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that people don't want to talk about when the sun's out
and the world's supposed to make sense.

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