



National Library  
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Canadian Theses Service

Services des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada  
K1A 0N4

## CANADIAN THESES

## THÈSES CANADIENNES

### NOTICE

The quality of this microfiche is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Previously copyrighted materials (journal articles, published tests, etc.) are not filmed.

Reproduction in full or in part of this film is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30.

### AVIS

La qualité de cette microfiche dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

Les documents qui font déjà l'objet d'un droit d'auteur (articles de revue, examens publiés, etc.) ne sont pas microfilmés.

La reproduction, même partielle, de ce microfilm est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30.

**THIS DISSERTATION  
HAS BEEN MICROFILMED  
EXACTLY AS RECEIVED**

**LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ  
MICROFILMÉE TELLE QUE  
NOUS L'AVONS REÇUE**

The Lion Come Home

Joyce Myerson

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

English

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts at  
Concordia University  
Montréal, Québec, Canada

February 1986

© Joyce Myerson, 1986

Permission has been granted to the National Library of Canada to microfilm this thesis and to lend or sell copies of the film.

The author (copyright owner) has reserved other publication rights, and neither the thesis nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her written permission.

L'autorisation a été accordée à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de microfilmer cette thèse et de prêter ou de vendre des exemplaires du film.

L'auteur (titulaire du droit d'auteur) se réserve les autres droits de publication; ni la thèse ni de longs extraits de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation écrite.

ISBN 0-315-30662-9

## ABSTRACT

## The Lion Come Home

Joyce Myerson

The Lion Come Home is an episodic novel, told entirely from the point of view of its protagonist, Emilio. Each episode contains a scene from his life. These scenes are not arranged chronologically, jumping back and forth as they do in time from 1939 to 1983. This structure and the unity of voice are essential to the unfolding of the novel.

The story of the novel is universal. It is about a man, who, for the most part of his adult life, sees himself as a success, and finally discovers that he is a failure. Through this revelation he becomes a better man.

The purpose of the novel, however, is to show that a man born into the specific political and social climate of Fascist Italy, and influenced as he is by the landscape - geographical, historical, and architectural - that is particular to his country, will think, feel, and interact in ways that let us know him as a unique character.



1

Grazie a Elizabeth per avere avuto  
fiducia in Emilio.

CHAPTER 1

1974

"Andiamo a mangiare a Poggibonsi la domenica. Tutti insieme."

After all these years, his American sister-in-law still couldn't pronounce Italian properly. She spoke fluently. Why couldn't she roll her "r's"? Was it so difficult? Dio, it irked him.

Giacinta, Lorenzo, and Sara were sitting on the couch in the lobby of his hotel, discussing dinner plans for Sunday. They should have been gone by now. He had an appointment with the girl from Room 24 in her room, or bed, to be more precise. His wife and Sara were going on and on about dinner. He looked at his watch. Didn't Giacinta have a tombola match coming up?

Emilio could feel his brother's eyes upon him. What was Lorenzo thinking? He turned away from them, thankful that he was behind his hotel desk. He stared at the cubicles of keys. All the keys were in except for Room 24. What an opportunity. No one around. Except Enzo watching the hotel. Why couldn't his family get out of here? Emilio clenched his fists in exasperation. Somebody was patting his shoulder. Emilio turned around. It was Lorenzo.

"Che c'è, Emilio?" he asked.

Emilio shrugged. "Niente. Niente." He looked into

Lorenzo's eyes. Grey eyes. Knowing eyes. Oh, Lorenzo, you know too much about me. He shivered. Lorenzo looked despondent.

"Sai, Lorenzo," he answered secretively. "I don't really feel...you know...like going out. Non lo so. I don't know. Giacinta,...she's..." He turned around and let his eyes fall on his wife. She was flicking the ash from her cigarette. The smoke curled around her head. By evening her hair would be permeated with the smell of cigarette smoke. She put the cigarette down, finally, and began to clean her glasses with a tissue. She was listening to Sarah. She had worn the same dress yesterday. Maybe even the day before. Surely they could afford dry-cleaning. Emilio sighed. Why was he feeling so restless? Did it matter that much if he made love to that girl or not? His shoulders slumped. He didn't really know what mattered. Certainly not his family. Not now or on Sunday. He just wanted them to leave him alone. And he didn't feel like being confidential with his brother either. Sometimes everything made him irritable.

"Look, what can I say, Lorenzo? I don't know the answer to everything."

"I didn't ask you for the answer to everything, just to one little question. What's the matter? That's all." Hurt, Lorenzo left the desk and went back to the women. Emilio's eyes followed him. Lorenzo, Lorenzo, don't take my moods so personally. It's not you. He just felt estranged from the people sitting in his lobby.

Lorenzo sat down beside his wife again and suggested that they go home and confirm the time and place another day. Emilio breathed a sigh of relief. Lorenzo, dear brother, I thank you. He looked up the staircase. I might get up there yet. Hate to see an opportunity to hold a beautiful woman in one's arms go to waste. He stretched his arms lazily. It's nice to take off one's suit and tie in the middle of the day, not to mention the pleasure of removing someone else's clothing at the same time. At this moment, his wife came over to him. She stubbed her cigarette out in the ashtray on the reception desk.

"Vado via, caro. A presto." She took her purse and heavily plodded out, Sarah and Lorenzo following her. They waved good-bye to Emilio. Lorenzo looked as if he would like to stay a little longer, but Emilio immediately took out his register and avoided his brother's eyes. I don't have much time, damn it.

As soon as they left, he went looking for Enzo. He found him in the kitchen.

"Time to take my place, Enzo. I have a few things to take care of upstairs. Va bene?" Enzo nodded, put on his jacket, and Emilio hurried out of the kitchen. He didn't want Enzo to see exactly where he was going although it probably wouldn't take him long to figure out, seeing there was only one key missing at the desk.

Emilio quickly climbed the stairs. Nothing like a young woman to take your mind off unanswerable questions. He

wished he didn't think so often about the dissatisfactions in life. Why, a successful man should be more carefree. He was too cross lately, too uncomfortable. He just couldn't understand himself. He had everything, vero?

He knocked on the door to Room 24. This was all he needed. A good time in the middle of the day. Open up, my dear, and put Emilio in a better mood. Altro che la moglie e la cognata ed il fratello. Emilio mentally kissed his family good-bye. Come, my sweet one. Let me taste your youth and beauty.

It was a very young face that he saw when the door swung open. Her facial features, the thinness of her lips, that intelligent look in her very blue eyes, made him recall their previous conversations in the lobby and in the bar down the street where they had once shared a coffee together. She had an odd way of looking at him, as if she were sizing him up. Ah yes, she was attracted to him and she let him know it. That's what he liked about her, her honesty. He had always preferred women who did not hide their sexual needs. When she had told him that she would be resting in her room all afternoon, he had known immediately that it was an invitation.

"Ciao, ciccìa," he greeted her.

"What's ciccìa mean?" she instantly asked.

"Nothing, really. It's just a term of affection. I may greet you affectionately, may I not?" He put his arm around her waist as she shut the door. "I'm feeling quite affectionately toward you, infatti."

7

"And why is that?" she eyed him invitingly.

"Well, you've been staying over a week in my hotel. I've known you a long time." Emilio laughed and tried to kiss her. She escaped from him quickly. She put her hands out towards him.

"Whoa. Hold on a second." Emilio reached out and took her hands. He drew her to him.

"Anything wrong, carina?" he asked her. "You wanted this, didn't you?"

"No, nothing. Mmmm, I guess I like to be more the one in control," she answered.

"Be my guest, signorina," Emilio responded with a smile. "Don't let me stop you." He bowed to her and graciously kissed her fingers. Then he knelt upon one knee and wrapped his arms around her middle. He kissed the zipper of her slacks, nuzzling his head firmly against her. He heard her laugh.

All's well, he thought. He reached up his hand and took hold of the clasp on her zipper and slowly pulled it down.

"Some control you're letting me have," the girl gaily spoke down to him.

"I'm at your service, signorina." By this time the girl was wriggling out of her clothes. Emilio stroked her bare legs and kissed her pubic hair. He looked up at her. She was smiling down at him. He covered the web of tangled hair with his palm, then reached his hand upward under her

blouse. He caressed her stomach. Slowly he got to his feet, allowing his hand to rise toward her breast. Their lips met. They kissed deeply. Finally she took her mouth away. Emilio continued to kiss her face and neck. With both hands he circled her breasts.

"Who are you?" she softly murmured at him. "Who are you?" she repeated. He lifted her blouse and began to kiss her nipples through the filmy material of her brassière.

"Who am I?" he repeated her question. He manoeuvred his hands behind her back, and undid the clasp. He nudged his head beneath the brassière and licked the nipples more passionately. "The man in your room," he answered.

"Is that all?" she queried.

Emilio did not answer. The girl held his head firmly beneath her hands. She pressed his face against her chest. Emilio let her guide the movement of his head across her almost naked body. He gripped her slim waist and breathed in the odour of skin, of youth, of their harmony. Finally she tore his head from his explorations. Emilio was kneeling again by this time. He looked into her eyes, surprised.

"Che c'è? What is it?"

"Answer me. I want to know."

"Know what?"

"The answer to my question. Please tell me."

"But what does it matter. I am whoever you think I am. What more do you need to know than that I want you as you



want me? And I do want you. Now." Emilio rose and completely undressed the girl. She stood still and allowed herself to be handled. He touched her gently, feeling certain of himself. They went to the bed and Emilio removed his own clothes. He knew she was ready for him, but he penetrated her cautiously, trying to match his rhythm with hers.

When it was over, and he lay beside her, contented in body, that restlessness returned. He saw again in his mind the scene with his brother, sister-in-law, and wife. What was wrong there? Why was it wrong?

Emilio got out of bed. He walked to the window and half-opened the shutters. The girl in the bed coughed. He turned around to look at her. Why had she asked him who he was? Why did she care? Did he know who he was?

He watched her emerge from the crumpled sheets and sit up. She looked hard at him. Emilio suddenly realized his nakedness. Did she have to look at him like that?

"You don't much like your wife, do you?"

Emilio's eyes opened wide in astonishment. How did she know he was thinking about his wife? How much had she seen of him and Giacinta together, that she would come up with such an idea? He walked over to the bed. He was about to sit down beside her but thought better of it. Maybe he'd better get out of here now? But she looked so enticing. He reached out and slowly stroked her arm from the shoulder to the wrist. Then he pointed his index finger at her.

"What makes you say that?"

She took his pointed finger within her own and

examined it carefully. Emilio began to feel very strange. This woman was like a witch. Suddenly she leaned back against the headboard and pulled his arm with her. Emilio lost his balance and sat down.

"Are you going to answer me?" he asked, getting impatient. He did not remove his finger from her grasp. The girl took it now and slipped it beneath the sheets. She guided it gently to her pubic hair. Emilio allowed her to stroke the delicate mass with the tip of his finger.

"I've watched you with her. I'm very observant." She opened her legs. She continued to guide his finger more deeply into her. Emilio saw her look between his own legs. She saw what she wanted and released his finger. Clever child. She knew he would not stop now. He slipped his finger inside and out carefully, drawing the stickiness with it. Methodically he ran his finger up and down the soft protrusions. He began to relax again. Still he wondered why she had made that remark about Giacinta. Couldn't she keep her observations to herself? His marriage. It just was. A fact..

She took his other hand now and placed it on her breast. He teased her nipple. It was a beautiful pink. He bent down to kiss it. Her hand clasped his penis.

He felt himself grow as her hand worked. He wanted to kiss her mouth now, and throw his weight upon her, but as he raised his mouth to meet hers, she spoke again.

"You're weird, you know." As she said this, she lifted herself up and threw her head between his legs. Her lunge was so forceful, that he found himself thrown back into

a lying position against the bed. Absorbed as he was in the play of her mouth and tongue, he hardly heard her. At the crucial moment, she lifted her head away and put herself into a sitting position over him. She eased herself down, allowing Emilio to come into her. Emilio held her hips and as he thrust upwards, he pushed and pulled her to and fro above him. She bent down over him and began to lick his ear.

"Oh, yes, I've been watching you," she whispered. Her voice got huskier. "Ever since I came to stay in your hotel in Florence." Emilio opened his eyes. She moved her head. Her eyes were poised above his, centimetres away. "I'm watching you now." She threw her head back and cried out. Seconds later, Emilio cried out. Ironically there was little pleasure.

Emilio threw the girl off him. He got up and held her shoulders down. He yelled into her face.

"Look, what are you talking about? What do you want from me?"

"I don't know. I'm not sure," she answered carefully. "You're an interesting specimen. However," she smiled provokingly, "I can't figure you out. Not even now."

"What do you mean, not even now?"

"Not even after making love with you. My naiveté to think that everytime you get into bed with someone, you solve a mystery," she sighed in mock regret.

Incensed, Emilio lifted himself away from her. He went into the bathroom and turned on the bidet. He washed and dried himself quickly. What am I listening to this for?

He rushed back into the bedroom.

She was sitting on the bed, knees up, her arms embracing them. Her eyes were closed.

"Look, what do you want from me? I'm a man, like any other. I'm forty-five. I have a hotel. I'm successful. I'm married. I have a grown-up daughter. I take my holidays at the beach. I've travelled around Europe. I...I..."

"You take nineteen-year-old girls to bed."

"Yes, I take nineteen-year-old girls to bed."

"Yeah, but what do you really like doing? You didn't seem to really enjoy it."

"Well, if you wouldn't have got me so angry, with your observa..."

"You know what I think?" she interrupted him. "I think you don't much like anything." She was on her knees now. Emilio leapt onto the bed, onto his knees, and faced her challengingly.

"How do you know I don't much like anything?" What was this child getting at? Hadn't their experience been pleasurable enough for her?

"Let me ask you a question, Mr. Successful Hotelkeeper. Is this your real life?" She swept her arm around, and indicated the bed, the room, the street outside. "'Cause if this is your real life, forget it." She turned her back on him and got down from the bed. She made her way to the bathroom. Emilio rushed after, but she shut the door quickly. He heard her turn on the shower. She hadn't locked the door so he threw it open. She was shampooing her hair.

"What kind of bathrooms are these without shower curtains? I'm getting everything wet, the sink, the toilet, the bidet."

Emilio could not contain himself. He rushed at her and held her face between his hands. The shampoo ran down his arms. The shower spray bounced harshly off his face.

"What do you mean - Is this my real life? What kind of question is that?"

"A good question," she retorted. She continued to scrub her hair. Finally she removed his hands, turned around, and let the water rinse over her head.

"Is this your real life?" Emilio asked her back.

She swung around. They both withdrew from the shower. "Look, I'm only nineteen. I don't know what I am doing yet. I have no idea what my real life is. But I'll tell you something. I'm sure as hell going to find out before I'm forty-five." She stopped and looked at him seriously. Then she half smiled at him and said, "Now please get out of my shower. I'm wasting all this lovely hot water."

Emilio reached for the door handle, slowly turned it and walked out. He shut the door behind him. He looked around for a towel. There was none in sight. He didn't wish to return into the bathroom so he pulled the sheet off the bed and dried himself. More perplexed than angry at this point, Emilio dressed hurriedly and left the room.

When he closed the door of room twenty-four behind him, and came into the empty corridor, he heard the hotel door slam shut. He looked down the stairwell. His daughter blew

into the narrow entranceway. She was big, as was her mother, but not stolid or slow. She had a breezy way about her. Rooms never seemed to have enough space in them to contain her. Emilio walked down the stairs to greet her. She kissed him hello.

Emilio went behind the desk. His daughter disappeared into the back kitchen. He heard her more than audible voice calling to Norma, one of the cleaning women. An argument ensued. Enzo chuckled and gave Emilio a knowing look, as if to say, "Women, che pazzia." Emilio sat down, leaned his elbows against the desk and covered his eyes with his hands. Carmela and her mother were both shrill and ungainly. My women, he thought. Che vergogna!

"Enzo, go tell them to shut up. They'll disturb the clients. Porca Madonna!" he swore under his breath.

As Enzo was leaving to obey his order, Emilio considered that sometimes he truly enjoyed his daughter's company. He recalled their evening walks through the glittering resort towns on the Mediterranean coast where they took their summer holidays. Watching the tourists, she would inevitably have him laughing at the way they dressed, their odd habits, their foreign accents when they tried to speak Italian. Yes, Carmela could be fun. Fun, he mused, eyes still shut. What did that girl mean about the real life? The real life, I have a real life, he argued with her in his mind. My daughter, for instance, he offered his imagined opponent. We have fun together. He heard her object to the word fun.

Emilio sighed and opened his eyes. Nervous, he looked around the lobby of his hotel. The interior was very

impressive. Expensive. Tasteful. It usually made him feel rich and full. But today everything was all wrong. And that girl, too. How long had he been muddling over this question, anyway? Is that why he was so restless? What was his real life?

Giacinta entered. She looked pleased with herself. She usually won a lot of money at tombola.

"The hotel is full," he told her. In his absence, Enzo had managed to fill the rooms that had been vacated the day before.

"Bene," was her response as she came behind the desk. "Sai, domani, we have to rearrange the rooms. That group of forty Americans is finally arriving."

"It's not so hard," Emilio offered her. "If we put five beds in the rooms on the bottom floor, and four in numbers 13, 14 and 15, we only have to use three rooms on the top floor for them. Right?"

"We could even put five beds in 14."

"That's true," he nodded, acknowledging her superior powers at accomodation. "Then we will have uh...six bedrooms, no seven free for regular occupa..." He didn't finish his sentence. A familiar face peered through the window of the heavy front door. Emilio glanced at his wife.

"Number eight?" she asked.

"Va bene," he replied. He nodded to the man to come in. The door opened. A respectable-looking middle-aged couple walked in. They were smiling.

"Buona sera a tutti," the man greeted them.

"Buona sera," Emilio and Giacinta replied together.

Emilio handed over the key to the man. Giacinta and the woman exchanged pleasantries. Still smiling, the clients took themselves to perform their adulterous act within the many-storied walls of room eight.

Emilio tried to remember if he had to ever pay for the use of a room in the middle of the afternoon. Not since his Livorno days. Now his lover-clients paid him for the room. Emilio gazed up the stairwell. The girl had not yet descended. He tried to visualize her body, allow the image to reawaken his instincts. After all, despite her insolence, he had had... Emilio sighed and shook his head. It was no use. He looked over at his wife for distraction. She was busy with her account books, seated close beside him. The girl was right. He didn't much like Giacinta. She left him with a feeling of tastelessness.

Somewhere in the back his daughter started yelling again. Giacinta got up from her chair and made for the small door that barred her and her husband from the traffic of clients. Emilio watched her closely. She lifted the small lever out of its slot, opened the door, moved outside, turned around, and clicked it shut. He was alone in his little cage. He felt a sense of relief.

Giacinta called loudly to Carmela and Norma, as she walked toward the rear kitchen. All of them were yelling now at the top of their lungs. Where, oh where, was Enzo?



"Do you want to leave now?" Giacinta inquired before slipping out of view. For answer, Emilio swiftly removed himself from the cubicle behind the lobby desk.

"I'll talk to Maurizio about rearranging the rooms. Could you pick up the rolls for tomorrow's breakfast on your way home? The reservation for the entire group is with breakfast," she reminded him.

As Emilio opened the door to take his leave, he turned around and mentioned, "I'll be home late." But she was already out of sight. Closing the door, Emilio shook his head, ruling out the possibility of his wife being his real life.

He crossed the street and turned around to look at his sixteenth century palazzo. He was proud of his building. It had taken him three years to get permission from the Ministero delle Belle Arti to change the facade and remodel the inside. It had been a long fight. In Florence, in Italy, no one ever liked to change the appearance of things. But he had been brave and petitioned and petitioned. Finally he had won and now he could stand proudly and gaze at the stony exterior and feel as if it were a monument to his perseverance. Conflict with authority, was that the real life? It was lively. It was exhilarating.

Emilio turned the corner on Via Nazionale. His car was parked a few metres away. He smiled at it appreciatively. He unlocked the door and sat down behind the wheel. Immediately he felt some comfort. His big warm animal. He

caressed the steering wheel. He turned the ignition key and heard the motor purr.

He eased the car into the street and headed for the Arno river. As he drove along, he remembered his long ago youth during the time of Fascism. He remembered marching along the river with his blackshirted comrades. Comradeship. Male comradeship. He had hardly been more than a child, but it had been such a powerful force for him. Perhaps that was why he always recalled the time of Mussolini with such nostalgia. Sometimes, even now, he would listen, alone in his bedroom, to the voice of Mussolini on record, exhorting the Italian nation to greatness. It was a voice that had moved him, moved him still.

That had been a wonderful time. He had felt love then, the simple love of country. And that unforgettable safe feeling of being surrounded by all that maleness, clothed in black. He wondered, as he continued his smooth drive toward the suburbs, if his involvement in the hotelkeeper's association had been an attempt to recreate that sense of belonging, of oneness. Yes, he liked his colleagues, but were they his real life? It did not seem likely. He never really felt with them that inward flow, that fire of his youth.

Emilio gripped the wheel of his car more tightly. He was upset. He had wanted to forget all these stupid questions by indulging in a little afternoon fun with that girl. Had she implied that he was empty, although outwardly

wealthy and content? Emilio wiped his forehead. He was perspiring. Enough now. Basta.

He parked his extravagant car in the dark narrow street. This street was almost like a tunnel with the tall apartment buildings holding out the sun and enshrouding it in gloom no matter how bright the day.

This was a new section of town. After he emerged from the street, in which he always parked his car, mud, building materials, half-finished palazzi greeted him. Emilio had to side-step puddles of soft yellow-gray slime. When would they ever finish these buildings? Everything seems to take forever in this country. Always behind schedule.

At the end of a huge pile of construction material and precarious-looking scaffolding stood a small old building of two floors. It had been there many years before the onslaught of new construction. Once it had been a house in the country far from the city of Florence. Now it was just a part of the line of suburbs growing out from the edge of the city.

Emilio shaded his eyes from the afternoon sun and looked up to the back balcony of the second story. Maria was hanging the wash on the line. She was singing along with the radio from the downstairs building, "Mi ritorni in mente, bella come sei...." She smiled at him. She continued her work and her song, "forse ancor di più. Mmm...mmm mmm...Mi ritorni in mente, dolce come mai, come non sei tu..."

Emilio climbed the stairs nimbly, passed his arm around her shoulders, opened the door, and entered the kitchen.

Ten-year-old Anna was sitting at the table sipping hot chocolate. Emilio sat down, too, beside her, and looked at her narrow little face. She was getting over a bad cold. He stroked her finger that was hooked into the handle of the mug. She lifted the drink and offered him some. He drank from her cup. This was their private little ritual, that whatever she held in her hands at the moment he appeared, a book, a toy, or food, she would offer it to him. He always accepted.

Maria joined them inside. She came behind Emilio's chair and affectionately stroked his hair. Emilio took her other hand in his and squeezed it fondly. Anna was the first to speak.

"Emilio, will you come outside and play with me?" She sighed. "I'm tired of being inside all day. Mamma says I'm getting better." She got up from her chair, and in imitation probably of some older friend, she waved her hand around the room and exclaimed haughtily, "Sono stufa di questa casa." She looked at Emilio flirtatiously. Then once more a little girl, she bounced at him and dropped herself into his lap. "Please, Emilio."

"Well, you may be tired of this house, but I just arrived and I intended to spend some time with your mother first. But before dinner, we can play, and perhaps, if you're lucky, do some homework together." Anna made a face

and jumped off his lap.

"I'm going to visit Cecilia downstairs. Ciao, mamma."

She slammed the door behind her. Emilio looked up from his seated position at Maria. He pointed at the door.

"That girl has some temper. And she's quick to lose it too." Maria playfully patted Emilio's cheek.

"Oh, go on now. She's only ten. Let her be disappointed. You're certainly more interesting than eight-year-old Cecilia, no?"

"I guess so, but she should be more... I don't know... polite." Emilio stood up and kissed Maria. "I guess it doesn't matter. Let's go to bed before she gets tired of Cecilia."

He didn't wait for Maria. He just went straight to the bedroom. She did not follow immediately, but stayed in the kitchen to fold the dry clothes. She quietly went about her work without explanation. He liked it, that she said little. Sometimes she said more, and he didn't like it. Emilio walked into the bedroom. It was always better not to talk. It could be his motto: Keep quiet and you have no trouble. He wondered if that had been his father's way with women, too. Certainly he was a silent man in his own family, except for outbursts of anger.

Emilio looked around the room. It was quite bare, but cheerful. On the bed was a brightly coloured quilt. On one wall, Anna's paintings, which changed from week to week. There were no clothes scattered about. They were all inside

the wardrobe. Emilio kept some clothes in there, too. On a low table beneath the window were flowers from the fields. Emilio walked over to the window. He went round the table and pushed the shutters partially open. He heard the chatter of Anna and her friend. He smiled, but then remembered, not without a sense of unease, that earlier that day, he had been alone in a room with a young woman and had also parted the shutters of her bedroom window.

Abruptly he turned around, went to the bed, sat down and removed his shoes. Seven years. Anna had been just three when Emilio had entered their lives. And for seven years he had kept this secret from everyone he knew. He supported Maria, not over-indulgently, for she would not have wanted it. He came two or three afternoons a week to make love to her. Inevitably he stayed to dinner and spent time with Anna, who asked, surprisingly enough, few questions. He wondered why she never asked if he were her father, or why he did not stay there. She could have asked many more complicated questions, too, but she never did. Perhaps her mother had explained everything to her and had made it all right. What would he have said to her, anyway? Your mother is my mistress. I pay her to sleep with me. I do not make love to my wife. Impossible.

He took off his shirt and placed it on the chair beside the bed. Then he lay down. Perhaps this weekend he would take Maria and Anna on a trip. Get away from the hotel. Forget his non-existent abstract problems. Forget today's

experience. Perhaps that girl would leave before he got back. Anna would be excited. Sometimes they took trips together, when the hotel was not too full, during off-seasons. Maria at thirty-seven was very lovely. He always enjoyed her body, but somehow when they left Florence, she always looked even more beautiful. Strange. Why would that be?

Emilio heard Maria's sandals clicking toward the bedroom. He looked up as she paused at the threshold.

"Let's go to Rome tomorrow with Anna. We could spend all day tomorrow, Sunday, even part of Monday, if you don't mind her missing a day of school."

She looked surprised. "I thought this was peak season. Aren't the tourists descending upon Florence in droves?" She came over to him and lay down beside him. He took her in his arms. He kissed her forehead and her hair.

"I know, I know. So my wife will work a little harder. Besides we have Enzo at the desk all morning now." He got up on one elbow and gazed up and down her body. It was still youthful, perhaps not nineteen.... He began to stroke her face.

"I'd really like to go. Besides you always look so beautiful when we leave Florence." He traced the lines of her mouth. She kissed his finger.

"Do I?" she asked, laughing.

"Yes, you do." He kissed her mouth. He rubbed his lips against hers. He gently bit the lower one. He licked the inside of her lips around her teeth. "Let's take our

clothes off," he murmured. As they removed their clothes quickly, Emilio continued his train of thought.

"I was wondering why."

"Why what?" He was sitting on the bed removing his socks, his back to her. Completely undressed now, he turned round to her, and wrapped his arms around her. He kissed her shoulder blades lovingly, grazing his lips within the sensuous hollows that they formed.

"Why...uh...why do you look lovelier outside Florence?"

"You really don't know why?" She stroked his hair with her broad palms, and then his back with her fingers.

"No, do you?" He looked up at her, his chin resting on her chest bone.

"Perhaps, perhaps, it's because we are like a family, then." She continued caressing his head. "Anna feels it. I feel it. So I guess I look better." She looked into his eyes. "You don't seem convinced."

Emilio lay his head between her breasts. He closed his eyes. He did not know what to make of her response. A family? But Maria was his mistress. She aroused him. His wife did not. He felt a need for her. Sometimes it was so strong, he couldn't wait to leave work. Like today. Today he needed something, something he could only get from her body. He caressed and massaged her skin now, pressing deeply with his hands. He suddenly felt desperate for...he didn't know what. He pulled himself up along her body until his



mouth met hers again. He kissed her endlessly, trying to go deeper and deeper until she pulled away with a cry of pain. So he ground his mouth into her neck, between her breasts, down her belly. Finally he parted her legs and dug his way into that crevice, that silent darkness. Maria was moaning. Perhaps he hurt her, but he couldn't stop. She pushed his head away.

"Come inside me, Emilio."

So he turned her over on her stomach and Maria raised herself upon her knees.

"Now, Emilio, now."

He drew his own thighs up against hers and slowly penetrated her. He cupped his hands around her breasts. He thrust a long long time, for ages, slowly, slowly, rocking back and forth. He lost awareness of Maria. He was alone, calling in the darkness.

Much later, he spoke:

"Do you look for something in my body, something you want, something you need? Something indefinable?"

"What a strange question for you, Emilio."

"Tell me, Maria."

"I look for something in you, Emilio. Certainly."

"Do you ever feel shame at being the 'mistress'?"

"What do you mean by 'mistress'?"

"Well, that is what you are, aren't you? Would you rather by my wife?"

She raised herself up to sit. She turned to him.

"How foolish you are."

"Does it disturb you that I have a wife, a family, a whole life that doesn't touch you?"

"It does not matter."

"How does it not matter?"

"Your other life is not real for me. Only this is real."

Emilio lay silent. For the first time that day he relaxed. He even slept, until he heard a knock on the bedroom door. Maria did not wake, so he removed his arm as gently as possible from beneath her neck.

"Anna, you may come in," he called softly to her, "but your mother is still sleeping. So be quiet." Anna opened the door and grinned at him. She had obviously forgiven him. He sat up.

"What's on your mind, child?" She came over toward the bed. "What? No sandals on. Marble floors are cold even in June. And you're not quite well yet. Go and put something on your feet, young lady."

"I want to visit the big holes that the workmen have made in the ground, Emilio," she said, not taking heed of his words. "Take me, Emilio, before the buildings go up. I want to see how deep they go." She pointed at her mother.

"She says I'm too little to go alone. It's too dangerous, but she never wants to come. You come with me. Dài, via, Emilio. Va bene?" she begged him. Emilio smiled and looked over at the sleeping Maria. She was on her side now, her back to them, breathing deeply.

"Va bene. Go get your shoes on," he answered her, as he pulled the sheet over Maria's shoulders. Anna ran out of the room.

"And afterwards, we will do your assignments for school. Understood?" He kissed the back of Maria's neck and then got up to dress.

Anna was waiting by the kitchen door when he came out of the room. She opened it and raced down the stairs toward the other side of the field. Emilio calmly followed through the debris. He watched her lithe figure and imagined her becoming a dancer when she grew older. He would tell Maria to give her lessons. It was better to start young after all.

As Anna reached one of the large pits, he watched her peer into its depths. She was too close to the edge. It made him nervous. He called to her to be careful and ran the rest of the way. She laughed, took his hand, and began to explore.

As they gazed downwards, he told her his thoughts.

"Do you know that archaeological excavations take place continually in Tuscany?" Anna shook her head. "That's what these pits make me think of," he continued. "I know that they are really here for the construction of new buildings. Just the same, that's what this whole site reminds me of." He swept his arm around the entire excavation area.

"What are the archaeologists digging for?"

"Oh, ancient civilizations. Whole Etruscan cities are buried all over Tuscany deep beneath the earth. Perhaps

here," he smiled jokingly, "on this very spot, there might be hidden objects from that great, great civilization."

"You're not serious, Emilio," she looked up at him, eyes bright with wonder. Emilio shrugged his shoulders.

"Who knows?"

"You mean we could be standing on top of some marvellous ruin, maybe streets, and walls, and amphitheatres..."

"Statues, sepulchres, mausoleums," Emilio expanded upon her fabrication. Anna pulled his arm.

"Let's go look, Emilio. Vieni!" She began to search for Etruscan treasures amid piles of bricks and cement bags littering the earth.

Emilio just watched now, not thinking anything in particular, absorbed in her quest, in the eagerness of her movements, in the quickly changing expressions of her face. He watched and felt relaxed, happy, even. When the sun began to set, he called to her. Reluctantly, she came and hand in hand they walked back to the little house at the other end of the field.

In the house, Maria was busy preparing the dinner.

"Ciao," she said, "have you had a good time?" She was bending over the oven door, and Emilio, recalling their recent lovemaking, felt the urge to caress her. He went towards her and laid his hand upon her back, suppressing his more passionate intention.

"What's for supper?" he asked, but Maria could not

answer for Anna was excitedly recounting what she and Emilio had just discovered together. She was skipping around the room, talking in a sing-song voice, as if she were reciting a poem.

"You know, Maria," Emilio managed to say, after Anna had quieted down, "I was thinking that we should send Anna to a dance academy, or maybe a private school that specializes in the Arts. What about her taking dance lessons this summer? I think she could be talented, vero? Che dici?" Anna ran up to him and jumped into his arms. She hugged him tightly. Why had he never been this interested in his own daughter? Emilio waltzed around the table with Anna in his arms.

"It's not as if I can't afford it," he added.

"Oh, Emilio, I'd love to be a dancer. Isn't it a wonderful idea, mamma?" Maria nodded. Her face was flushed with excitement, too. How beautiful you are, he silently said to her.

"Va bene, Anna, let's do some homework. You haven't been to school in how many days?" Anna made a face.

"Three days, but tomorrow is Saturday. Do we have to?"

"Oooo, three days. We have a lot of catching up to do. Go get your books. If we wait any longer you'll forget everything." Emilio put her down and she went into the bedroom.

"She's a bit tired today, Emilio," Maria said to

him, "Don't overdo it. You know how resistant she becomes when you try too hard." Emilio was a bit surprised at this remark.

"What do you mean by that, Maria?" Maria was washing the lettuce at the sink. The water was running so she raised her voice a little.

"Oh, you know how frustrated she can get when you're too much of a perfectionist. You know what I mean. Especially with English. You want her to be as good as you." She shut the tap and came over to Emilio for she could see that he was a little hurt. She stroked his cheek and kissed him lightly on the mouth.

"No one is as good as you in English. You know that, Emilio. All your years of experience in the American army, and then in the hotel..." but Anna had come in now with her books. Maria stopped and went back to her vegetables. She had flattered him, but somehow he felt uncomfortable. He thought that she appreciated this time he spent with Anna, helping her. Maybe she didn't after all. But if his English was close to flawless, then all the more reason for him to be the one to teach Anna. No elementary school teacher knew as much as he did. He sat down at the kitchen table next to Anna.

"What's there to do today, my dear?" he affectionately asked her.

"Just geography and English."

"Let's do geography first." They turned to her

text and worked for a while, huddling like army strategists over her maps. Emilio began to feel comfortable again and the anxiety over Maria's comments seemed to dissipate. When they finished, he had a short conversation with Anna in English, as was his wont, before they did her exercises. They talked about their recent adventure.

"No, no, Anna, not Etrooscans. Etruscans."

"Va bene, va bene. E--trus--cans. I...like... Etruscan...mmm,...uh..., rovine. Come si dice 'rovine' in inglese, Emilio?"

"Ruins, Anna."

"I...like...Etrooscan, no, Etruscan ruins." she said proudly.

"Brava, brava. Let's do your assignments."

"Sono stanca, Emilio. Let's stop."

"Well, but we should finish your homework so you will be prepared for Monday." He opened the book. Anna sighed. Maria came over and touched her arm.

"Just finish, dear, and then we'll eat." Anna nodded. However, things did not go so well and she hardly paid attention. Emilio got annoyed.

"What am I doing this for, Anna? Come, quickly, let's finish," he added impatiently. He pointed to a sentence that she had just written in English. "You see, in English, you place the adjective before the noun."

"Uffa, Emilio." Anna shook her head, sat back, and folded her arms across her chest.

"What do you mean, no?" Emilio's eyes opened wide. Anna continued to shake her head.

"I'm telling you, Anna, in English, you say the 'warm sunshine', not the 'sunshine warm'." Anna was adamant. She shook her head again. Emilio threw his arms in the air and let them fall loudly against the table.

"Look, who's the expert here, signorina?"

"My teacher!"

"Look, my dear, she's wrong. She just doesn't know English as well as I do!" His voice was getting louder.

"No, you're wrong," she yelled back. "You always think you're perfect. Well, you're not." Anna got up from her chair, put her hands on her hips, and faced him in open rebellion. Emilio was so infuriated he did not know what to say.

"Anna, go to your room at once," called Maria to her. She came over to her daughter and gave her a slight push in that direction.

"That's no way to speak to Emilio." Anna gave Emilio a glaring look and went off to her room.

"What kind of superior brat have you brought up here?" Emilio yelled at Maria. Anna heard and called from her room.

"I am not a brat," she cried. "You just think you know everything. Well, you don't!"

"Don't speak to Emilio like that, Anna," Maria called back to her.



"Why can't I? He's not so great!"

"You ungrateful little..." In bewilderment and rage, Emilio flung her English grammar at her door. Maria tried to calm him down.

"Emilio, stop. I told you she was tired. She's just a child with a child's attention span. She doesn't mean those things." Emilio was now furious with Maria for taking Anna's side. He glared at her, felt a scream rise, stifled it, and stalked out the kitchen door, slamming it as loudly as he could behind him. Unforgivable child, he muttered out loud. What would she do without him? His care, his support? What would they both do without him?

He drove his car furiously towards the lights of the city. What an awful question he had put to himself, for he knew that Maria had never really wanted to stop working. It had been his desire.. It was possible they could do very well without him.

As he neared the Lungarno, Emilio felt a sudden impulse to head towards the Ponte Santa Trinità. It was the statue he wanted to see, Francavilla's marble woman, symbolizing la Primavera, at the head of the bridge. The head of this sculpture had been lost during the war. There had been rumours that after the bombing had decapitated her, some German or Allied soldier had stolen it. But in 1961 the head had been dredged out of the Arno and placed for all to see upon the delicate neck, and once more the lonely sentinel could gaze over her city, representing not only spring and

rebirth, but the completion of the city's reconstruction after the disasters of the war.

For Emilio she had special significance. He parked his car in the piazza and gazed up at her from his window and remembered. Thirteen long years ago, he had been at a crossroads in his life. His marriage was meaningless. After all, he had married Giacinta only because he had made her pregnant. His work was drudgery. He was working in his mother's hotel only because she had ordered him to. The tug toward Livorno and the American army was still strong, even after eleven years. And worst of all, his mother controlled the purse strings. He never had any money. He always had to beg for it and account for every lira that he spent. And then this great event took place in the city of Florence: the headless woman of Santa Trinità was restored to her former beauty. All of Florence, at some time, filed by to pay respect to her.

On the day Emilio came to see her in 1961, something happened to him. Seeing her standing there in her splendour, gave him this wonderful sense of determination. He placed his own head, in imagination, back on his shoulders. He told himself that from then on, he would not let himself drown in the sentiment of helplessness that was quickly overtaking his life. He would make something of it. He would become a success for all to see. Nothing would stand in his way. To hell with Giacinta. To hell with his mother. He would spiritually free himself from them, and make his way on his

own.

And today, again, he looked long at his past inspiration. He offered up to her this image of success that he had willfully created. But as he did so, the questions came. What is it all for? Whom is it for? To whom would he give his success? The scene with Anna in Maria's kitchen returned to torment him. Ungrateful, arrogant, superior brat, he mumbled angrily to himself. He clenched his fists in frustration. He closed his eyes. He took his key and felt for the ignition. When he raised his head and opened his eyes he noticed a familiar face at the window. It was Domenico, a colleague. He rolled down the window and was greeted by a look of surprise.

"What's wrong, Emilio? You look ready to strangle someone!"

"Women!"

His friend chuckled. "Problems with the wife?"

Having just imagined himself in Maria's kitchen, he was thrown by Domenico's remark. He responded in a daze.

"...Uh...my...wife?"

His friend laughed even louder. "Don't tell me, Emilio. Something on the side? I never would have thought!" Domenico responded in mock amazement.

Emilio swiftly rolled up his window and started the car noisily. This lighthearted, vulgar allusion to Maria had pained him. What was happening to him? She was only his mistress. Why was he letting these stupid feelings get the better of him?

He drove toward the bakery to pick up the rolls for breakfast. He was in a terrible state. His nerve-endings felt exposed. As the car turned the corner, he took a swift glance at the statue. The head was still there. He made up his mind. Despite his quarrel with Anna, he would get away. He would take her and her mother to Rome tomorrow.

On the Via Nazionale he parked his car and walked to the panificio.

"It's Fiumicelli," the baker's wife called into the sweet-smelling interior. The baker came out and greeted him with pleasure.

"Signor Fiumicelli, how good to see you in person. It's not often we do. You are always sending someone else to fetch your rolls these days. Too much success has made you elusive." He clapped Emilio's shoulder with his broad workman's hand. Emilio was touched. Why should this man care so much?

"Ah, and I have something special for you, beside breakfast rolls for your clients. Something I know you will love. What good fortune that you yourself show up today."

"Something special for me?" Emilio asked. The baker nodded, went to the back, and returned with a large round loaf of dark bread, the kind Emilio liked best. Across the top of it, with letters shaped from extra bits of dough, was spelled the last part of his name, 'Celli. People who knew him well called him that sometimes. Emilio took the heavy bread in his hands. The look of surprise on his face

caused the couple to laugh. Emilio laughed, too. Deep down he felt really moved by their gesture. He had felt so many things today. So much emotion was draining him. He walked back to the hotel slowly, dreading contact with his normal world. If he could really be normal again.

At the entrance, he cautiously stared through the window of the portone first, hoping the lobby was empty. Seeing no one of his family, he slipped in stealthily, greeted his night porter en passant, and hurried into the kitchen to deposit his parcels of bread.

At dinner, he breathed a sigh of relief when his daughter immediately turned on the television. Good. No conversation. They could sit more or less in silence before the dominating screen. Emilio sat back between mouthfuls and watched his daughter speedily change the channels on the tiny control box. Then he turned his eyes to the set. When they had first purchased it, he had been proud of its opulent cabinet, of its beautiful colours, of its superior technology. It was an aesthetic wonder. But as he watched today, he realized that he no longer felt anything for this particular possession.

Abruptly he turned to his wife and told her he was going to Rome for the week-end.

"Sai, Giacinta, now is the time before July, August, and September to meet with the Associazione di Albergatori in Rome to discuss price fixing and uh, government control, and uh, ..., capito?"

"Ma, Carmela, smetti. Stop changing the channels all the time. I don't care what I watch, but I want to watch something, not bits of everything," Giacinta remarked to her daughter. But she had paid attention to Emilio for she nodded her head as she lit a cigarette.

"Va bene, Carmela, stop right there. I like Mina. Let's listen to her."

"Dai, mamma, she's so old-fashioned," answered Carmela as she switched the channel to a quiz show.

"Ma che old-fashioned? What are you talking about?"

"I'm just going for a short walk, ladies. I'm going to have a coffee at the bar. I'll be right back." Emilio slipped out of the dining-room. Giacinta called to him as he reached the front door.

"There's a new movie at the Excelsior. It starts at ten. Do you want to go?" she asked.

"I want to go, too, mamma," he heard Carmela say to her mother.

"Certo, Giacinta, if you can manage to sit through the movie without a cigarette, we can all go," he sarcastically responded.

"Va fancullo, cretino," he heard her yell to him as he shut the door on them.

In the bar Emilio telephoned Maria to tell her to be ready early the next morning. He heard Anna scream with delight.

"Are you sure it's all right? You don't want to

talk about what happened today. Maybe you and Anna..."

"Look, Maria, let's not talk about it. I don't even want to think about it."

"But Emilio, it's important."

"Basta, Maria, I've heard enough. Besides I have to go now. Giacinta and Carmela are waiting for me. Ciao."

"Ciao."

\* \* \* \* \*

Saturday morning at nine they were on their way. Emilio drove as fast as his car would let him. In three hours, they had reached the Raccordo Annulare around the city of Rome, and the traffic slowed them down.

"Look at all these trucks, Emilio. I've never seen so many," squealed Anna from the back seat.

"Yes, it's always difficult to get into Rome, no matter what time of day or night. You can just slip in and out of Florence, but a city of this magnitude demands..." Emilio gestured with one arm at all the lanes of traffic. "I love it." He looked over at Maria. "I don't know why I do. I just love the bigness." Maria smiled but did not say anything. Emilio took her hand in his and held it firmly for a brief moment.

When they finally entered the city, all the Romes greeted them at once, the modern one of busy streets and busy people, the Baroque one with its graceful cathedrals and bright white fountains, the Ancient one with its Forum and Colosseum and triumphal arches. To Emilio, it felt like the centre of the world. He breathed deeply. He felt free of

the narrow prison of Florence, of the dramas that had threatened him yesterday. He drove to Piazza Navona. He had considered the whitest monument of them all, the one to Vittorio Emanuele, but changed his mind, thinking that it might provoke some anti-Fascist chord in Maria, since the Duce himself had had it built. He would save it for a different moment when Maria would be so conquered by the beauties of Rome that no political sentiment could possibly mar her enchantment.

When he parked the car and they walked towards the piazza, Emilio began to speak as soon as it came into view.

"You know, Maria, it's not water sparkling in those fountains. It's music. Listen!" But Anna had a different idea. She ran off.

"Oh no, Emilio, this is real water," she called to him, as she put her hands into a basin of water to prove it. She splashed some at Emilio and her mother.

"You see, you see," she called again. Maria and Emilio had to laugh at her pleasure. "I wish I could dive in, mamma."

"Well, you better not," Maria yelled back, still laughing.

Maria and Emilio walked slowly up and down the square, Maria holding Emilio's arm, as she listened to him speak about the Baroque period. He pointed to the statuary of the fountains.

"You see, man is more than just man now, as he was



so simply in the Renaissance. Now he's a hero. The Renaissance gave man a place in the scheme of life, but now that he has proven himself, anything is possible. Doesn't that huge creature over there look as if he can do anything?"

"Le piazze fiorentine seem so humble by comparison," Maria responded as she took his hand and led him to one of the stone benches that outlined the centre of the square. They sat in the Roman sun and watched Anna play. She was talking for a while with a little boy and then came over to them when he went away.

"I'm hungry. Can we go eat now?" she asked Emilio.

"That's a good idea. Let's go to this little trattoria I know around here. We can walk."

On the way she told them what she had noticed during her conversation with the boy.

"He doesn't talk Italian like us. You have to get used to it. It was a bit hard to understand him at first." She looked up at her mother.

"All over Italy," Maria told her, "people speak the same language in their own way. Sometimes a distance of five kilometres can make a difference."

"But it wasn't a dialect, mamma, what that boy was speaking to me, was it?"

"Well, if you understood him, I doubt if it was, maybe a few words. He was just pronouncing Italian the way Romans do. You pronounce Italian the way Florentines do, especially you," she added.

"It's true, Anna. I haven't heard a hard 'C' out of you in years," Emilio laughed as he said this. Anna made a face, for this was something he reprimanded her for often.

Emilio felt a sudden urge to place his hand on Anna's head as he walked beside her, but he resisted the impulse. He couldn't be spontaneous anymore after yesterday's fight. She had betrayed him in some way. Oh but the desire to touch her was so strong. Maybe Maria was right after all. Maybe Anna wasn't really ungrateful, just.... He reached out his hand tentatively, but Anna spied the restaurant a few metres ahead of them, and was off and running.

"Hurry up, hurry up," she called to them, "Sto morendo di fame."

Once inside and seated, Emilio listened attentively to the conversations around them. It was true. Anna was right. The language was much harder, but at the same time, colourful, tuneful, full of expressions that did not exist in his more careful Florentine Italian. Then he listened to Maria and Anna and the soft shushing sound of their language. It was more like a smooth river. It did not have the spikiness of the surrounding Roman tongue. They were true daughters of Florence.

When the primo was served, all three of them ate heartily. To Emilio everything tasted wonderful. He raised his wineglass and declared, "To Rome! To strength! To beauty!" He threw his head back and drank the full rich red wine.

The three of them rested through the sultrier part of the afternoon in their hotel room, and at four set off for the Vatican. Emilio longed to make love to Maria and almost wished they had not brought Anna along. In the car he whispered to her how beautiful she had become in the new and radiant light of Rome. Maria smiled and leaned her head against his shoulder.

Inside St. Peter's, Anna exclaimed, "I've never been in such a huge church in my whole life. I thought the Duomo was big. How could they make anything this size before bulldozers and cranes?"

"Manpower, Anna, is the answer to that," Emilio said. "But, Anna, this church isn't just the biggest in size. It's the grandest, the mightiest, the most inspiring in all the world. And it was meant to be."

As Maria and Anna went off by themselves to discover the beauties of the side chapels, Emilio stood in the very centre and gazed at the gilt altarpiece that dwarfed everything around it in proportion and momentum. He breathed deeply. Oh, he felt so good here in Rome. Gone were yesterday's traumas. The old manliness and composure were back. He was vulnerable no more.

During their short stay, Emilio shared with Maria and Anna the sights of Rome that had always impressed him. He exhausted them and felt wonderfully alive. He was in his element.

Late Sunday night in their hotel room, Anna went to

bed and fell instantly asleep. Emilio went to take a shower and when he came back into the room, Maria was in bed already.

"I'm glad we're going home tomorrow," she said, yawning and turning on her side toward the wall.

"You're just tired. Not used to being a tourist." Emilio got into bed and kissed her on the forehead.

"No, it's not that. After being here, I can really appreciate Florence. I don't think I really like Rome."

Emilio was taken aback. "You don't like Rome?"

"I don't think I could ever feel at home here. It's so ... overpowering."

"Maybe you just don't really like big cities," he ventured. It upset him to think that she hadn't really enjoyed Rome when he had felt so alive and exhilarated here. Maria shook her head.

"Well, then be more explicit."

"I can't explain myself better. Rome just makes me tired." She sounded annoyed. Emilio touched her arm.

"Dài, Maria, try. Tell me." Maria sighed wearily. Finally she spoke.

"Well, I guess I feel that Rome is so much the opposite of Florence. It's so pompous and, ...and aggressive. Everything is so big and proud of it." She stopped a moment, then continued. "I told you, Emilio. It makes me tired. It's like a certain kind of person I have no patience for."

Her back was to him. He couldn't see the expression on her face, but her voice told enough. Was that person him?

He panicked. He grabbed her shoulder and pulled her over on her back. Her body would reassure him, as always. But he had been too rough.

"Stop, Emilio." She sat up quickly and leaned against the head of the bed. He looked up at her. She had never denied him.

"Maria?" She had drawn her knees up and was resting her head against them. "Maria," he softly called again, "what have I done?" She lifted her head up and looked into his troubled face.

"Do you remember you asked me a few days ago, at home, whether I looked in you for something I wanted?" Emilio nodded.

"There is something in you that I look for, some quality that you are unaware of possessing." She paused. "Ah, but you are unaware of so much." Emilio was sitting, too, now, and facing her. She reached out and touched his face.

She shrugged her shoulders. "I cannot describe it. It's when you're not trying to be someone else."

"Someone else?"

"Yes, someone else. Someone bigger, better, grander, so you think. It doesn't matter, Emilio." She smiled.

"I'm sorry that I..."

"No, Maria, I want to hear this."

"There's nothing to hear. You have your moments, like everyone, when you are just yourself, unselfconsciously."

"And then what?"

"Oh Emilio." Her eyes filled with tears. She leaned her head back and looked up. "I guess I love you then."

Emilio turned away from her and did not speak. He lay down, finally, beside her. The light from the street lamp disturbed him.

"I'll close the shutters now. The light is worse than the heat."

1983

In his head he had planned all kinds of things to say to her, to ask her, but none of them came out when he was face to face with her. Here she was by his side after six years of absence. The sight of her pained him. He couldn't trust his voice, his actions with her. All other women, even Maria after six years, would have been easier to deal with. But this child, woman, this nineteen-year old, almost daughter...oh my God! What was she? Who was she? And could he ask about her mother? Not now. Maybe later. He had to know if....

"Emilio, guarda!" Her face flushed with excitement and surprise, Anna stared wide-eyed as a child, at the street before her. "Ma che hanno fatto? What have they done to the Via Calzaiuoli? It's wonderful! No cars! All cobblestoned! Flowers! Trees! How perfect!"

"I know, little one, I love it, too," he responded. And suddenly he felt as he had so long ago with her. He felt as if he could run with her down the street, holding her hand, laughing at her pleasure, loving her joy in beautiful things. Anna, my child. Where have you been? He felt the tears rise to his eyes. Quickly he took her hand. Perhaps she and her mother should never have gone? Perhaps he and Maria could have worked it out. O Dio! Is it better to live with women or without? Is that why he was feeling so awful now? Had he

wasted the last six years of his life? He turned to Anna as if for an answer. When he looked at her, she withdrew her hand from his and walked ahead of him.

"Anna, wait. Why?..." Why had she rejected his gesture? "Anna, have I treated you so badly? Is it me that has hurt you?" Anna turned around. He could see her as if this were a moment captured by a photograph, with the people milling about her, the windows of fancy shops glaring at her with their wealth of desirables, the perfect street, old and new at once, the sky crowning her, Florentine turrets like jewels in her crown. And her face, young but drawn, missing her mother's softness, yet carrying all of her beauty. The eyes told him that all was not well. This was not a pleasure trip for his Anna come home. Why had she come? What did she want from him? Could he give it to her? Could he take the sadness away from those eyes? Oh, Anna. He reached out to her. Let me hold you, Anna. Aren't you my child in some way?

Slowly she walked back to him. It seemed to take forever. When she reached him, she returned her hand to his. He squeezed it tightly. His heart began to beat. Ah, maybe, maybe, it would all work out. True, he had failed her mother, but it was just possible he would succeed with the daughter.

They strolled along hand in hand, as if it were a summer day. On approaching the Oratory of Orsanmichele, Emilio stopped and remarked to Anna:

"Do you know they have restored Orcagna's



tabernacolo? Come, let's go inside. I haven't been in for a long time, and Orsanmichele has always been one of my favourite places in all of Florence."

Anna nodded energetically.

"I'd love to, Emilio," she said, gazing at the marble sculptures in the niches around the building. "Did you know I have been studying art history at Boston Univ...?" Her sentence unfinished, she blushed. For how could he have known? He had not heard from either her or her mother at all. His first sign of their continued existence had been Anna's telegram, just days ago, "Arriving from Milano, Stazione Santa Maria Novella, three o'clock, February 16. Can you be there?"

Emilio opened the portone off the side street and Anna passed beneath his arm into the cool interior. The light was provided by a few lit candles and the thin winter sun entering the tall high windows. Despite the relative darkness, the building seemed alive with the voices of long ago. A holy place, a granary. What a strange mixture. Emilio closed his eyes trying to imagine a scene with workmen and priests at their appropriate tasks side by side. Not possible. Then he heard Anna's voice.

"Emilio, we need a 100 lire piece to turn the lights on. Have you got one?"

Emilio came out of his reverie to see Anna at the foot of the Bernardo Daddi's encased painting. He placed the coin in the box and the light shone on the Madonna in her restored

glory. He heard Anna's quick intake of breath. Emilio's eyes wandered around the building. Such a wonderful paradox of history. The secular and the religious housed together, the grain stored upstairs above the miraculous tabernacle. And here they were Anna and he, another paradox of history, brought together again, because that was the way it should be. They gazed, she at the Virgin, he at her. Ah, Anna, you are every elegant line and hue as beautiful.

Finally he took her hand and without words he guided her around the building. They stopped to look at the marble grain shaft, similar to a chimney, that had once brought the grain from the top floor down to the bottom. Anna ran her hand along the smooth surface of the well-worn marble.

"How could this place be both a warehouse and... and... a chapel?"

Emilio shrugged. "Apparently a lot of miracles took place here, so people gathered here from everywhere to pray, even if it was a building stacked with cornmeal. It became a shrine and eventually the religious function of the place superseded the other. Finally it stopped being a granary altogether."

"And now it's a church." Emilio nodded, happy just to hear her voice, have her speak to him, without anxieties and tensions between them from the past.

They went outside again. Emilio felt good about this little diversion. It had enhanced the old bond between them. They had spent so much enjoyable time together like this,

going on little outings. He had loved her curiosity. He had been happy teaching her the things he knew. Possibly her interest in art had been stimulated in that faraway yesterday of theirs.

They had finally reached the Piazza della Signoria. They could go to Rivoire's for hot chocolate and pastry. As a child she had begged him to take her there, but he had refused to be in the centre with her. He knew too many people.

"Anna, remember how much you wanted to come here with me to Rivoire?" He pointed in its direction. "Andiamo ora. You can have everything your heart desires." It was situated to their right, looking elegant and inviting in the growing dusk of winter. Anna stopped a moment and Emilio put his arm around her. Her eyes filmed over with tears.

"You never wanted to bring me, Emilio," she whispered in the pathetic little voice of a child. Oh my child, my child, what have I done? Emilio took her in his arms. She rested her face against his chest. He put both of his hands on the back of her head and gently stroked her hair.

"I made..mistakes,...Anna. I guess I didn't want anyone, anyone at all to know about you and your mother... I'm sorry." He felt like crying. It had been such a simple thing. Why had he been so selfish, so uncomprehending? And here he had always thought that except for the fights with her mother, everything else had been all right. He had seen himself as a perfect saint in relation to Anna. Why compared

with his own daughter, Carmela...!

"Emilio," Anna turned her eyes up to him. The expression of hurt in them made him shiver. "Does that mean," she slowly began her question, "does it mean you never...that no one in your life...knew about mamma and me?"

Emilio couldn't bear the sight of her pain any longer. He hugged her to him tightly until she pulled away from him.

"Is that true, Emilio?" she pleaded with him.

Emilio hung his head. "My brother,... Lorenzo...he always, well, I told him at some point. He knows...about you." Emilio swept her into his arms once again. He kissed the top of her head. "Please, Anna, let me make it up to you." He pressed his cheek against the side of her face. What could he do?

"Anna, I want so much to have a wonderful time with you, while you are here. Two weeks is not much." He paused and thought awhile. He was quite free in winter, his hotels being closed in this season. His laundry business as well, ran very smoothly without him. He had already taken his wife, daughter, and son-in-law away for a winter vacation. "Let's travel a little. Why we can drive through the countryside. You can look for vineyards with me." He gently drew her head away from his and searched her face. He wiped the tears away with his fingers. He felt more confident, suddenly, carried away with their projected explorations. "I want to go into the winemaking business." He smiled. Proudly he

pronounced his intended House name, "Casa Fiumicelli. How does that sound to you, carina?" Anna shrugged.

"How about Casa Pileggi e Fiumicelli, then?" He tapped her nose with his finger. She smiled shyly.

"You like that one better?"

Anna nodded.

Emilio felt better now. He had overcome a difficult moment. He waved his arm at the famous Florentine landmark.

"Let's have a feast of chocolate, my dear. Rivoire awaits us."

Emilio and Anna walked arm in arm toward their destination. He knew Anna was still pondering over his admission of guilt, for her head was down, but as he opened the door into the luxurious café, he felt his power return. He was certain to be an equal in wealth to the owner of this bastion of chic and fashion. If from nothing he had created these riches for himself, surely he could make this girl happy. Altro che la mamma. Forget the mother. He had failed her, but he could still win the daughter. Perhaps she would even come home one day, after she finished university, marry here, work here.

Inside the waiters were scurrying around with trays of pastries. The tables were nearly full with tourists reading art books and sipping hot chocolate.

He and Anna found a table by the window and the radiator. Emilio rubbed his hands over it momentarily. He felt chilled from their leisurely walk through the streets,

but this was what Anna had wanted. At the station she said that she wished to walk through the whole town in one day.

She had shown excitement upon her arrival, but little by little tension was creeping in. She barely spoke to him and he was beginning to think that she was like him, one who didn't reveal much and couldn't be coaxed either. Had Maria really left him for that reason? It seemed so long ago now. They had fought about politics, Mussolini. And then they had just fought and fought. Maria was always wanting something, never satisfied. The body, their perfect fit had not been enough.

He scrutinized Anna's body as it emerged from her winter coat. She was wearing a grey sweater that was tight against her chest. Her breasts were not as full as her mother's. Her waist was slim. Her hips...she was more angular than her mother, but perhaps with time and the right man, she would soften, too.

Emilio swallowed hard. His head ached. He passed his hand over his forehead. Maria. Anna reminded him so much of her. To have Maria now. No other woman had ever aroused him as she had. No one had ever made his bed feel so alluring. Bed. Just a place to sleep now. Or a place to conquer. He shook his head to rid himself of these thoughts. O Dio, why did I let it go? Oh Anna, perhaps you should never have come. I need to bury, not to bring back.

"Are you all right, Emilio?"

Emilio took his hands away from his face and leaned

his elbows on the table. Sitting before him, her light brown hair, reminder of her real father, falling to her shoulders, circling her narrow child's face, her eyes questioning him with that intensity of hers, her child-woman's body so vulnerable, so delicate, Emilio felt his heart would break for all those years missed, for that gap that they could never fill. He sat back and sighed. He shrugged in answer to her question. He opened out his hands. How could he be all right, if everything was so wrong?

Anna hung her head. Her hair fell forward and covered her face.

"Anna, carina." Emilio brought himself forward and touched her shoulder. "It's not your fault. It's all, all the mistakes, the wrong moves, the past that cannot be remade."

Anna shook her head. "I don't believe you," she whispered. "You say you want me here, that you want to see me." She shook her head again and whimpered, "But really it's not worth it. I shouldn't have come. I've spoiled your peace of mind." She sniffed and took the table napkin to dry her eyes. She pushed the hair from her face. Emilio could not speak. He feared his own tears. He tried to deny her conclusion. He shook his head as forcefully as he could.

"You didn't want me then," she continued. "Why should you want me now?" As soon as she uttered these words she rose quickly and ran to the washroom. Emilio was speechless. How? How could she have thought that? O Dio,

what have I done to my child? He covered his face with his hands.

"Will you order now, signore, or when your daughter comes back?" the waiter asked.

"Uh, ...now." Emilio raised his head. "Un espresso per me, e una cioccolata calda per la signorina. Come back and she will choose her pastry. Va bene?" The waiter civilly nodded and went off.

Anna returned, dry-eyed. Her face was bright with the struggle to master her emotions. What could he say to her? They did not speak. The waiter arrived. Emilio gulped his espresso, suddenly recalling meals with his mother and father in the hotel, when his brother would be away at school, and just the three of them would sit in silence. In the evening, with Lorenzo there, it would change. Lorenzo would talk about his school work, his friends, his plans. He would ask everybody questions. He could even get his father to answer them. Emilio asked the waiter for another espresso.

"E per la signorina? Un dolce?"

"No, niente," Anna sadly replied with a slight movement of her head.

The waiter left them. Emilio finally looked at Anna. She looked back. The expression of sorrow in her eyes overcame him. He reached his hand toward her face. He gently touched her cheek.

"Non è vero, Anna. It's not true. How can you believe such a thing. I always felt towards you like a fa..."



"Don't say it, Emilio. Please," she pleaded with him.

"But why not, if it's true, amore?" He in turn pleaded with her.

Anna shook her head.

"You can't... if it's not... if you don't... Oh Emilio, why didn't you ever... in all these years...?"

"Ever what?"

"Try to find us or at least find out about us..."

She covered her face with her hands.

The waiter brought Emilio his second coffee and placed it before him. Emilio sat stunned. He did not acknowledge the waiter or even seem to see the cup on the table. Now he knew. He could not make it up to her. It was too late. After six empty years, you cannot suddenly... he didn't know what, become part of her life again, be a father. He hung his head and stared at the white tablecloth. He sighed. Nothing was right.

"Emilio, could we go and walk... along the river now?"

Emilio slowly lifted up his head. He took a long look around the room. How utterly ridiculous everything was. In one moment you can feel one way, powerful, successful, in the next moment,.... He refused to think what. He shook his head and wearily stood to put on his jacket. He went to the cassa and paid as Anna buttoned up her coat and wrapped her scarf around her neck. She caught up with him and they went out the door into the winter evening.

They strolled through the Loggia of the Uffizi, neither of them brave enough to open a conversation. The

leather stallkeepers, noticing their leisurely pace, took them for tourists, and tried to sell them handbags and gloves.

"Solo diecimila lire, signorina. Ten thousand lire, rabbit fur inside, the world's softest leather. What size? Anche per Lei, signore?"

They walked more quickly and finally reached the water. Emilio gazed up at the Forte Belvedere on the hill across the river. He pointed up to it.

"Ecco la nostra fortezza," he said to Anna. Just as Anna turned up her head, the lights came twinkling on. They crossed the street and on the other side, Anna stopped and leaned against the brick ramparts of the Arno. She leaned her elbows on the top and placed her head in her hands. She stared before her at the water, at the houses lining the Arno, and finally up at the hillside.

"It's good to be here again. It's so different in America, the life, the country, everything."

Emilio watched her face in the growing dark. Would she speak about herself, tell him something of her life? So strange to want to know so much about someone else. He leaned sideways against the support, watching Anna carefully, recalling the day he met her mother, himself standing here alone, gazing at the Old Bridge to their right, thinking his private thoughts. He felt the desire to touch Anna again, almost as if it were possible to draw something of herself through his fingertips.

"You are beautiful, dear Anna, like your mother."  
Oh Maria, what has happened to you? "But you look so sad.

"Are you unhappy away from Italy?"

He saw the tears fill her eyes. He touched her hand. Without turning to him she replied.

"This is my home, Emilio." She hung her head.

"And...and....," she halted and shrugged.

"Yes?" Emilio questioned her.

Now she turned her face towards him. "I never wanted to go, Emilio."

Emilio raised his arms in despair. He had no power to control the past. Anna turned away from him again.

"I am sorry that you left," was all he could say.

"Do you really mean that, Emilio?"

"Yes."

"Then why," she said ever so softly, "why did you let us go?"

Emilio gasped. He felt as if she were pushing a knife into his heart. Could he have stopped them? He had just understood that Maria's last good-bye had been a final one. And he hadn't wished to prolong the quarrelling. Some months after their last fight she had let him know that she and Anna were off for America. It was strange, for by that time, he was thinking that perhaps he would visit her again; perhaps the gap of time would have worked a transformation in his mistress. And then she had called him to say good-bye. He hadn't tried to stop her. It was as if he hadn't realized how far she was really going, that from then on, she would be unreachable. She had always been so available. When it had

finally sunk in that she was not a short drive away, it was too late. Emilio Fiumicelli never ran after a woman, certainly not all the way to America. When Lorenzo had asked if it was over between Maria and himself, he had haughtily answered that he needed no woman, especially no woman as difficult as she. He could not remember Lorenzo's reply.

He was incapable of answering Anna's question so he left it there between them, separating them, feeling suddenly so lonely and afraid, afraid for Anna, afraid for himself, for the life ahead of them. He had never expected that her visit would provoke such terrible feelings.

The fear seized him that perhaps she hadn't even come back to re-establish something between them. O Dio! He had to act. Make her recall their life together.

"Anna?" he softly asked. She looked up at him, hoping for relief from their pained silence. "Would you like to see the old house? I haven't been around there for years. I wonder if it's still there." He did not wait for an answer, but took her hand. "Andiamo alla macchina," he said, moving in the direction of the car.

He pointed at his new Spider Veloce when it came into sight. "I also have a Ferrari for travelling on the Autostrada." She did not comment.

"I can do two hundred and twenty kilometres an hour without..." He stopped and looked into her face, but she

seemed totally absorbed in her own self. It wasn't the time to talk about cars.

They got inside the car and Emilio listened to the hum of the motor. He affectionately tapped his steering wheel and manoeuvred the car into traffic. He drove toward the outskirts, remembering the years he had spent travelling this familiar route. The landmarks had changed somewhat. The city was larger. There was a new bridge beyond the Verrazzano, but it was not a part of his city and he could never remember the name of it.

~~Anna~~ was staring intently out the window, carefully examining the passing landscape. They were approaching the old neighbourhood. Emilio swung the car into the well-remembered narrow street. He parked. Wordlessly Anna got out of the car. Emilio followed. They came to the end of the street. He looked at Anna. He read the signs of shock in her face from this, but he had wanted to come so badly. The house was like a magnet drawing him into his precious past.

All the openness of old that had once spread before and round the place was now a mass of twinkling lighted windows. There were not just the two apartment buildings that had been built when Anna was growing up. There were buildings everywhere and new streets as well. The triumph of civilization.

Together they stared up at the balcony of what had been their house now almost blocked out by new structures.

That house, his temple of pleasure, his temple of misfortune. He shut his eyes. Alternately he conjured up an image of Maria, warm and sexy, hostile and angry. Suddenly he felt the need for Anna to comfort him in his misery. He opened his eyes and reached his hand toward her. She was just out of touch. Her body was shaking. She was so fragile in her aloneness beyond the stretch of his hand. And he had done this. He knew. He had created this separateness that need not have been.

"The past is gone, Anna. It has disappeared with the empty fields. Not even we are left. I do not know you. You do not know me." From where had this voice come? Anna searched his face with the same question in her eyes. Maria, Maria, Emilio called to himself. He moved forward and stroked Anna's face. She stared fiercely at him. What was she asking? He felt so urgently the impulse to dive deep into her longing and give unconditionally whatever it was she had come for. He took her in his arms. Anna was trembling. Finally she pulled away from him. Come back, Anna. Let me try. Why, oh why, does it have to be too late?

"Let's go back to the car." Her voice sounded hollow. "It isn't like before. I'm cold." She started back. His eyes followed her slow flight from him, his heart going out to her. He felt chilly and lonely. Where was all that sunlight that used to shine upon her brilliant hair as she ran through the fields towards the warm beacon, that was his lover and her mother?

CHAPTER 2

1975

"Emilio, could you drive a little slower, please?" Maria asked him. She pointed to the landscape, the olive trees, the vineyards, and the contadini at work. "If you drive like this, we might as well be on the autostrada. I'd like to see the people's faces as we pass them by."

Emilio touched her leg in reply. He slowed down considerably and with her watched the countryside. Was she thinking that it held some mystery, some wisdom? And if we stop to contemplate it, we would receive some answers to life? Probably. Somewhere in him he did, too. Why were city-people like that, so eager to give nature a voice? The contadini had no such ideas in their heads. Nature for them was a place for them to live in. But at that moment, as Umbria stretched before them, all rolling hills, bearing rows and rows of silver olive trees, sunlight so strong so thick, it felt as if it could carry you out of this world into another, he was ready to believe anything.

Emilio settled comfortably into his seat to consider all these questions he had raised. He leaned his head back and discovered that Maria's hand was there. She stroked his hair. He almost closed his eyes it felt so good.

He luxuriated in the slowness of their movement forward. He felt as if every blade of grass was his to gaze



at, to know.

He and Maria should be doing this more often. His hotel was full and running smoothly. His wife and daughter were at the beach on the Adriatic coast. Why not take advantage of this freedom and travel more with Maria, just go away for a day or two, visit a village, learn its history, see its church and museum?

Yesterday at breakfast, just before he was to leave for his hotel, Anna had asked him about St. Francis of Assisi. Her friend's mother had seen the movie.

"Monica said that he built the church with his bare hands, and it was snowing, and he had no shoes. Is it true, Emilio?"

"Let's go and find out," he had said in answer. "Shall we, Maria? I'll call my portiere di notte and see if he'll stay this morning. If not Silvia, the girl who makes the breakfasts for the clients, can stay at the desk the rest of the day. She speaks English and would love to work more hours. And this lucky bunch," he pointed to himself, Anna, and Maria, "can go to Assisi and visit the church of St. Francis."

"But all that driving, Emilio," Maria commented.

"Have no fear," Emilio announced as he went to the phone.

"Does he really mean it, mamma? Does he? Does he?" Anna asked in disbelief. Maria smiled and shrugged. Anna ran to her and put her arms around her mother. "Oh, I hope so mamma."

Emilio returned to the room and lifted Anna into the air.

"If you're really good, Anna mia, we'll stay the night in a hotel, right next to St. Francis' church. What do you say to that?" Anna was kissing his head, slapping his cheeks and crying out as he held her above him.

"Let's go now, Emilio, mamma. Right now!"

And so they had just gone. But where had this extra sense of oneness with nature come from? Was it just part of the excitement of going away? Was it the physical enjoyment of Maria's proximity? He squeezed her leg with his right hand. She responded by gently caressing the hair, at the back of his neck. Would this feeling last? Was it only part of the magic of Assisi, that yellow basilica, and its flowing rhythmic archways? Would Florence and the remaining kilometres steal the enchantment? Or did it really belong to them?

In the back seat, Anna was just waking up. The car and the summer heat had made her drowsy, but now she climbed up and stood between them, her chin resting on her mother's outstretched arm.

"Do you see those towers over there?" Emilio asked her.

"Where?"

"Don't you see all those electrical poles and wires?" he pointed to the electrical installations in the distance.

"Oh, yes, Emilio, now I see them. What are they for?"

"They bring power to the area. My father built

them."

"Your father?" queried Maria. "But I thought your brother is the engineer in the family."

"My brother is the engineer. My father was the builder. Before the war, and I think even after the war, but I'm not sure. He supervised hundreds of men, organized their schedules, dealt with all the problems on site. Not paperwork, like my brother, Maria. Real work, man-work. He built bridges mostly. He told me once that within ten years, four hundred bridges went up around the country, and he was sent up and down the length and breadth of Italy, making sure the work was well done." Emilio stopped a moment and looked over at Maria. He decided not to mention his father's strong political beliefs. At other times he and Maria had talked about Mussolini, and she was not very receptive to his positive feelings toward him. Besides, four hundred bridges spoke for themselves. That was one of the best things he had done for the country. Maria was listening intently so he went on.

"He was away from home much of the time. And once for a year, he was sent down to the south. He built giant aqueducts that brought water to the Puglie. Before men like my father went down, the pugliesi lived in a desert. He changed their lives."

Emilio fell silent. The car accelerated. Maria looked at his profile while he concentrated on his driving. She too said nothing for a long while. Anna played with her

doll in the back, chattering quietly.

"Did you miss your father when he was away, Emilio?"  
Maria softly asked.

Emilio sighed. He shrugged. "I guess so."

"You've never talked about anyone like that before. Have you always wanted to be so much like him?"

Emilio hesitated for a long time. His lips worked but no sound came out. He drove faster, sometimes his long smooth car screeching around the sharp curves. He couldn't answer her somehow. Why not? It just wasn't all that simple. He repeated her question.

"Do I want to be like my father? I don't know, Maria." He became suddenly angry at the turn the conversation had taken.

"Why do you ask such questions? I admire him. That's all. Like anyone else."

"Why is it so hard to say that you want to be like him, that kind of man? Productive, authoritative, organized. Anyway, you are. You are just like that."

"I am? I am all those things? Maybe to some extent, but not like him, not in the way he was. Everyone admired him. Every woman that looked at him wanted him. Every man wanted to obey him. He was a leader, a great..."

"And you, Emilio," Maria interrupted, "What did you want from him? How did he affect you?"

"He well... like all the rest.... I wanted him ... I just wanted him..."

Maria moved closer to him. As he sought out the words, she stroked his shoulders and looked at his face, waiting.

"Tell me," she whispered.

Emilio jerked away from Maria's touch.

"Why do you always want to know everything? Can't a person just be? I'm so tired of your questions. Just watch the countryside. That's what you wanted wasn't it? Well, you're getting it. Don't ask for more."

"Emilio, you brought up your father. You made your speech about him. You wanted to prove something about him. If you didn't want to talk about him, you wouldn't have started the conversation."

"Va bene. Va bene. Basta. You and your questions. If I want to talk, I'll talk. I tell you what I want to tell you. What I don't tell you, I don't want to tell you. Enough now!"

Where was Assisi gone? All that slow sensuality. Where? Nothing lasts, grumbled Emilio to himself. He made the turn for the autostrada. Might as well get home fast.

1946

"Hey, 'Celli. Hey there! That's what they call you, don't they?" Emilio looked up from the crate he was trying to lift onto the back of the truck. His face was wet from effort and although the air was wintry cool his clothes stuck to him. With the back of his shirt-sleeve he wiped his forehead and looked inquiringly at the American soldier who was calling to him. He was long and thin and friendly-looking.

"Yes, that's me. Emilio Fiumicelli."

"C'mon then. Sergeant Philips needs you to talk to some Italian over there. Seems his English isn't too good. You can help, can't you?"

"Oh, yes, certainly. Let's go." Emilio picked up his jacket, that was hanging over the side of the truck, put it on, and followed the American boy eagerly. The soldier continued to talk to him as they crossed the compound.

"The sarge is okay. He's not too fond of you Italians, but if you just do what he says, you'll be all right."

"Why doesn't he like us?" Emilio asked innocently. He thought Americans liked everyone. They were so friendly and outgoing. The women on the base, too, talked to you so naturally.

"Well, he's had some bad experiences over here.

Like I didn't come over here until the war was pretty near over, but the sarge has been here a long time. He hated the crummy war and he'll blame his misfortunes on just about anyone. But you Italians, hell, you guys had a lot to do with it."

The soldier looked at Emilio in a compassionate sort of way. "Look, I don't mean anything personally. Like everybody suffered, and certainly Americans at home haven't got a clue what that really means." He put his arm on Emilio's shoulder as he said this. Emilio, for a moment, felt closer to this American than to any of the friends that he had grown up with.

"You'll do fine with the sarge. He's hot-headed, but he'll like you. Hell, he needs you. There aren't enough of you bilingual guys around here." He smiled down at Emilio, for he was at least a few inches taller, and although at that instant his turned head blocked the sun, Emilio never felt it shine so brightly on him. Emilio smiled back. The soldier put out his hand and Emilio took it. As they shook hands, the boy introduced himself.

"I'm Roy."

"Emilio, or 'Celli if you like."

"Okay 'Celli. Didn't want to make you nervous or anything but I just wanted to warn you about Philips 'cause he's a little weird, you know. Anyway he's over there on the exercise field." Roy ran off towards the headquarters.

"Have a good time," he called back. Emilio waved good-bye to him.

Emilio could see the Sergeant standing by the flag-pole and gesticulating wildly as he tried to make himself understood. He was a very large angry looking fellow. A little dark, but well-dressed man was standing in front of him, his face screwed up unnaturally. He looked as if he were making a monumental effort to understand this mad American. Emilio ran over to them. Maybe this was his big chance. After all, up to now, he was only doing manual labour. Maybe he could become a translator and get to work in an office! Visions of desks, secretaries, top-secret communiqués floated him out of his menial present. He couldn't load and unload delivery trucks all day for the rest of his life.

"Sergeant Philips," he said in his clearest English, "I'm Emilio Fiumicelli. Can I be of some help?"

"You most certainly can," the Sergeant answered him. He wiped the sweat from his forehead with a handkerchief.

"Where have you been all morning?"

"Uh, I didn't know you needed..."

"Never mind, never mind. I don't know if this man here is stupid or what, but I simply can't get through to him. His name's Leonardi. He has a construction firm in Livorno, so he says. Anyway, since I can't get supplies from anywhere else in this bloody army, I need him to get me the building materials for the new sheds we're putting on the other side of the mess hall." He pointed over in that direction. Then he gave Emilio a detailed account of what was necessary and when it was all necessary for. Emilio recounted this to



Leonardi who carefully wrote everything down. Together they all went over to look at the site. The Italian, who proved himself to be exactly what he claimed, made many suggestions to the Sergeant on how to improve upon the original plans. The Sergeant listened without comment to Emilio as step by step he not only translated but pointed out the logic in the little man's recommendations. At the end of a half-hour, the Sergeant actually looked quite pleased. When the two of them, Sergeant Philips and Signor Leonardi, had settled on the remaining details, Leonardi finally took his leave. He formally shook the Sergeant's hand and warmly thanked Emilio for his help. He told Emilio that he and his family had practically starved during the war and that this was welcome employment.

"Smart guy," the Sergeant remarked as Leonardi turned his back on them. "I hope a few more of them survived for your country's sake. Wouldn't want to think all the right ones got their heads... ah never mind. Why should I care?" He looked over at Emilio carefully. He made Emilio feel naked.

"You're not stupid yourself, kid," he added and walked off.

Emilio walked slowly back across the base towards his truck at the entrance. He felt flattered. Perhaps the Americans were going to take notice of him now. The other local boys, who worked with him, spoke some English, but they just didn't have the same ease with the language, and

certainly they couldn't switch back and forth from language to language as comfortably as he could. And it hadn't taken him very long either, about six months, no more.

Emilio stopped for a moment, put his hands in his pockets, and surveyed his surroundings. The whole base was like a tiny little world within a big world. And it was real, too. Not like school, which had been a tiny empty world, where nothing, nothing had ever happened. All he had done there was wait. Wait and hope for something to happen to him. But he had waited in vain. Everything had happened around and outside him - the war, politics, heroism, fighting for a cause - everything. Even joining a squadron of avanguardisti had proved...but that was the past. He had been too young. And then things had just got worse. Mussolini had lost everything. He saw that now. Yet how he had wanted to help him as father had done so nobly. His father had marched on Rome. That was something you could never take away from him. And what had Emilio done all that time but recite Latin verbs? What more could a ten-year-old or an eleven-year-old do? He had missed out on something, something great. That was for sure. Even if it had ended in disappointment. His father could still be proud, no matter what. Well, he wasn't going to miss out on anything any longer. He took a deep breath. Oh, the salt air. This was the place for him. He would make his mark here.

But how to convince his father who hated Americans and violently disapproved of him working for them that this job meant everything to him, that he needed more than

anything else the recognition of these American soldiers? This was where his father had got it all wrong, where he allowed his feelings to get in the way of reason. He could be so stubborn and old-fashioned. Today something had really happened, though. Something was going to change for him. Surely he could make his father understand that.

\* \* \* \* \*

Today it was Christmas. God, the truck was slow. Two and a half hours and the Duomo was still nowhere on the horizon. Emilio usually loved this Livorno-Florence journey in the American Army truck. As he would get closer and closer to home he would feel the excitement rise from the floor of the truck, through his boots, and up his whole body.

He wished his friends could be watching him as the huge truck rumbled into the city. Each time he felt as if he were replaying the scene of the American victory entry. But now he was anxious to get there already.

His aunt and uncle from Siena would be there as well as his Florentine aunts and uncles and cousins. He liked listening to his uncle from Siena. When Zio Vincenzo talked about the war and the tedeschi, and the partisans, and the government, it was different from his father's usual tirades about the mistakes and misfortunes of Mussolini, or his mother's maudlin interjections: "Poor Mussolini. Aveva un cuore d'oro. He had a heart of gold. Betrayed, he was, tradito."

No, Zio Vincenzo was truly different. He calculated, weighed, defined, measured. He had the political vocabulary at his fingertips. How Emilio admired his cool logic. Yes, Zio Vincenzo was smart. His father was certainly brave, strong, loyal, but not smart like Vincenzo. Besides his father was too stuck on the old ways. Vincenzo moved with the times and understood the times. Emilio liked it when he was around. He watched him carefully. He could pick up a

few things from his uncle. If his father would just pay attention without getting so emotional, maybe, he, too, could change, and then, who knows, maybe he would see his son's endeavours in a new light.

When he got home, Uncle Vincenzo greeted him like a conquering hero.

"Our boy, home from the front!" He placed his arm around Emilio proudly.

"Macchè front! What do you mean, 'front'! He works for the americani. A soft job. Americani are all soft." His father pointed a finger admonishingly at Emilio. "And you'll get soft, too, figlio mio. You'll forget what kind of man Mussolini wanted you to be," he added, walking away from them towards the dinner table. Vincenzo called after him.

"Ettore, you are too hard on the boy. He has a job. He works hard. The americani are not bad. Infatti, the future is in America. Emilio will have a future," he said encouragingly, this time looking at Emilio.

Thank God for Zio Vincenzo, thought Emilio. Ettore grumbled something under his breath, instead of responding to Vincenzo's defence of Emilio. He sat down at the head of the table and soon all the family followed. Lorenzo, Emilio's six-year-old brother, manoeuvred his way between the adults to sit down beside Emilio. He looked up smilingly at his big brother and Emilio affectionately clapped his hand on Lorenzo's shoulder. He never paid much attention to the boy. It was time he started.

"Would you like some mineral water, Lorenzo? Here, I'll put a touch of wine in your glass." Emilio reached out for the bottle.

"Wine, Emilio, give the boy wine," his father cried out from his controlling vantage point. "Acqua! Non ha bisogno di acqua! Vino! Ha bisogno di vino. It's his heritage!"

Emilio blushed and poured the boy some wine.

"Can I have some water, too, Emilio?" He turned to his father. "Babbo, the wine is too strong for me. And I like the bubbles anyway." He turned his head up to Emilio. His grey eyes were unperturbed. Ettore sputtered a bit and then calmed down.

"Va bene, va bene," he finally gave in.

Emilio filled the remainder of Lorenzo's glass with water. Lorenzo smiled sweetly at him and took a drink. How could Lorenzo so easily state his desires without fear? He seemed so calm and untroubled by his father's outbursts. Why can't I be the same?

Emilio leaned back in his chair. He glanced first at his father, then at Vincenzo. Vincenzo's long bony nose gave him the appearance sometimes of some strange bird. He certainly wasn't a handsome bird either. It didn't matter. He stood up to Ettore, handsome Ettore. His ideas, his way of expressing himself had beauty. And what he had said about America. Emilio knew Vincenzo was right. He had figured it out.

Once he had carefully explained to Emilio how Italy

would become the nation Mussolini had envisioned, but today with America as an ally, helping their country on its feet after the war had enfeebled it, making it strong again. If his father thought that the Fascist ideals had died in Vincenzo, he was wrong.

At the table, between the pasta course and the secondo, a heated discussion ensued. Russia, Russia, what was one to do with Russia?

"This is why we need America and its industrial know-how," Vincenzo was saying slowly. He took a small sip of wine. He put his glass down and continued.

"Without America you would see how fast the communists would eat up Europe."

"Who feeds Americans?" Emilio's father thundered, fork in hand. "Italians don't need Americans. They'll corrupt us with their chewing gum and coca-cola. We need a Mussolini once more, a man with vision, not American weaklings, who press buttons, and never tasted a real tomato!"

He put his fork down and pounded his fist on the table.

Angrily, he tore some bread from the large dark loaf beside him.

"Oh, babbo! Basta! Could you please cut the bread with a knife," his wife called to him from the other side of the table.

"Really, Ettore," she sighed heavily. His father ignored her as he munched noisily.

"It is true, Ettore," Vincenzo continued. "Italy

does need a great leader, a strong Fascist party. But we can still use America, be our own boss, but use the Americans. Be practical. We cannot fight Russia alone. All nations need allies. America will be ours. We can learn from them." He paused a moment and rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"And now we must build the party to what it once was. Get rid of the communists in our own country. Togliatti is a strong man: He must be beaten down." Vincenzo, too, beat his fist on the table, but slowly, willfully, to emphasize his point. "You see, you let the Americans take care of Stalin. We must take care of Togliatti. And we must also become an important nation, strong, an industrial power. It is time to build up our economy. But to get rid of the Americans, no, Ettore. They will help us to our feet again."

Emilio's father was on his own feet by this time, eyes wide with fury. How could this irrational, irate madman be so dazzling and fine as well?

"I don't want their help!" he cried loudly. "I'm a man! I'm an Italian! The Americans have already killed our party. There will be no Fascists left! None, if the Americans teach us their ways!" He waved his arms furiously at Vincenzo, and as if to lay the blame of past failure at the small man's feet, he pointed his strong muscular arm at Vincenzo's tiny frame and roared passionately, "Italy will lose its heartbeat!" and sat down to imagined applause.

Oh, why doesn't he understand? How could anyone get



through to that jungle of energy? But Vincenzo, clever, clever Vincenzo was already masterfully making peace.

Emilio's hopes grew once more. Perhaps Vincenzo could yet convince his stubborn romantic father. If not, his father might not even let him return to the base and his job.

Vincenzo had brought up a subject that both he and his brother-in-law could agree upon. Mussolini had never been wrong actually. He had always made explainable errors, "Ha fatto sempre degli errori spiegabili..." he was saying in his careful, precise Italian, full of that quality of conviction that really attracted Emilio. One day he would like to be able to talk like that, too. Emilio watched his father now, trying to interpret his mood. Would he be ready to listen to his story about the translating for Sergeant Philips?

Occasionally his father interjected with a loud "yes" in response to what Vincenzo was saying. But had his previous anger really been placated? He looked quite frustrated, as if he hadn't said all that he had to, as if he hadn't made enough of a show of superiority over his pragmatic intelligent and more intellectual rival. Oh yes, Emilio saw it now, that heat behind his dark fierce eyes. At this point Emilio's mother intervened in Vincenzo's monologue to express her opinion that the partigiani had been good men, too, Italians like the rest, even if..

"Le donne! Women!" shouted Emilio's father. He stood up, fuming.

"Women are good for one thing only! And if they are not lying flat on their backs screaming for joy, they should shut up!" With that he stomped triumphantly from the room.

1975

Emilio sat perspiring behind his hotel desk. It was four in the afternoon and about as hot as it could get in mid-July. He stretched his arms contentedly and yawned. The clients were mostly out at this hour, either shopping or getting an education in the museums of Florence. Emilio looked over the register. Full of Americans, this week. Ah, it felt good to have a full hotel. No anxieties. He was free, too, Giacinta and Carmela having gone to the beach for six weeks with his mother. He could see Maria every night if he wished. He could check the possibilities in his hotel, especially if Maria got on his nerves. She had this habit lately of always asking him questions about what she thought "important issues." He couldn't stand it. She made him uncomfortable. Porca miseria! Wasn't she there for his comfort?

He scanned his hotel register. There was that sophisticated woman from Chicago in Room Nineteen. Her passport said Mrs., but she was travelling alone. He had liked her right away. He had flirted with her the first day she arrived. She seemed to enjoy it, too. He could ask her to dinner when she came in. Foreigners were always anxious to be taken out by the natives. They saw it as a wonderful opportunity to get an inside glimpse of Italy. Yes, this

woman was worth a try. He traced his finger down the list, to Room Nineteen. Donna Adams. How old was she? He couldn't remember the date of birth on the passport. Mid-thirties perhaps.

His heavy front door swung open as he contemplated the age of his future conquest. He half expected it to be Donna Adams. But it was his brother Lorenzo, bright-faced and boyish looking. Lorenzo walked up the few steps to the desk and smiled. His white shirt was stained with perspiration and his face was wet. He moved easily, though, not minding the heat. We both like the heat, Emilio thought, even in the city. Emilio smiled back.

"What're you doing tonight, fratello mio?" Lorenzo amiably asked.

"I don't know. Nothing much."

"Let's have dinner tonight, you and me. I've finished work already. We could drive to the country somewhere. Sara and the kids are going swimming tonight at the piscina near our house. So I'm as free as you."

"Your wife likes to keep in shape," responded Emilio ignoring the last remark.

"She wishes I would too." Lorenzo looked down at his slightly protuding belly. "I can go to the pool tomorrow night." He looked up at Emilio.

"So, shall we go out?"

"I'll tell you what, Lorenzo. My portiere should be here any minute. We'll go for a swim, and then for dinner.

That way, you will please your wife, too."

"That's a great idea. If you have a bathing-suit for me, I'll go phone my wife and tell her of our plans."

"I'm sure I have more than one bathing-suit."

Emilio handed him the desk phone. "I'll go look now. Be back in a minute." Emilio went off to his room. No women tonight. It was a fine idea. Didn't want to get too dependent on them anyway.

The portiere finally arrived and the two brothers headed towards Emilio's car. At the door to the car, Emilio paused before turning the key in the lock. He looked nostalgically at his brother.

"Remember, Lorenzo, when we used to swim in the Arno? It was a struggle when the current was strong, but we liked the challenge, didn't we?" His brother nodded. "And then you could sit and dry off in the sun on the grass or on the sand. Now we go to fancy indoor pools where we sit on beautiful in-laid marble, and instead of drying off in the sun, we have a drink at the poolside bar."

Lorenzo shrugged and nodded. "We're rich, Emilio. No more dirt for us."

"If we're so rich, Lorenzo, why can't we stop the polluting?"

"We're not that rich. Besides you have to make rivers dirty in order to get rich, so you can afford to build swimming pools."

Emilio opened the door to his car and eased himself

into the stifling interior. He stretched over to open the door for his brother. Che peccato to lose the river, their river.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was cooler in the hills. Emilio and Lorenzo stood outside the restaurant for a moment, gazing at the surrounding landscape. The cypresses stood like sentinels, forever on duty, guarding the vineyards, the farmhouses, the oliveti. What looked after the city-dwellers? The bell towers, he supposed, all green and white and pink in-laid marble. They were old at least, maybe not as old as the cypresses, but old nonetheless. And they kept his hotel full.

"Wouldn't it be nice to have a villa up here, somewhere, Lorenzo?"

"Do you mean share one? Our two families?" Lorenzo looked surprised. Emilio nodded.

"Why not?"

"Emilio, are you crazy? The way you and my wife go at it we wouldn't last a week." Lorenzo laughed good-naturedly as he said this. Probably he would love it. Emilio smiled as he imagined himself and Lorenzo sharing their lives again as they once had when they were little.

"To hell with our wives, Lorenzo," was Emilio's final word on the subject.

The restaurant was a very rustic one, full of Florentines escaping the sweltering valley. It had become very fashionable to eat peasant food in this type of rough and wooden setting.

The menu was simple. Soup with white cannellini beans, hot, home-made brown bread dipped in virgin olive oil, perhaps a rabbit stew or Florentine steak grilled on an open

fire, contorni of green vegetables simply cooked and bathed in the greenest of olive oil, made from the olives of the neighbouring farms.

As he and Lorenzo sat down, Emilio felt a sense of well-being, a sense of belonging. If this was Italy, then he would rather be here than anywhere else. And he thought that if he only could have the river back, then all would be...

"How long have you known her, Emilio?" Lorenzo suddenly asked.

Dio mio, so it's all out. Emilio drank some mineral water. What had given him away after all these years? He played with his fork as he felt his brother's steady gaze fall upon him. Well, he'd have to talk about her. He had no doubt that Lorenzo meant Maria, not a shadow of a doubt. He would never have brought up a minor affair with a female client. Countless times Lorenzo had seen him flirt with a girl at the desk, knowing sooner or later that his older brother would end up in bed with her. Why, he was sure by now, even Giacinta noticed. No one in his family seemed to care much about it. But if Lorenzo was asking this question, it was obviously Maria he was referring to. Well, if only Lorenzo knows it won't be so terrible, thought Emilio. He looked up at his brother sitting relaxed before him. He is so sweet my brother, and good. No, how could it be terrible if Lorenzo knew? Emilio leaned back in his chair now and inquired.

"How long have you known?"



"Oh, not long."

"How did you find out?"

"I don't know, nothing specific. Just a feeling. The way you have been behaving lately, kind of absent, and sometimes disturbed." Ah, so it's that. It was true he had been preoccupied with Maria lately. She was troubling him, taking away his peace of mind. She was spilling into his daily life. Why? Why did it have to change this thing between them? Why couldn't it just stay what it was? "Also you're just not at your hotel at certain specified times when I call, and nobody seems to know where you are. So how long have you known her?"

Emilio leaned forward conspiratorially. He placed his arms flat on the table, palm over hand. For a moment he looked down at them, almost losing the courage to speak. Slowly he raised his head and looked straight into Lorenzo's eyes.

"Eight years," he said quietly. Lorenzo's eyes opened wide with shock. Emilio watched him. How would he react? He won't just be surprised, Emilio thought. Many things will go through his mind. But which will he choose to tell me?

"Eight years," he said it slowly, shaking his head. "Dio mio, that's a lifetime." Lorenzo, who had also been leaning forward, now sat straight. He was taking his time. That large round figure certainly had a special ring to it. It's true, Emilio thought, I have known her eight years. What

does it mean?

The waiter came now and they ordered dinner. He brought them a fiasco of the region's chianti. Neither of them drank for a while. Finally Emilio poured it into their glasses. He was about to raise his glass to his lips, but his brother stopped him, placing his hand over the rim of his glass. Their eyes met.

"Then you must really love her," Lorenzo finally uttered. That's something his brother would say, Emilio reflected. He looked into Lorenzo's face. He felt a surge of anger, for what he read there was undoubtedly a sense of relief. Why should he be relieved at the thought that his older brother might love someone. Had he believed something had been wrong with him all these years because he didn't love his wife? You try to love her, my dear Lorenzo, go ahead, try. And who says that love in a man's life or the absence of love in a man's life makes him the subject of worry? I don't need your worry or your relief, fratello mio.

"Love, love. I'm too old for that, Lorenzo," he said somewhat harshly. "I don't know what it is. It's just there." He waved his arm as he said this, as if to imply that this relationship with Maria was just there, as the restaurant was, and everyone in it. Never mind love. Maria wasn't that great either lately. Emilio wasn't angry anymore. It didn't matter what his brother thought. He shook his head. Maria, Maria. Will this thing between us always last?

The hot food was brought to them now. Neither seemed

to feel like talking anymore for a while. Emilio watched his brother eat the thick soup. He couldn't stay angry at Lorenzo. After all it had been a shock. Perhaps he was even a bit hurt at discovering his older brother's most important secret so late.

When the coffee was served, the conversation resumed.

"Lorenzo, have you ever thought about having a son?" Now where did that question come from? Emilio scratched his head. It had just come.

"A son?" Lorenzo raised his eyes to the ceiling.

"A son. Well, Emilio, I think two children are all I can handle now. I mean Sara and I are so busy being parents all the time, we hardly have time to be husband and wife. No, I wouldn't be anxious at all to have another child."

"C'mon, Lorenzo, that's not what I meant. I didn't mean another child. I meant a son. You know. A boy. Don't you think it would be different to have a son?"

Lorenzo folded his arms across his chest, leaned back slightly in his chair and thought. A smile broke out on his face.

"Oh, Lorenzo, I know what you're thinking. It's just so wonderful to be the only male among three women. You love it." It felt better now between them. They were being amiable again.

Lorenzo just nodded and laughed.

"Besides, you're absolutely in love with your daughters, and couldn't imagine someone else, some other male,

coming along and changing your beautiful relationship with them."

Lorenzo continued to laugh. "You have something there, fratello mio, you have something there. But what about you? Are you thinking about it?"

"Me? It was just a passing thought." Emilio gestured vaguely with his hand.

"How old is she, whatever her name is? Is she young enough to have a child?"

Emilio hesitated. It was not a diffidence to reveal facts about Maria. It was just the necessity of having to say the word Maria out loud. Except to Maria herself, he had never said her name. He squirmed in his chair a bit.

"Maria is thirty-seven," he said very softly.

"Well, then, Emilio, if you want a son..."

"Oh, c'mon, Lorenzo, fammi un piacere, don't be so serious. She already has a daughter and besides, I have a family."

"But, Emilio, what difference does all that make? If you love her and you want a son, rearrange your life."

"Rearrange my life? You think it's all that simple? And besides, it's worked like this up to now. No one's found out. No one has interfered." My little secret. He wished it could be perfect again.

"But sometimes, Emilio, surely..." Lorenzo hesitated. He touched his napkin lightly, then picked it up and wiped his brow with it. "I mean I know we have different ideas

about marriage....and obviously I don't know this Maria, but surely...I mean sometimes...she must, you know, want to walk down the street beside you, without fear. And if you have a son with her, well, I mean that would be a proud moment, one that she would want to share uh..., with uh..., the world." Lorenzo looked at him apologetically. Then he turned away, embarrassed.

Emilio did not answer. He stared at his younger brother. He eyed carefully the white shirt and grey tie. In some ways they were the same, always dressed neatly, not flamboyantly, carefully, conscious of their "figura" in the world. And he knew that they both made good impressions when first met. They were not dissimilarly built. They were both dark, robust, and healthy looking, neither of them however matching the grandeur of their father in his prime. Both were comfortable in their bodies, feeling good, he supposed, about their appearance. But Lorenzo was so different. Why? He didn't know a thing about Maria, and here he was trying to put himself into her position, trying to feel what it was like to be his older brother's mistress.

Emilio shivered. He guessed it was the strangeness. Talking about Maria. Finally he laughed. Lorenzo looked at him suddenly, surprised.

"What's the joke, Emilio?"

"I don't know, Lorenzo." Emilio shrugged. "It's funny talking like this. About something that doesn't really exist in our life." He lifted his arm away from them, to

indicate somewhere else. "Maria is another life. Not this one."

CHAPTER 3

1939

Paolo was the caposquadra. He was fourteen, three years older than Emilio. Emilio liked him, admired him, and although he was so much younger, he knew that Paolo respected him and trusted him.

All the groups of avanguardisti met in the school building, in the gymnasium, after dinner. Sometimes there would be discussions, lectures, talks about the Italy of the future. It bored Emilio, all this talk. He and Paolo shared this feeling. They both needed to do something, something more than just wear the black shirts. They wanted to honour their uniform through action. As a band, they would march down along the Arno on occasion, fierce in their pride, in the colour of their shirts. In love with everyone and everything at these moments, Emilio dreamed of marching to war. But this was the closest he ever got to action, to exploits, to war.

It was Sunday. They were sitting on the staircase in front of Emilio's apartment building. Emilio was throwing pebbles at the flower-filled urn by the gate. Paolo complained to him.

"I know there is something going on out there. The older ones, Piero, Tommaso, they told me about it. They go in gangs. They beat people up. They take care of the enemy.



Emilio, I want to go, too."

Emilio nodded, the reality of this other world stirring him.

"Last night they took away that guy Giorgio in my building. You should have heard his wife hollering. His mother wailed and cried all through the night. Serve the Communist bastard right." Paolo shook his head, disapprovingly. "He was going to secret meetings, publishing pamphlets, propaganda. Wish I could have been there when they found the hideout with the press." He sighed and looked down at the ground, discouraged. Then he jumped up,

"Hey, I just remembered something! Got to go now, kid. My sister's friend Gina is coming over. I don't want to miss her!" He winked at Emilio. "Women are the next best thing, eh, my friend! To beating up Communists, that is." He laughed and headed off in the direction of Santa Croce. Paolo was poor, clothes torn and ragged, but oh, he glowed there in the sunlight with his fine masculinity, in his knowledge of the female world. His tiny brother, Lorenzo, barely walking, was a poor substitute.

Emilio walked towards the river. When he got there, he peered over the ramparts and watched the canottieri driving their canoes swiftly down river. He picked up a stone and threw it with all his might into the river. He had all this energy. He could go swimming he supposed.

Stories ran through his head, stories like the ones Paolo told him of all the goings-on in the city, the

capturing of gangs of Communists, the killing of key men, the exploits and triumphs of the older bands, roaming the city, guarding it from untold dangers, in the name of their leader, the Duce. Emilio swore under his breath. Porco Dio. Never anything for him to do. At least school would be over soon. He was working on his parents to let him to camp near Livorno for two weeks with the other squadrons. There was talk of learning how to fire a gun, do military manoeuvres. It wasn't as if his parents would have to pay anything. The camp was run by the government. He hoped, so hoped, they would finally say yes. His mother kept putting the decision off.

"We have to wait till babbo comes home," was all she ever told him, when he asked her. Emilio hoped he would come home before camp started. But you could never tell with his father. He could come back the next day. He could stay for a month.

The streets of Florence were dry and dusty, the old buildings looking parched and pale. Emilio headed, thirsty and driven, towards the centre to his mother's tiny dressmaking establishment. At first she had worked out of their apartment, but business was good now and she had moved her sewing-machine and patterns and boxes of materials into a one room workroom in Borgo degli Albizi.

His father travelled a great deal these days. He worked for the national electrical works, managing new projects, on sites where dams were being built or repaired,

or plants being set up.

Once he had been away for almost a year in Puglie. Something to do with irrigation. Emilio wondered what irrigation had to do with electricity.

Emilio thought about his father's secret life away from them, up and down the country. His friends at school told him stories about his father's great success and prowess with women. They knew from their parents' whisperings of these things at home. None, the lion, they called him. The mothers giggled when his name was mentioned. Emilio longed to go on the road with him sometimes, find out for himself, see his father in action. But there was always school. There was talk of war. But even if there would be a war, it would be over soon, too soon, he knew. The tedeschi were too strong. Italy was strong, too. She had a great army, and Mussolini was the greatest leader ever.

He stopped a moment and stared up at the Duomo, the Cathedral, that had always filled his days and nights with her majestic presence. He saw himself in that glorious army, victorious, a master among masters.

Suddenly he felt walled in by the buildings, the traffic, the noise, the very air about him. He ran now all the blocks to his mother's shop.

\* \* \* \* \*

Emilio lay awake on his cot, in the darkness. He wished he could smoke a cigarette, and have at least that tiny glow in the room. He heard his mother's steady breathing through the thin wall. She breathed heavily and sighed often in the night. The baby, Lorenzo, slept in her bed with her when his father was gone, but Emilio never heard the slightest murmur from the child. Lucky Lorenzo. He had everything he could possibly want.

Emilio wanted so much, but the world was filled with impossibles. No cigarette, no light, no father, no girls, no action. No reality. Even Lorenzo's life was more real.

Emilio tried to imagine his father with other women, how he talked to them, how he attracted them, how he drew them down into the depths of his arms. Perhaps it happened in the field in the country out where he supervised dam restoration, perhaps beneath the concrete walls of the dams themselves. Perhaps in his private room in a pensione when he went to some strange town. Perhaps it would be the hotelkeeper's wife or young daughter. Emilio conjured up the possibilities. His father was quite a man, and so would he be one day, but when, when would his life start?

\* \* \* \* \*

Paolo and he stepped out into the glaring sunlight. His mother's shop was dark and cool. Paolo for the first time had come to lunch with Emilio. Now that she worked there Emilio always went there for his midday meal. She managed to cook on one small burner, take care of her baby son, and deal with clients all in that one little room. Behind a curtain she even had a bed that she said she lay down on during the day, with Lorenzo for a few hours.

Emilio had been asking Paolo for months to come here with him. His heart filled with pride when Paolo finally consented. He had been to see his older friend's home many times and had even met the enchanting Gina, whose body had been caressed by his great friend, but not once until this day had Paolo deigned to accept his invitation.

Long, thin Paolo, in a gesture of real pleasure, thrust his hands into the pockets of his loose-fitting pants and began to whistle as he sauntered down the street. Emilio followed, enraptured by his friend's contentment.

They walked towards the river. They had decided on a swim.

"Your mother sure knows how to cook, Emilio. Haven't eaten like that since I stole all that meat from the butcher's last month. Scarcely any meat in the city, and so high-priced, too, but your mother sure has a good supply." He winked at Emilio, knowingly. What did his friend mean? They turned a corner and before the river beckoned to them, Paolo pointed a finger at a butcher shop window.

"That's the place."

"Where you stole all that meat, Paolo?"

"No, no, my little friend, where your mother gets it." At this Paolo's neat and narrow body bent forward with laughter. He gaily pranced ahead of Emilio, like a horse, throwing his head back in sudden bursts of noisy mirth.

What did Paolo mean? What was so funny about the store where his mother bought her meat? Emilio's previous happiness abandoned him. Paolo was laughing at him! But why?

Paolo finally stopped and Emilio caught up to him.

"You don't understand, do you, kid? Oh well, you will, you will." He chuckled again. "She sure is a pretty lady, your mother, trim flesh if I ever saw it. But then again there is someone in her life who knows all about flesh to help keep it in shape for her." And off he went again, roaring this time, as he ran towards the river and its promise of refreshment.

1967

The throngs of American hippies swarmed across the bridge. Emilio watched them. Unkempt and dirty though most of them were, he had to admit his attraction to them. Was it that loose way that they moved? Was it that freedom of limbs? He remembered the Americans on the base. It was an earlier time but they had had that special something too. Was he just romanticizing? Was this "love" of Americans just an idealization of their shared past?

He leaned his weight against the ramparts of the Lungarno and turned his eyes up towards the roofs of the old buildings along the Ponte Vecchio. Italians had their history. It seemed to him a wonderful combination, the ancient Renaissance setting and the imported youthful bodies from a youthful land.

The sun twinkled on the dirty water and almost made it look inviting. It was spring and the water was quite high, giving the Arno the semblance of a real river. Soon the dry weather would cause the river to shrink away from its banks exposing mud and grass and vines. Emilio always preferred the turbulence and life it had during the winter from the rains. It was too bad the tourists didn't come then and see that more energetic Arno. He wondered why he should care about that. They came anyway, stayed in his hotel, soon, he

hoped, his hotels. They came for the museums, and the leather, and the gold, certainly not for the city's puddle of a river. Ah, well, the shabby river would remain his.

Emilio sighed, folded his arms and continued to gaze at the spectacle of young flesh. Someone nodded to him. Who was it? Oh yes, the girl in Room Twenty. He smiled back at her. How long was she staying? What had she said to him that first day?

"Oh about four, five days. But maybe more. Depending on when my friend gets here."

And he had nodded and wondered if that friend were male or female. He watched the swaying of her hips as she disappeared into the crowd crossing the bridge. She reminded him of Virginia, the Virginia of long ago. He had never felt about any other woman what he had felt about her. But leaving her had in the long run been for the best. He had concentrated since that time of first love on his business. His hard work was beginning to pay off now.

Emilio looked at his watch. Three thirty. Probably the foundry would be open by now. It was his father's birthday and since he had just bought a villa with several acres of farmable land on the outskirts of Florence, he had thought it would be appropriate to buy him a large bronze statue to grace his terreno. Something graceful, handsome and strong. Maybe a mythological subject. Yes, a Greek God. A wonderful male creature. A symbol of his life, of his new land, and the work he would do to create a fertile and



beautiful place. Perhaps his mother would one day leave her affair and go live there with him.

Emilio strolled slowly towards his car a few blocks away. That was a ridiculous thought. He could no more see his mother giving up her hotel than himself doing the same. No, she had turned her passion and sensuality toward business and had made of it the centre of her life. The thought crossed his mind that perhaps, she, too, accepted the favours of her clients. How horrifying. He shivered. Turning the corner, he spied his car. Time to get rid of the old Fiat. Why didn't he take Carmela with him to look at the new Lancias? She was fourteen now and would enjoy that sort of thing.

As he placed the key in the ignition, a vision of his mother seducing a client as she showed him a room flashed through his mind. He turned the key and leaned back. 'Donne! His father would say that they were good for one thing only, and why should his mother be any different?

As he drove past the old bridge and watched the tourists amble their way to the other side, and the promise of culture, Virginia came to mind again. How he had needed to love an American, then! Now he needed nothing. He was thirty-eight, healthy, virile, rich, and free. No mother to control him. A wife who let him be.

Emilio drove quickly along the narrow streets, anticipating eagerly the afternoon's activity. He supposed he should have taken Carmela along with him. He didn't

really spend enough time with her. Then again, this was really between himself and his father. This present, he hoped, would be his way of telling the old man how he saw him as a man in relation to his world. It would be a gesture of respect.

There was a kind of mid-afternoon music in the air. The streets were gradually coming alive after the afternoon siesta. Shopkeepers were pulling open the large iron shutters in front of their stores and the women were coming out of their homes to do the shopping. The tourists who had chosen to relax for awhile were drifting out of their hotels and heading for the centre and a fresh dose of art. Emilio felt a part of this momentum. He was on a special mission. The car hummed and the street hummed and he hummed in unison.

Emilio parked the car around the corner from the foundry. He got out and locked the door, taking his time, savouring every moment of this agreeable sensation.

The foundry was a massive stone edifice with large wooden doors. He rang the bell and a young boy promptly came to answer.

"Signor Fiumicelli to see the proprietor, Signor Guerrini."

The boy nodded. "My father is in the office. Come." He followed the boy through the large courtyard, listening to the noises of the establishment. Probably here even in Michelangelo's days, Emilio thought to himself. Off the courtyard were many workrooms. He could see through the open doors the men dressed in black work coats, and the sculptures

themselves in all stages between start and completion. Again he felt conscious of his pleasure and satisfaction in being here.

Signor Guerrini was in conversation with a young female employee, dressed as well in the familiar black gown. She looked like a school girl without the books under her arm. She smiled at Emilio briefly, showing little disposition to remain in the company of the two men. She looked annoyed when Signor Guerrini told her to stay. Emilio watched her face darken. He was attracted to her. He couldn't help but wonder what kind of shape lay beneath the black coat. Its looseness and length made it impossible for him to tell. Every woman was such a mystery, he thought to himself. A woman first met could always deflect him from any original purpose. He didn't know the exact reason why Signor Guerrini had told her to remain but he hoped it had something to do with showing him around the place.

"We have all kinds of statuary suitable for gardens, Signor Fiumicelli," Signor Guerrini began. "I am sure there will be something here for you. Maria will show you all the possible choices. Take as much time as you like. Maria, begin with the antiquary, and then proceed to six and seven. When you get to shed eight, tell Carlo to come get me. Va bene?"

Maria nodded and without a word to her employer, left the office. Emilio thanked the man, shook hands with him and followed Maria with a pleased grin on his face. Lucky him.

Just what he wanted. An attractive guide.

"Do you really want to see the old pieces first, Signor Fiumicelli?"

"Call me Emilio. And I do, unless you think another type of sculpture would be more suitable."

He tried to smile as pleasantly as possible, hoping to change the girl's mood.

"Well, why don't you give me a hint of what you really have in mind. We have a few very fine and original sculptors working here. So I can show you anything from copies of the David to the unimaginable."

"Well, why don't you show me everything? It's something for my father and therefore his taste has to be considered, but since I'm here, I might as well get an education."

She seemed quite satisfied with his response. Perhaps she really liked being a guide. Emilio Fiumicelli would prove to her to be an excellent student with sophisticated tastes. All of a sudden he felt a genuine desire to please her. Perhaps most of her day was spent doing drudgery, and he knew how awful that could be.

"Tell me, signorina, what do you do in this fascinating establishment?" Too pompous. That was the wrong tone. He could see that her dark face was not amused.

"First of all, this place is not fascinating. The older men are very skilled, and perhaps we, the younger workers will be too one day. There is much care, even perfection. We make fine bronzes. But don't think that this

is creative work." She shook her head vigorously. "That's an illusion."

My God, she was serious! Emilio stepped back a little and watched her move across the courtyard to a workroom on the other side. Her hips were full. She moved gracefully. Her black hair loosely fell to her shoulders. He noticed the light playing in the thick waves. He longed for her to take that robe off so there could be some colour lighting up all that darkness. She stopped and waited for him to catch up. She turned to him and her eyes were dark too, almost black. What a creature! He must get to know her.

"Do you have to wear that coat all day? Even in the heat of summer?"

"No, not really. It's to protect our clothes. Don't forget we work a great deal with plaster. If you want to repeat a bronze statue a thousand times you have to have a plaster cast, a model. Very few sculptors, anyway, use the lost wax method, today."

"And what is that, Maria?" Despite himself he was interested. She stopped before the antiquary door and began to explain.

"To make a bronze you must first have a wax model to pour the molten metal over. When the metal hardens and takes the features from the wax beneath, you melt the wax inside it, and the original is lost. In that way you have only one sculpture. But, if you want to repeat it, there is an intermediary process, the plaster cast. It remains forever

to be copied. If you want, later I can show you some wonderful sculptures by a woman who uses the lost wax method. It's interesting that she is not an Italian, don't you think? Perhaps only a straniera would seek a tradition not her own?"

Maria gave him an intent look. She wanted confirmation of her supposition. But he really didn't know what to say. She could be right. But maybe Italians had no use for the wasteful methods of their ancestors. Signor Guerrini wouldn't be getting rich if he couldn't mass produce.

"What nationality is this woman?" was all he could think to ask. Maria turned into the shed. She was ready to continue the conversation even as he looked at the copies of Greek and Roman subjects.

"She's Canadian, but she has been here many years. She's very pleased with our work. Certainly she couldn't find this quality of craftsmanship in her home. She's lucky. She works here, but she only does her own creating. She doesn't have to pay attention to all the..." Maria left her sentence unfinished. She pointed disparagingly at the statues crammed into the small space of the workshop. Too bad. Possibly he would buy one of these statues for his father. Would she have contempt for him then?

But it couldn't be helped. He had his father to think of.

He now began to carefully examine the pieces. Absorbed in his search, he forgot Maria. She stood apart waiting by the shed door as he moved from subject to subject.

Finally he faced Maria again. He was thinking about Leone.

"You know my father is a very able man. He has just bought some land. He will enjoy planting and weeding and sowing. He was never a farmer, but I am sure he will be a successful one. He will put his heart and soul into it. I want something that will represent that side of him."

Maria listened, her arms folded across her chest, as she allowed her weight to lean against the door. Emilio watched her concentration, almost forgetting his mission as he did so. He decided that her energy came in part from anger. Who was she angry at? Some lover? One of those "original" artists she worked with? Otherwise why would there be this cloud over her face?

"Do you think you can help me, signorina? You know every statue in this place. Have you got a good idea?"

"You know there is this replica we have of an ancient Bacchus. I've always had a fondness for it. Perhaps because it's less a copy than the other ones. The original work in marble is so damaged that the workman on the job really invented most of the facial expression and the lines of the body as well. Maybe a Bacchus is not that appropriate a subject for you since pleasure is his goal and not the benefits of work."

"Oh no, no. It sounds wonderful. My father is doing this for pleasure. He was serious about politics in his time, but he's a creature of the flesh more than anything else. And besides he'll be growing grapes and making his own

wine. I'm sure he'll enjoy drinking it as much as making it. Please show me this sculpture."

Bacchus. It sounded ideal. How come he hadn't thought of it?

"It's not here at the moment. It's in shed five. Come."

As they emerged into the courtyard, the spring sun shone upon them generously. Emilio walked beside Maria, feeling warm and comradely. Perhaps if it got too hot she would remove her coat.

"You know what I like about this Bacchus?" Emilio detected a ring of intimacy in her tone.

"And what would that be, signorina?"

She looked straight at him when she spoke. Her face brightened.

"Well, you know how sometimes that look of glee in the eyes of a Bacchus can make him look almost silly. Like the grin of a.. a.. an idiot, sort of?" Emilio nodded.

"Well, this one, and who knows what the actual one looked like, this one is smiling, yes. But the happiness is... is...infectious." She smiled at him now, and Emilio knew what he had known all along - that she was beautiful. She concentrated a moment and finally found the right word.

"He's irresistible."

They had entered shed five and there it was. The ray of light from the open door struck it from the side. The bronze gleamed. Emilio was overcome. Leone. That's Leone.



"It's perfect." He loved it immediately. It was about a metre high, sitting on its marble pedestal, which was perhaps half a metre in height. Bacchus was holding grapes in an outstretched arm. The grapes were full and round, and moulded realistically. One thigh was lifted covering the genitals from Emilio's view. The muscles seemed to vibrate. The uplifted arm was hiding the mouth, but Emilio felt his smile as if he could actually see it. It was the eye. The right eye, which he could see well, was not just smiling, it was laughing with joy. Quickly Emilio moved round to face the statue right on. He felt like reaching up and taking the grapes offered him. He felt like saying yes, yes. He stretched his arms out as if to hug the creature.

"I love it," he said.

Maria was laughing. "I told you he had that effect. Antonio is such a wonderful worker in bronze. You feel as if he moulded it like clay." As soon as she uttered this she turned away. Antonio. So, perhaps there was an Antonio in her life. But perhaps he was no more. Or perhaps Emilio could get rid of him with a little effort. He had made her smile. Why he had made her laugh. He was as irresistible as Leone.

"Signorina, I have chosen. But if you do not mind, I would like you to continue this guided tour. I must see the modern pieces just for my own pleasure. Show me what you like best. Show me the work of the Canadian woman, who does

not make duplicates and triplicates of her sculpture."

Maria hesitated uncertainly. I'm not going to lose her now, thought Emilio.

"Perhaps you do not think I am in good faith. But I am. Why must it be that we always see original works of art in museums? You see all this every day, but I never get to view a sculpture in an artist's workroom. I never get to touch the tools he works with, or a model in the making. I am deprived of such things. Would they not enhance my appreciation?" Emilio instinctively touched his heart as he uttered his next words.

"Maria, it is up to you to give me this pleasure." And now he smiled, relaxed for the moment, for Maria was smiling, too.

"Va bene. Va bene." Maria nodded as she acquiesced. And as she said this, Emilio knew it had a special meaning. For before she was merely working for Signor Guerrini. Now she would be his guide for her own reasons.

He followed her across the sun-filled courtyard, feeling light and heady, as if he had somehow absorbed the spirit of that ancient merrymaker. They had traversed so many times already this oblong of space, it felt as if their duet had been choreographed on purpose. Something would come of this meeting. He would see to it. But she was touchy, questa donna. He had to be careful not to offend her.

They went into a small shed, only to emerge through another back door into the light again of a smaller courtyard.

There were about a dozen sculptures sitting on pedestals.

"Does she work outside?" Emilio asked, assuming that they were getting a glimpse of that Canadian woman's work.

Often. Sometimes in the hottest part of the day, she will be out there, moulding, firing, thinking, studying. She says there is too much winter where she comes from. She takes advantage of all the sun and heat she can get. I think she will never leave Italy. È innamorata."

"Some of this metal does not look like bronze at all."

"Well, that's because it isn't. Sometimes she uses silver, depending on the mood of the piece, probably on her own as well. If the piece is not more than twenty, twenty-five centimetres, it is still affordable."

Emilio examined the smaller sculptures. They were all human figures in various attitudes. Many were draped with only their hands and feet visible. These were particularly gaunt like Donatello's Maddalena. Unhappy creatures, he thought. Yet he felt a certain desire to study them.

"Are they all part of a group? They seem to be communicating with each other in their own world," he observed to Maria.

"Like characters in a book, perhaps? Is that what you mean?"

Emilio wasn't sure, but he nodded at the possibility.

"I think she's very literary. She's always referring to books, old books, Medieval and Renaissance texts like Tasso, or Ariosto, or Dante. But she will never

directly tell me what she is doing. She asks me all the time, though, what I see in them, what they mean for me. Come look at this one."

They went over to a small silver sculpture of a man and a woman. They were paked and running, the man straining forward pulling the woman by the hand behind him. His face was set and determined to go wherever they were going. The woman, although running forward, was turned around with the upper half of her body wrenching backward. Her eyes were searching for something they were leaving.

Emilio chuckled. "Does she represent nostalgia or something like that?"

"Actually, they are Adam and Eve. That much I have been told. The eternal Adam and Eve for me, because the woman wants to hang on, retain more than the memory if possible, whereas the man wishes to hurry headlong into their new life. He wants to get on with it and forget."

Maria looked up at Emilio challengingly. Emilio took the challenge.

"And you think that all women are like her, and all men like him?"

Maria shrugged.

"I don't know. It's just that whenever I look at it," she pointed at the sculpture, "it strikes me as true to life."

"So when men leave something in their lives, they leave it. It's over. And women linger, needing a tug into

the future? Is that what you believe?" Emilio smiled at Maria. But her face showed no inclination to joke.

"Think about it, Signor Fiumicelli. Think about your own life. When you've had to leave something behind, a place, a person, a job, a home, have you done it? Did you just sever yourself? Or did you write letters?"

She was almost sarcastic, if not hostile. Strange that just today he had been thinking about Livorno and Virginia and Americans. Yes, he had just gone. He had gone without a word. He had not stopped to ponder what Virginia might have thought or felt. He had only seen the future, his.

"But it is necessary sometimes, Signorina, to be that way. Otherwise we might just stand still. There would be no movement forward. No progress. We'd still be back there," he pointed to the sculpture, "gazing at our Paradise Lost."

But Maria was not listening to him anymore. She was somewhere inside herself, eyes glued to the silver beings before her, contemplating their flight, and perhaps her own life. Finally she looked up:

"I will tell Signor Guerrini that you have chosen." Before he could respond to her, she was inside the door, making for the other side of the shed into the larger yard and the office. Emilio felt disheartened. He wanted to know this woman, conquer her in some way, get her mind off these useless things, get her to laugh.

Inside the office, Maria did not look at him. Emilio paid her employer, and they decided that Emilio would not bother to wait for it to be brought by truck to his father's

villa, but that he would transport it himself immediately. He was anxious to take it.

"Maria, tell Carlo and Andrea to drape it in something more suitable and carry it to Signor Fiumicelli's car." Signor Guerrini turned back to Emilio.

"It was a pleasure to serve you, sir. I am happy that we have been able to satisfy you." Emilio and he shook hands. Maria was already leaving the office.

"I will accompany the Signorina," he ventured hurriedly, "and watch the procedure." Maria, Maria, wait.

"Maria," he called to her. She stopped. She did not turn. She just waited for him.

Emilio touched her black sleeve. Now she turned. She had the oddest expression in her eyes. Emilio did not know what to make of it.

"Maria, can I see you again? I'd like to know you better. You are a very unusual woman."

Maria did not look exactly receptive to the idea. But she was hesitating. He hadn't thought to ask her if there was any man in her life. Perhaps she was feeling awkward because she didn't know how to tell him that she wasn't free?

"Excuse me, Maria. Perhaps I seem a bit hasty. After all I don't know if you are married or fidanzata. I never thought to ask. I'm sorry." He looked in her face. Something told him he had said the wrong thing.

"Why, Signor Fiumicelli, perhaps you would care to

tell me if you are married?"

"Well, actually I am, but, uh... it really makes no ..."

"And if I were married as you are would you ask me out anyway?"

"Well it would depend uh... on the uh... circumstances of your..."

"Never mind, Signor Fiumicelli. I am not married."

What is she getting at? (Am I not allowed to ask someone if they are married or not?)

"Well, I'm relieved to hear that. I'm not really sure I understand..." Maria did not let him finish. Her face was bright with opposition. Emilio couldn't help feeling how beautiful she was. He felt he had to see her at any cost.

"Why is it that you feel impelled to find out whether I am married or not when it obviously makes no difference in your case. If a man has the freedom to be single and married at the same time, why should it be any concern of yours if a woman is attached or not?"

"But, Maria, I just thought that if you were involved with a man, you would not be able..."

"But you are obviously involved with a woman and it doesn't prevent you from having dinner with another. Why should it prevent me?"

"I don't know. I just thought. I don't know. It's just like that."

"Well, it's not just like that, not with me anyway."  
She turned away from him so abruptly, he had no time to retaliate. Emilio stood still. Maria went to tell the men to pack his statue and he did not follow her. Instead he moved toward the entrance. He would bring his car in front of the building.

He waited inside the car for the men to come out. He couldn't think. Then the door opened. Emilio got out of the car to open the trunk. It was some minutes before he realized that Maria had come out with the men. She was standing beside the car. She had removed the dark robe. She was so soft looking. There was nothing severe in her face anymore. She wore a yellow skirt and a white blouse. Her body was slim and full of energy even as she remained still. Perhaps it was her hair that gave the appearance of movement. The light touching it. The waves. The way it fell. His heart beat quickly. She had come out to see him again. It was not over.

The workmen shut the trunk and returned to the foundry. Maria did not move. Emilio stood in the street. He kept his eyes on her as he locked the trunk. He took a few steps toward her. He stepped onto the sidewalk. He took her hand.

"I will drive you home, Maria. I am sorry we fought today. I only wanted to see you again. More than anything."

Maria smiled.

"And I am not sorry we fought. We know each other better now."



Emilio felt his whole body relax. He could have  
kissed her.

\* \* \* \* \*

Emilio lay on his bed with the lights out. He reimagined the night before spent with Maria. He closed his eyes and brought his arm to cover them. He wanted no distractions. He wanted to go over every delicious moment as intensely as he could. He heard his wife's footsteps coming down the hall. She stopped to say good-night to Carmela and continued toward their bedroom. A sudden desire came over him to have a room of his own, if only to contemplate freely in. The light came on suddenly.

"Turn off the light. Turn it off! Can't you see I have a headache?"

He heard his wife grumble something and then she turned out the light. He relaxed again.

"Aren't you taking your clothes off?" he heard her say. He sighed. He would have to move, get up, take his clothes off, re-enter the bed beneath the blankets, feel his wife's heaviness beside him, put off his reverie for later. He slowly got up from the bed. His wife was throwing her clothes on the chair, on the floor, anywhere she could find space. He watched her sit down noisily on the bed and remove the remainder of her underclothes.

Nothing. He felt nothing for her, concern now and again for her health if she caught a cold, but nothing powerful. Would he ever feel that way for a woman again? Would Maria absorb him like that? He hoped not, but he knew that he couldn't do without that body of hers, now that he had had it. It was too wonderful. Maria would be a wise and

worthwhile attachment. She was the best woman he had slept with in a long time. She could be full of surprises too.

To think she had a child, a little girl! She had no shame either for having conceived her without a proper marriage. No, she was a proud woman through and through.

What a shock it had been to arrive at her house the day he had bought the statue and be greeted by a toddler. Anna was adorable, too. She had immediately liked him. She came up to him and just handed him her pacifier as if it were a present, or her way of saying ciao. Emilio shook his head at the memory.

"Are you talking to yourself, Emilio?" his wife asked. He could just make out her huddled form, beneath the blankets. Had she been watching him in the semi-darkness? Did she think about him sometimes, about what he did, or thought, or felt?

He chuckled and said, "I suppose I am. Old age creeping up on me."

But she wasn't really curious. She just turned over on her side and presumably closed her eyes. Good. He would be able to lie down and allow his imagination to wander freely. He finished removing his clothing, placing everything neatly on the chair beside the bed, closest to where he slept. He allowed himself to sink back onto the bed and into his dream.

Ah Maria, Maria, such energy, such flow, such perfect rhythm. Never any clumsiness. Never any restraint.

Never any lack of certainty. She had been sensuality itself. Why he had almost felt as if she had taught him something. He did not have to conquer her either. When she had accepted him as a friend, it seemed she had accepted him as a lover, too.

He had come back the night of the afternoon that he had brought her home from work. She put her daughter to bed, gave some last minute instructions to the old lady who stayed with the child when Maria was out, and went with him to dinner.

She was not just agreeable all through dinner. She was something else. He tried to put his finger on the right word for her behavior. She was open, candid, honest, just as she had been during the afternoon. But she was more than just open with him or free with him. She was... It was as if they were making love from the very moment they were alone together in the car, throughout the meal, and the trip back to her place. That was it. That was why the passage from clothes and the outside to no clothes and the interior of her bedroom was so smooth. Everything had been intimate and sexy from the beginning.

Emilio chuckled to himself again. His wife turned over. He moved further away from her. What a discovery! That's what Maria had taught him. How to make love continuously from the moment you laid eyes on a person, how to make love when you sat beside someone in a car and talked about babies, how to make love when you opened a door and followed a woman into a bright and lively restaurant. Every ordinary moment, every ordinary action could be electric.

And so the final act of getting into bed, and feeling their bodies' arousal had been no more and no less than touching an arm as you walked through the street, than the crunch of the car door closing, the slipping off of your shoes, the taste of skin, the feel of the wineglass, the pressure of lips, the swallowing of food - all one and the same act.


Emilio shivered. He never for one moment doubted the outcome of the evening. They had come together without ambition or tension or friction or the need for coaxing. And surprisingly enough he hadn't missed all that, that game of seduction and success.

It was hard to figure out why she had been so difficult during the afternoon, so unpredictable, so touchy. He thought of two possibilities. She might have been uncomfortable at work because a former lover prowled the place, that Antonio maybe. Probably all that had ended badly and just being in the same place produced tension in her. Or the other possibility was that she had been immediately excited by his own presence as he had been by hers, and her indecisiveness caused her to behave strangely with him. Once she had made up her mind to allow herself to be attracted to him, all anxiety left her and smoothly she flowed into his arms.

She puzzled him though. What kind of woman was so proud and so yielding at the same time. He thought about some of the other hotelkeepers that he knew. Domenico or Riccardo. Whore they would have called her for sure.

Puttana. A baby, too. But women who were whores, he would argue, were usually dejected. They wanted you so badly they would do anything, anything demeaning just to get you. Maria was the opposite. She demanded respect before she would even have a conversation with you. Had he not treated her respectfully, she would never have come out behind the men carrying the statue to his car. She would have waited until he had left and then gone home herself. It had been a close call, though. He had very nearly failed. What had won her over in the last moment? Was this something you could ask a woman? Maybe when he got to know her better.

He felt sure of himself now. In the foundry he hadn't known what he was doing. He had been completely out of control. But now that she had come to him, he would handle her just fine. She was his if he wanted. And right now he wanted. He would have to arrange his schedule to accommodate her as frequently as possible.



1939

Emilio got down from the bus. He was wearing his new white shorts and black shirt. He was tanned and healthy. He had spent almost two weeks of camp near the seaside. He felt like a soldier. As it happened the squadrons were home three days early. There was no explanation. Rumours of war were being spread among the boys. But they weren't afraid. Why should they be? The enemy was no match for their Duce.

Emilio would miss the camp, the bunkhouses, the dining-hall, and especially that atmosphere of comradeship. But now that he was home, he hoped that his father might be back from one of his important missions. He hadn't seen him in an entire month.

He left the other boys and headed for the family apartment. It was mid-day and if he hurried, perhaps his father would not have left the house yet. When he came home from some project, he usually stayed in all morning, showering and shaving and getting dressed before going into the centre to meet his friends. Maybe today he would take Emilio with him. Perhaps they would go to the headquarters of the party or see one of his high-ranking official friends in the commune. He could hear his father introducing him, "And this is Emilio, just home from camp. Tell us of your experiences, Emilio." And after he told them, his father

would slap him on the back and say, "You are becoming a real man. The Duce would be proud of you. Perhaps one day I will take you to him. What do you say to that, ragazzo mio?"

The streets were empty. His boots clattered against the cobblestones. Emilio felt like stretching the old buildings away from him as he hurried along. They were crowding him in. But every now and then, there would be an opening in the street between the buildings and the sun would suddenly pour down on him. Emilio would look up at the blue sky full of promise and glory, and it made him feel as if much much more was at the end of this journey than the sight of his father.

Camp had been good, more than just fun. It had felt like the army, with all the field exercises, and guns, real guns, and the orders, and the hikes, and all the other boys around him marching, moving as one in the name of their leader. Maybe now he and his squadron could have special duties in the city, now that they had proven their worth in training. He quickened his steps as he thought these thoughts. He was almost home now.

He was now at the outskirts of the city. The streets were getting wider and the houses more sparse. Emilio's house was four storeys high and set in a square with a large yard and iron gate in front of it. As Emilio entered the square he looked up immediately to their second-floor apartment balcony. The balcony had large terracotta urns filled with flowers sitting on it. The glass doors to the



balcony were closed and he could not see into the living-room. He crossed the square as fast as he could and ran through the gate, across the yard, and into the lobby. He dashed up the stairs inside, nodding to the portiere's wife, who sat interminably knitting behind the grilled window of the little one room cage from which she protected her lobby.

"Non c'è nessuno!" she called up to Emilio as he raced towards the first landing. He kicked the wall in anger. Porco Dio! No one was home. He looked over the railing at the woman and thought that if he had had a gun he would have shot her.

"Your mother and little brother went out this morning. My but you are a fine-looking young man today. Your father would be proud of you."

"So he's not at home?"

"Hasn't been home in a long time. Who knows what that 'Leone' is up to!" She went back to her knitting.

Emilio sighed. He dragged himself up the next flight of stairs and unlocked the door to the apartment. It felt so large. When his father was home, it seemed to shrink. His father filled the whole space up. When he talked his voice rang about the rooms, enveloping all of them.

First he went into his parents' bedroom just to check for signs of his father. The room was spotless and untouched. Then he went to his own room and dropped his small bag of clothing beside the bed. He threw himself onto the bed in a gesture of frustration. What was the point of being home if

his father was not there. All his pride and energy began to drain from him. Why couldn't his father be home just this once to listen to his stories about the camp? He put his hands behind his head and stared at the blank ceiling. All he wanted was to see him and talk to him. Was that so much to ask?

It was hot in the room and very soon he fell asleep. When he woke up about an hour later he was quite wet. He took a shower and changed into ordinary clothes. He checked the kitchen for something to eat. There was nothing but a few rolls and mineral water. He drank and ate what there was. Obviously his mother was spending most of her time in her workroom and was eating there. Emilio got up from the table and looked out the kitchen window. Might as well go visit her. Before leaving he examined the large bedroom, once again, just to be extra sure. It was obvious that his father had not been home. Unhappily he left the apartment.

This time he stood and waited for the bus to take him to the centre. After twenty minutes of waiting it finally arrived. Emilio alighted at the Duomo feeling hungry. He walked slowly, though, towards his mother's shop. His body seemed to weigh a million chili; he could hardly lift his boots. He walked dejectedly, head down, with his hands stuffed into his pockets. All the joy of the previous two weeks had left him.

When he arrived in the narrow Borgo degli Albizi, he noticed that his mother's door was barred by the huge iron

shutters, but the lock which was usually at the bottom was not there. She must have still been inside, probably taking her afternoon nap. Instead of lifting the iron gate, he walked around to the side street to peer down into the street level window.

At first it was difficult for his eyes to see through the gloom. So he moved as close as he could to the window and dropped onto his knees. His brother was sleeping in the cradle beside the large worktable. The sewing machine stood to the right. An unfinished dress hung down from it. In the far corner he made out his mother's small bed. His mother was lying naked on her back with one arm across her forehead. She looked as if she were laughing. Beside her, lying on his side with his head propped up by his bent arm, was 'Maso the butcher. His left hand was stroking his mother's belly. He, too, was laughing. Then 'Maso's dark head covered his mother's face and Emilio could not see anything of her head. Her arm now moved over 'Maso's back. The hand stroked his skin from his shoulder blades down down slowly along the spine.

Emilio stood up and walked backwards, his eyes never leaving the window. There was no one else in the tiny street. Finally his back touched the wall of the facing building. He pressed his whole body against the stone, feeling the unevenness, in his back and thighs. When his head touched the wall, he took one glance at the blue, blue sky. Then he bent down and picked up a rock from the pavement. He threw

it with all his might into the shop window. As soon as he heard the sharp sound of the pane cracking, he began to run. He ran hard until he turned into the Via del Proconsolo. He was far enough out of sight by now for them never to know that it was he who had shattered the afternoon silence.

CHAPTER 4

1983

He was to meet her at the entrance to the Pitti. An exhibit to see. Another damn exhibit. Since she had come, they hadn't missed one. She spent their precious time together avoiding him by standing in front of a work of art. He had tried so hard to reach her, suggesting excursions away from town, exploring the colline toscane for hidden vineyards, picnics in picturesque villages, hoping for long journeys in the car, so that he could speak freely to her, get her to reveal herself.

How much he wanted to know her! Did she have a boyfriend? Had she had experiences with men? Did she want to come home? To Florence? Certainly he would help her financially to pursue her studies in art. He would do anything. Please just talk to me. But she refused all attempts at intimacy.

He had thought that first evening together that all their tears would be some kind of beginning, but now after a week, he realized that they had been the beginning of an end. She closed herself up, remaining distant and aloof. Sometimes, in order to get away from the painfulness of her company, he made excuses about his wife or his daughter and son-in-law, that he had to spend time with them. This was far from the truth; his time was his own.

He had let her have her way, too. He hadn't forced her in any way to talk of herself. He had given up almost immediately, as soon as he saw her guard go up. But after a week, he couldn't bear the tension. He was ready to scream. Time was ticking away. He was desperate. He was ready to beg. Let me, dear child, let me love you.

Emilio drove up the slight incline in front of the Palazzo Pitti. He looked around for Anna. He couldn't find her among the people strolling around. He parked the car and paid the attendant. They were to meet at the entrance to the nineteenth century gallery, the huge monumental archway in the centre of the palace. They had already been to the Gallerie Palatine around the side of the building near the Boboli gardens. And he couldn't stand Raphael: All that too precious flesh. Nor could he take all the portraits by Sustermans, but she wanted him to come, as always, and he couldn't refuse her. There was always a chance... if she wanted him there, then maybe, it meant.... who could know?

He was beginning to feel that the more he cared for her, the more deeply he loved her, the more he wished to rid her of her immeasurable sadness, the more she hated him. This thought tormented him. He could hardly sleep. But all she had said the first day about his neglect was true. It was shocking. How could he not have realized that by not seeking her out in some way, he had abandoned her? Why had he never tried to prevent them from going? Why had he been so passive?

He slowly walked to their appointed meeting-place, feeling weighted down and old with his terrible guilt. The wind blew the red and blue banners above him. They were advertising the Gino Severini exhibit. Well, let's see what Severini has to offer. I might as well get an education while I'm about it. Get an education. He remembered trying to seduce her mother at the bronze foundry, talking with her about getting educated by her. Memories, memories. Leave me. Leave me.

He stepped through the enormous gateway. Oh there she was, sitting on the stairs leading up to the gallery. Reading. Some art book, no less. Art isn't everything, Anna. He called to her.

"Anna?" She looked up from her book, her eyes searching for the direction of his voice. He saw in them a flicker of emotion. Was it relief, maybe, that he was really there, and she wanted him to be? And then they grew dark.

Oh Dio, it reminded him of that poem by Quasimodo. Ed è subito sera. Would she know that poem? Would Maria have encouraged her to read Italians? He would have. Oh, all that he could have done. Time is so short, Anna. Tell her. "Ognuno sta solo sul cuor della terra/trafitto da un raggio di sole;/ ed è subito sera." Tell her that we each stand alone at the heart of the world, transfixed by a ray of light, and in a flash evening comes.



Tell her the darkness falls too soon.

She stood up. "Ciao, Emilio."

"Ciao, Anna."

They walked up the stairs, he behind her. He wanted to touch her back, make her stop for a moment.

At the top of the stairs they bought their tickets.

"Would you like a poster from the exhibit?" he asked her, hoping she would say yes.

"Let's see it first, Emilio," she said, walking immediately towards the entrance a few steps ahead of him.

"Va bene, Anna," he answered humbly.

The first section contained his non-futuristic works. Together he and Anna stood in front of the large canvasses. Emilio liked them right away. The simplicity. He wanted to know what Anna thought.

"It's funny, Anna, I can't see how out of this kind of work, came all, ...all that..., you know, all that turbulence you see in his mature work. Can you?" He looked at her. She carried her coat over her arm, hugging it to her. She wore a yellow sweater, that recalled Maria, for it was a colour Maria loved. Anna brushed her hair from her face thoughtfully. Emilio could see her eyes concentrating, searching for an answer. Good, he thought, she's going to respond.

First she sighed deeply. Her hand rubbed her chin.

"I think, Emilio," she slowly started, "that's because of the nature of Futurism. You see," she turned to him, more than willing to express her opinion, "it's possible to see the seeds of Impressionism, or maybe Cubism, but Futurism is different because it came out of an idea, you know, something intellectual, or literary. It wasn't initially a painting movement, or a style. After all, Marinetti, the poet, wrote all those manifestoes, that expressed precisely what they believed in or mostly didn't believe in. I guess it's sort of strange. Their ideas were kind of strange anyway, and, uh, unfortunate politically, too." She suddenly grew shy as she said this. She dropped her eyes and retreated into herself. He had the distinct impression that she was afraid that she might have hurt him.

He knew her reference was to Fascism, for politically, the Futurists, wanting to destroy the old society, and build a new one, were therefore quite quickly identified with the Fascists. You see, Maria, she did make up her own mind in the end. My influence on Anna was not that strong.

He sighed and looked up at Severini's Maternità, painted in 1916. Anna gazed up at it, too. She pointed to it, ready to take up the conversation from where it had stopped.

"I guess you could say that's not very revolutionary, considering what else he did," Anna slanted her head to the side, pondering. "He knows how to paint a woman sitting in a chair, nursing a baby, though. Doesn't he, Emilio?"

Emilio thought the painting was beautiful. "The woman has such an intelligent face," he mused. "Like your mother, my child," he blurted out. Anna looked so frightened when he said this that he returned to the subject of the painting. He moved around Anna, closer to the canvas.

"Isn't it odd," he continued, "that we can't see the expression in her eyes, and yet I can feel, or sense somehow, that she is intelligent? It's usually from the eyes that we can make such judgments." He remembered the Bacchus. The eyes laughing. I made your mother laugh. I reached her. What have I done to make you so untouchable? Are you like this with everyone?

"Look at the way she's directing her gaze downward at the baby." Anna continued the conversation, as she pointed out the imaginary line between the mother's eyes and the baby's. "They're communicating. We don't see her eyes, because they are only there for her baby. We are excluded." Her voice sounded wistful as she said that. He remembered a time when the three of them were a family, when he was allowed to love this little girl, when he was not excluded.

Anna said she was ready for the other rooms. But he did not want to go just yet. Something about the Maternità was still pulling at him.

"You go, Anna, I want to stay here a while yet. We'll meet." She nodded and left him. He could tell she didn't really want to go alone. There was a reluctance in her step. Anna, my dear, tell me you want me. He watched

her uneasily, wishing to protect her from harm. But the harm had come from him, not from others.

After some time, Emilio turned back to the picture. He looked at the baby this time. The little hand cupped around the mother's breast. The face so intent. Anna was right. They were complete unto themselves. The woman had strength, firmness, and refinement. I guess one could say the same about Maria, if I were asked to describe her. The woman had the same assuredness of body. Self-respect. He had thrown it away. Because he couldn't answer questions. He shook his head. He hadn't wanted to know the answers. He hadn't wanted to know himself. Why question the things one was taught to believe? How could he? He hadn't had the courage.

He didn't have the courage now either for the other canvasses, the modern ones. He could see Anna in the other room, carefully studying those lively and animated paintings. They were not for him. He preferred the stillness of the phase represented in the room he was in.

He sat down in the only chair in the room. He leaned forward with his elbows on his knees. He placed his head in his hands. I'm getting old. He had never felt old before, really, despite his age. But his unwillingness to see all the abstract, fragmented, even destructive dynamism of Severini was telling him something about his age. That art was for Anna. It was her turn to feel part of something revolutionary, even if she didn't agree with Futurism's

particular brand of it. What would happen to Anna? Would she be creative or destructive? Active or passive? Small or great?

He had told her that Mussolini was great. Had he been mistaken?

"Emilio?" It was Anna's voice. Her child voice. ("Emilio, let's go play together.... Let's go outside.... Take me away.... Let's have fun.... Mamma never wants to do anything....") He lifted his head. She looked excited. Beautiful.

"Do you want to see the famous pictures? There's a room here that they transferred from some villa. He painted all the walls and the ceiling, too. And there's a Paris Métro painting. It's so much fun. E così movimentato!" She waved her arms about in excitement. She loves it. The motion. The energy. He stood up. I guess I would have, too, when I was young. My energy got mischannelled. In what direction would she send hers?

He followed her through the other rooms. He felt so sad watching her. For himself, for her. She wanted him; she didn't want him. She resisted him; she resisted herself. He had abandoned her and killed her trust. That was the only explanation.

My poor, small, helpless creature, locked inside yourself. She would not come out for him, not very far anyway. Would she come out for anyone else? He supposed this was the important question. But he wanted her to come

out for him. Was that so much to ask?

He had to do it. He had to try again. Perhaps this wasn't the right place, but was there a right place? She had talked about Severini. He must make her talk about things that mattered to them.

"Anna, let's go see the posters. Maybe we could find one of the Maternità. I want your mother to have it."

"My mother?"

"Yes, your mother, or am I not allowed to mention her?"

"Well, uh, sure," Anna began. She stopped and turned away slightly from him. She fumbled with her coat.

Emilio lay his hand gently upon her shoulder and turned her around to him. He placed both hands now on each shoulder and looked into her eyes.

"Look, Anna, we have to talk, about her, about you, about me, about everything. It's too important." He directed her firmly towards a corner of the cold stone entrance hall. There were not too many people milling about. He faced her and pulled her as close as he could to him.

"She's here with us, isn't she?" He gave her a look which he hoped would make her respond, not pleading, demanding. Anna nodded her head. She began to cry. Between sobs, she tried to speak.

"My mother loved you, Emilio.... She, she wanted it to work, but you, you..." Emilio held her head between his hands. Go on, go on, my child, Please don't stop now, he

mentally encouraged her, too moved to speak the words.

"She says that you destroyed what you had because you...couldn't...live in the...real.... I don't know. I can't say it." She was crying too much now to talk clearly. He held her tightly in his arms. He wanted to let go too, to cry with her. His little girl. Was he wrong making her talk of such painful things? It was strange to think that Maria had discussed them with her. Why couldn't he have been there, too?

"I'm cold, Emilio," he heard a small voice say to him. Quickly he helped her on with her coat. He hadn't wanted to let go of her just yet. He wanted her small body close beside him. Let me give you comfort. Let me make you warm, the way a father should.

She was still crying as she buttoned herself inside the coat. He touched her chin and lifted her face to him.

"Anna, did your mother want you to come?"

Anna shook her head. "She said it was my choice. It was something I had to do. Her life is there, but she knows that mine may not be."

"Oh, Anna, do you think you might come back?"  
Please say yes. We need time, Anna, so much time.

"I don't know, Emilio." She moved towards the door.

"Wait, Anna, not yet. What does it depend on?"

"Please, Emilio," her voice and tear-stained face begged him. "No more now."

"But, Anna, I must know. I must know why you've come. If you want to know that I want you here, ...Anna,

haven't I shown you how much I do? If you want to study here, live here, work here, all these things are possible: I would take care of you. Anna, you can trust me."

"Can I, Emilio?" she said in a very quiet voice. There was the hurt again in her child's eyes. They stood, staring at each other over the distance of six silent years. What could he say?



1967

The last times he had mentioned it, he had been too apologetic. Begging was not the way to play the game. She always flatly refused. This time he would order it. "Maria, you have to quit your job." He would allow her no chance for rebuttal. My God! It was just so obvious. He couldn't just get up and leave his family every night. And it was too difficult to come on Sundays. Sometimes he needed to be with his brother or his daughter. During the week, in the middle of the day, that's when he could see her and not rush their time together. He could think of a million pretexts for leaving the hotel in the afternoon. Why he was hardly ever there anyway in the afternoon. He met colleagues, discussed new business propositions. His wife never asked him anything when he went out at four or five o'clock. She was never there either until about five. She was always playing tombola with her friends! And he wanted Maria to be available to him at all times. If she were going to be his and exclusively his, she would have to arrange her life around his schedule. That's all there was to it. Did she love her work anyway? And all those men around her eight hours a day! That damn Antonio! It could drive a lover crazy.

As soon as he reached the outer limits of the city, he pressed his foot heavily on the accelerator. The prospect

of a negative reaction from his mistress made him drive faster. In the last six months he had spent most of his free time with Maria, but because it had to be late at night, or on Sunday, a constant nervousness pervaded him. He did not want anyone to know. It had been a long time since he had kept a woman for so long. He had seen a particular woman now and then over a period of a few months, but he hardly remembered them. This was different. Maria was a great addition to his life. And so far he had never once tired of her body. It was always good to him. If she would just comply with this small request, he could have it whenever he wished. Providing for her and Anna would be easy. He was surprised himself sometimes at how easily the money flowed in. It would be no sacrifice whatever to support them. She could even have this old Fiat of his if she wanted. He wanted a new car anyway.

He pulled into the little lane behind her house. It was quite a windy day and the washing from the clothesline downstairs was swinging wildly in the breeze. Emilio's eyes followed the upward movement of the clothes to Maria's door and then farther toward the sky. Yesterday had been cloudless, but a streak of gray was now rapidly crossing the sky. It was October and he could feel the chill of the approaching bad weather. Would Maria last the winter? Would she accept his proposal? It was nice to have a regular woman. The odd foreigner for a taste of another way of life, and also to keep the old seductiveness well-oiled, but a regular woman

would be heartening in the middle of winter when the rain poured cold and heavy onto the city. When there was less work, less to keep you rushing around. Maria would be his secret pleasure, ready to respond to his every whim.

As he mounted the stairs, he could hear her singing to Anna. One o'clock. Anna's nap-time. She had less than two hours before she had to go back to work if he drove her. Would she argue that he could come every day at lunch-time and then drive her back to work when the old signora came to mind Anna? No. He wanted to control her life. Working was too risky. She had to be his.

Before opening the back door, Emilio turned around to examine the land. What if he bought this house and the few acres that went with it? He liked to come here and listen to the hens clucking in the downstairs courtyard, smell the aromas of vegetation, see the hills in the distance and the umbrella pines that dotted the slopes. The contadino below made his own olive oil from the few trees and also supplied the padrone of the building with enough every year for his family's own consumption. Perhaps he could go and speak to the man and make an offer. It was a thought. Maria would first have to comply with his wishes. Everything would be possible then....

He opened the door quietly. Maria continued singing. He heard no sounds from Anna. The kitchen was a bit messy; a few dishes from lunch, a biberon half-filled with milk for Anna, an open bottle of wine sat on the table in the middle

of the room. Emilio felt great affection for this room. It was always warm and friendly. It received him like a person.

He sat down at the table and poured some wine into Maria's glass. Thank you, he said soundlessly to the room, I don't mind if I do. He brought the glass to his lips. He drank in the room and its objects. He put the glass down contentedly. If it could only be mine.

He felt a little light-headed. It was a good feeling. It gave him confidence. He would be manly and firm with Maria. He heard some noise in the other room. Anna must have fallen asleep. Maria would be coming now into the kitchen. He heard her footsteps coming toward the door. The door squeaked as she opened it. She did not see him. She was looking backwards to see if the noise had awakened Anna. It had not. Maria closed the bedroom door behind her.

"Oh, Emilio, you're here."

He could not speak. All he could do was rise, move his chair aside and go to her. He took her in his arms. He held her to him tightly. She responded and caressed his back with her hands. Her face was buried in his neck. He felt her kiss his shoulder, his neck, his cheek, as they held each other. The desire to kiss her was so strong now that he pulled away her face from his body. He looked in her eyes for a split second, saw the urgency there, too, and brought his mouth down upon hers. Their saliva mingled. Oh, how sweet. He just wanted to eat and drink his way into her warm mouth, as deeply as he could. He needed no air, just the soft voluptuous closing around his tongue. She drew

back and kissed his lips many times, but he yearned to be inside once again, inside that dark envelope of pleasure. She yielded again. He forced his tongue back into the depths, sliding into every crevice, against the roof of her mouth, along the inside of her cheeks, pressing her body closer to him, until he knew he wanted more than her mouth, he wanted every pore of her.

"To the bedroom, Maria," he murmured. He pushed her gently towards her room. She turned away from him and opened the other door. He was right behind her. Inside the room he shut the door. He saw her moving toward the bed. He reached out and caught her from behind. He kissed the nape of her neck and passed his hands across her breasts. He continued to explore her body, rubbing his face inside the mesh of her hair, until she cried to him.

"Let me undress, Emilio, let me undress."

Quickly he helped her remove her clothing, without letting her escape the touch of his own body, the pressure of his lips against her skin, wherever they chose to fall. Like a cat he licked wherever she exposed herself. She pushed him away, and told him to undress. As he took off his own clothes, she lay back on the bed and reached her arms up towards him. When he finished, she took his hands and tried to pull him down.

"Come, stand up, Maria."

He reached for her, pulled her up to a sitting position, and then lifted her upon his bent knees. She wriggled forward until he was inside her and then they rocked

together in the air, her legs wound about his middle. His arms supported her back as he rhythmically swayed above her. He felt his strength shoot into her with every thrust. He moved about the room like a dancer, pulsating with his partner in perfect unison. Maria was crying out in pleasure. He held back his own spasm until he dropped her gently to the bed, and then it rushed from him and he called her name over and over again.

He lay panting upon her body. She passed her fingers rapidly down his spine kneading his joints. Then she took both her hands and pressed them firmly on either side of his hips. She moved him up and down over her pelvis, pushing herself up against him, drawing renewed desire from him with every move. He moaned into her ear.

"Oh, God, Maria, stay this afternoon, stay here with me. Never go back to work. Never leave this room, this bed. We were made for this." He lifted himself up and slipped easily into her. He wanted to pound his declaration into her.

"You must give up work," he called above her. He held himself away from her chest and looked into her eyes. "We cannot live like this, snatching an hour here and there." Maria closed her eyes. Was she drinking in the sense of his words or only the beat of his body? Finally he cried out and dropped himself upon her.

She did not speak. He drew himself out of her and lay down on his back. He heard the ticking of some clock. He heard their steady breathing. Would she answer him?

Would she give herself?

And then, oddly enough, he heard her crying. He turned on his side toward her and stroked her belly. He bent down and kissed her ombelico, sliding his tongue around and around. And then he lowered his head into the warmth between her legs, smelling their together smell, tasting that smell of their lovemaking. Maria's hands passed over his head. She pushed him deeper into her, but he knew where to go without direction. He knew the line to follow. It raised itself to his tongue, seeking a velvety oneness. Soon she shuddered and gasped, lifting her head into the air, and then collapsing back on the pillow.

Emilio lifted his face from the wetness and climbed up her body. He kissed her shut eyes. He rested his head upon her shoulder. He was careful not to crush her. They stayed, unmoving, for what seemed an eternity. Then he spoke.

"I can support you easily. Anna will have everything she needs. I am thinking of buying this house. Do you think the padrone would sell?" Maria did not answer.

"I want this, Maria. It was meant to be."

"All right, Emilio," she whispered. "All right."

He heard her sighing.

1946

The train was full, the heat unbearable. If the train hadn't stopped so often, Emilio wouldn't have minded that much. But even though the war was over now, for almost a year, nothing was really working quite right, least of all the trains. So few tracks were completely repaired. There was always confusion and stand-stills, and commotions, when he took the train from Livorno to Florence, but today Emilio was travelling from Milano, and the trip was much worse.

Emilio had boarded the train in fine spirits. Four days in Milano on a translating job for his captain. Everything he had been hoping for seemed to be coming true. Good work, recognition, travel. But as the train slowly proceeded, he felt heavier and heavier. Everyone around him looked so forlorn. Conversations in his compartment were about losses. This one's son was killed in combat. That one's son had frozen to death in Russia. Someone else's house had exploded during the night, turning everything to dust. There was a young man sitting in front of him, wounded in one arm, who just stared ahead of him, unseeing, mute. People offered him wine and food but he never accepted or acknowledged the offer. He sat, reliving some unshareable agony. Emilio couldn't stand it. He wasn't used to this anymore, surrounded, as he was, by fun-loving American



soldiers for the last six months.

Emilio and his family had suffered from material deprivations during the war and had lived through terrible fears. There were friends of his family whose grief was immeasurable. But his father had refused to subject himself or his family to tales of woe and horror. His father was a stoic, no doubt about it. Emilio remembered being forced to read Seneca in school. He had hated it, but he had to admit how much his father had in common with those old Romans.

To his father a war was a war. If necessary one suffered and kept quiet. Who knows what he himself had gone through away from home on his missions for the Duce? Who knows how many men he had seen killed or wounded? He had not been a soldier, being too old, but Emilio was sure he had worked directly for Mussolini. He had been involved in secret activities of a very dangerous nature.

Everyone mourned personal losses. His father mourned ~~only~~ the death of Fascism. But he would not give up. Oh no, not leone. As far as he was concerned, there was always hope for its resurgence.

Sometimes to Emilio, Ettore Fiumicelli seemed not only to have the body of a lion, but the face of one too, ready to bare his teeth and growl at the slightest provocation. Publicly he was quieter about his Fascist friendships, since the end of the war and the new government, but he still thundered on at home before friends and family, unconscious of neighbour's ears. The leone was not afraid.

Such an emotional man, thought Emilio. He realized that mostly his father displayed anger and pride, two emotions that Emilio over the years had come to see as one. Emilio knew that he was not only afraid of his father, and ashamed of it, but also afraid that somehow the man could detect his fear, with his lion's sense of smell. And so it was a double fear, a double shame.

He sat on the train feeling alone and cut off from everyone around him. He was not like these people because his father would not permit it, but he knew he was not like his father either. Babbo, babbo, always thinking of babbo. When he was on the base at work, he thought of his father, too. Wherever he was, he thought of him. He wondered if this was what was called an obsession. He wanted so much to tell him about the four days he had just spent in Milano, but anything to do with Americans, he had learned by now, filled his father with revulsion. Emilio thought that at moments his father was truly disappointed in him for serving the Americans, but at other times, he took an interest in his son's work and the possibilities it was opening up for him in the way of a future.

Emilio leaned his body forward, supported his elbows on his knees, and rested his head on his hands. He closed his eyes. It was just so hard to know with his father. It was possible that he could tell him the events of the last few days and get an attentive response. It was also possible that some little incident could cause the man to flare up in anger. And then he would rant and rave about his son aiding

the "enemy". Emilio seriously considered remaining silent. But not to tell would be so hard! To hold back on the best times of his life! The captain had been so pleased with Emilio's sharpness. He was really fast now at simultaneous translation, and so the army was using him on most occasions when an officer had to leave the base for one day excursions elsewhere. One other boy went frequently on these trips, but Emilio had been the first to go to Milano with the captain.

The train pulled into a station. Emilio opened his eyes, stood up, and went to the window. Bologna. Three quarters of the trip done. His body ached from sitting so long. His mind ached from too many thoughts. Emilio leaned out the window and called for a bottle of mineral water. It felt good to have money of his own and spend it as he wished. He dressed well, now, in the American style. Emilio wondered, as he paid for the water, if smart clothes could hide all the unsettled feelings in him. Did he look smart because of his clothes? On the week-ends he spent in Florence, when he walked in the streets or went to a movie with some of his old friends, he thought he looked better than them, more polished maybe, but he hadn't yet been daring enough to invite girls to go out with him. Sometimes he felt that they responded to him when he stared at them, but mostly his friends would chat with them, and he would stand aloof to the side.

He was becoming ~~more~~ and more attracted to Bernardo's sister. This week-end then. He made up his mind. He would ask her to a movie. He could talk to her about Americans,

and his work, and visiting other cities. And maybe he could hold her in his arms, and whisper in her ear how much he cared for her and wanted her. And she would smile at him shyly and he would touch her face and kiss her mouth, and so smoothly convince her to let him into her bedroom after dark, through the window maybe, when everyone was asleep. And he would creep into her bed and take her clothes off. Slowly and carefully he would manoeuvre and finally she would yield to him softly moaning his name, Emilio, Emilio, ti voglio, ti voglio, I want you, I want you, prendimi, take me. And Emilio would be Leone, too, to all the girls of his quartiere. And not only Elena, but Rosa, Gina, and Christina, too, would give in to him.

He watched the people on the platforms saying good-bye. A young man in uniform was leaving his girlfriend. Emilio watched them kiss. The man's hands stroked her back slowly, up and down, up and down, as he murmured to her softly. If Emilio stretched out his arm, he, too, could touch her hair and feel its softness. His body stirred with longing to touch a woman just like that. With confidence and skill, the man persuaded the girl, now almost in tears, to leave the station. He held her at arm's length and gently said, "Vai, Loretta, vai." And quickly she turned around and ran down the stairs away from the track, disappearing into the underground walkway beneath the trains. The man turned his back on their parting scene and climbed onto the train. The train began to rumble.

Emilio headed back to his seat. The train gained momentum and Emilio leaned back against the wooden seat and closed his eyes. Nobody new had entered the compartment. The wounded man continued to stare, and the others continued to eat and tell their woesome tales.

Five minutes from Bologna, the train screeched to a stop. Passengers standing fell on top of each other, and baggage toppled from the overhead shelves. Emilio's eyes blinked open. Another stop. What could it be this time? One man opened the door of his compartment and went out into the corridor to see what was going on. Immediately everyone began to chatter about what could have happened.

All of a sudden there was running up and down the corridor and women shrieking, "Madonna! o Dio! Dio mio! Che disastro! Aie-e-e!"

Emilio, too, got up now and went to the corridor. Men were leaning out of windows, calling, "Guardalo, guardalo! Look! There he is!" Emilio pushed forward towards the window, in order to see, but there was no space for him. He asked a man rushing by what had happened.

"Signore, what has happened? What's everyone yelling about?"

"Somebody threw himself from the train. A soldier! Cut in half!" And he was gone. Somebody beside Emilio followed the man who had spoken, and as the train started to move again, Emilio found himself by the window. The train crawled forward. Emilio leaned out. In the distance he saw

the boots and trousers of the man. And then his window was right over the body. One trouser leg was rolled up. Emilio saw the dark hairs on the man's calf, the brown sock. It was hard to believe that these limbs were not attached to a torso, that they were not alive.

"Dall'altra parte si vede la testa! Sangue! Sanguè!" From the other side of the train you could see the head and all the blood, someone yelled, and ran by him. Emilio closed his eyes at the image. Quickly he forced his way to the end of the corridor, past the groups of passengers standing and talking, to the bathroom. He locked the door behind him and immediately vomited into the toilet. His legs felt weak. He turned on the tap. He plunged his face into the cold stream of water. He held onto the sink desperately, feeling his legs give way. Finally he sat on the edge of the toilet, supporting his head in his hands. After what seemed a long, long time, he stood up and looked at his face in the mirror. It was white. But he would not be sick again. He left the bathroom and returned to his compartment. The conversation around him naturally concerned the accident.

"He took the wrong train," a man was explaining, as he leaned against a window frame, to his audience standing outside Emilio's compartment. "Che disastro! He had only two days leave and didn't want to waste it going all the way to Florence and then back. The train was still moving quite slowly so he told me he would jump and he did." The man slapped the side of his face with the palm of his hand. "The wrong way! He jumped the wrong way. Ha sbagliato

direzione!" His friend shook his head in response.

"Dio mio," he said, "and so the train sucked him under the wheels. Che stupidaggine!" He shook his head again sadly.

Emilio felt sure that the soldier who had jumped was the man from the platform, whom he had seen saying good-bye to his girlfriend. Her name was Loretta. He felt as if he had known them. The poor girl. He remembered her tears. At this vision of her weeping, Emilio thought his own tears would come. Head down, he made his way to his seat. The people in the compartment were talking so fast and furiously that they did not notice his return. He sat down. The wounded man, who had remained oblivious to everything around him, suddenly met Emilio's gaze. Their eyes locked. Emilio shuddered. The man smiled at him tenderly. Emilio stared down at the floor, ashamed. He had been sick at the sight of death. What would his father think?

CHAPTER 5



1975

By closing his eyes, Emilio could watch again as the bird plummeted down to earth. He could hear the crack of the rifle, the cry of pain and surprise, and the soft whistling of the fall...then, stillness.

"Oh, oh Emilio! Emilio-o-o!" called his brother, from the other side of the table. "You look like a contented Buddha. What are you smiling about?"

Emilio did not open his eyes. His mother had cooked it to perfection. The smaller birds, too, but that one, the pheasant, had been just right, from the time of sighting it to the family table.

The talk was getting livelier. His daughter had her audience laughing. His brother's little girls were squealing with joy. Emilio opened his eyes and observed the members of his family. He sat at the head of the table. On his left was his aging father, eating methodically, not partaking in the good humour. Beside the old man sat his mother, boisterous and still young, talking and eating at the same time. Then his sister-in-law attentively listening to Carmela across from her. Emilio's own wife faced him. At this moment she was noisily drinking down a glass of wine, but when her daughter reached the punchline she could not control herself and burst out in a fit of laughter spewing

wine onto the table. Emilio brought his eyes to rest on the face of his daughter. He was proud of her command of the company. Emilio chuckled with the others. She did have wit.

He noticed now that his brother was not participating in the family joke, but watching him instead. When their eyes met, Lorenzo smiled at him affectionately. Emilio leaned forward and placed his elbows on the table, chin on his open palms. He smiled back lazily and slightly turned his head to the younger children on his right. The youngest stood up and stretched herself toward him. She whispered something in his ear but it was incomprehensible. He laughed anyway and she kissed him. They were full of kisses. His brother's daughters. He sighed. It annoyed him sometimes. The spectacle, the display of affection. But today he was quite charmed.

Norma came into the dining-room and removed the naked carcasses of the birds. The meal had been a success. Emilio poured himself more wine and drank a mouthful slowly. Excellent wine, excellent, just right for the delicate-tasting bird. He leaned back in his chair and tried to recapture the sense of release as his finger pulled back, discharging the invisible death pellet. Tension - release. Something, something hard dissolved in him as he fired, as if some unwanted being had come to inhabit him over the years, and could only get unstuck by this careful, timed violence.

"Oh, Emilio," cried his mother, "when was the last time Zio Vincenzo and Elvira were here?"

"Christmas, mother," responded Emilio absentmindedly.

"No, no, Emilio, they've been here since then. You remember. Was it my birthday, or close to it, in the spring ...no?"

Vincenzo, Vincenzo. Emilio thought of him unhappily. A little bureaucrat, unadventurous. What had Vincenzo done with his life? He doled out energy in little measured bits, a word at a time, as if his able intellect were only there to preserve him from dirtying his fingertips. The wine in his mouth tasted sour.

"Oh, Norma, bring the coffee and dessert." He put down his wineglass and felt ready to tell his mother that her precious brother could go to hell, for all he cared, but said instead, "It was the end of March, after your birthday. He managed to miss it. Important affari, you remember. He had had no time. But his darling presence two weeks later was enough to cure all wounds."

"Such sarcasm, Emilio," commented his sister-in-law in English. "One would think you were a model son, full of love and attention." She repeated the remark in Italian so her mother-in-law would not miss the comment.

"True, true," his mother replied. "If it weren't for Carmela," she nodded at his daughter, "I would have little contact with your family."

Emilio grimaced. Just like his sister-in-law to provoke a little family feud. Who wanted to talk about filial affection anyway? Nor did he wish to talk about or even think

about his illustrious uncle Vincenzo, chief administrator of some undoubtedly inefficient civil service office in the busy metropolis of Siena. Such distinction! The civil service! And to think he had once believed in Vincenzo. He was probably impotent, too, for all he knew. There were no children.

His peaceful reverie had been disturbed. He felt a sudden longing for Maria, but it was Sunday, the day to be at home. What if he went anyway? What did Maria and Anna do on Sunday?

He tried to imagine what it would be like spending Sunday with them, eating pheasant, drinking wine. He thought of Maria's warm, pleasant kitchen, of Maria bringing the food from the stove to the table. He watched her move towards him with a steaming dish in front of her, her face frowning in concentration. At last it was on the table and she grinned at him in satisfaction. Her dark smooth hair softly fell over her face as she bent slightly forward. He pushed it from her eyes and saw in their depths a real happiness. He was there, in her life, at her table. He took the large knife from her and rhythmically penetrated the flesh of the bird. He took one succulent morsel with the fork and placed it into her mouth to taste. As she chewed her eyes lit up with pleasure.

Emilio stood up suddenly as Norma placed the coffee on the table and announced to the company that he had urgent business to attend to.

\* \* \* \* \*

"But why do you hunt, Emilio?"

Emilio propped the pillow up behind his head and eased his back against it. He gently caressed Maria's hair.

"Why do I what?" he asked her, hardly interested in her question, as he stretched his legs beneath the sheets and felt the warmth from her body against his side.

"Why do you hunt?"

"Why do I hunt? Why shouldn't I hunt? What a question!" He could hear Anna dancing around the kitchen and banging into the chairs and table. She had the record-player going. He smiled to himself, pleased at his excellent choice of gift for her eleventh birthday.

"But, Emilio, that's not answering my question. 'Why shouldn't I hunt?' That's no answer. Don't you think you should have some explanation for why you kill?" She sounded annoyed. Emilio looked at her for a moment. She was so...so incomprehensible lately. He had to have a reason for everything he did. She was always asking him why, why, why. Why did he do this? Why did he do that?

"Some explanation for why I kill? Maria, you make it sound inhuman."

"It is, Emilio, it is. Especially if you cannot answer why you do it. At least have a reason, no?"

What was she getting at? It was none of her business anyway, why he did what he did. He was a man. He could do as he pleased. "What's wrong with shooting pheasants, or any kind of bird or animal for that matter? I do it because

I like it. Now leave me alone. I can't stand all these questions. I come here for peace, not for questions."

The music stopped in the other room. His voice sounded loud and angry as he finished his last sentence in the sudden stillness. Emilio wondered if Anna had been listening.

"You always run away when it gets too difficult," Maria said softly. He turned to look at her. Why was this happening to them? Her face seemed to ask him. Where did all the anger come from?

"I ask you questions because I want to understand you," Maria ventured into the silence between them.

But he didn't want her to understand him. Can't you just be here, and forget your questions when I need you? he mentally implored her. A physical weariness assailed him. Maria made him tired lately. She confused him. He swung his legs over the edge of the bed and sat up. He felt her fingers on his back. He almost turned around to bury himself in her arms. But he pulled himself up straight. She's weakening me. I've got to get out of here.

"Emilio, please, don't leave now. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to attack you like that." She drew her arm around his shoulders. She hung her head against his chest.

"Emilio, we have to do something...about...us. I... I...turn on you like that sometimes because..." she stopped and looked up at him. There were tears in her eyes. She sighed and drew her hand to his neck. She gently played with the back of his hair. "If you think, Emilio, that when I

ask you things about yourself, it's, it's to deny you of some freedom, or something, you're wrong." She looked straight into his eyes. She shook her head. "I don't want to deny you of anything. I don't even want you to stop the things I disapprove of."

"Like hunting, for instance?" he asked her mockingly.

"Yes, Emilio, like hunting. Please listen." She drew her finger now over the bones of his cheeks, her face intent, thinking. Her finger stopped at his mouth and she traced the line of his lips. Emilio felt his heart beat, as if she had a kind of power over him. Was it the power of her nakedness, her sensuality?

"I just feel that there's this great big gap between us, because you live...I don't know. I just want to know all of you, I guess."

"But you've said to me before that my other life was not important to you, that it didn't touch you."

"No, Emilio." She shook her head. "All of you is important to me. But it's not what you do in your hotel that I want to see."

"Then what do you want? We share this, don't we?" He pointed to the bed, to their nakedness. "What is more important than this? I certainly don't do this with my wife." What did she want? This was special enough for him.

"I know, I know, Emilio. You know sometimes when I ask you things, about your life, about your childhood, your feelings, I even know somewhere inside of me the answers. I

guess I just want to hear you say them. I want to know that you want me to know those things about yourself. But you're right, maybe they are not important."

"Especially if you know the answer already." How strange that she should say that. After all these years of trying to get him to explain himself. She brushed her hand now against his cheek. She smiled at him. She shook her head and chuckled slightly.

"What's so funny, Maria?"

"I don't know. You, I guess. The look of surprise on your face when I told you I might even know the answers to my questions before I ask them."

"What's so funny about that?"

"Oh, Emilio," she looked down now and kissed him softly on the chest. "There just is so much you don't see." She was looking up at him again. Her eyes were bright, full of hope. The softness was back in her face. Why couldn't she always be like this? What made that touch of hardness in her nature come back?

She rubbed her hand slowly and deeply over his chest and abdomen sometimes playing with the hair that curled around her fingers. Emilio leaned forward and kissed her forehead. She brought her other hand to the back of his head and lifted her lips to his. She kissed his lips lightly many times. Then she leaned away from him slightly and spoke again.

"We mustn't destroy 'us', Emilio." She hung her head a moment. "Why do I feel that we might?"



"I don't know, Maria." He kissed her bent head and then with both hands he lifted her face up to him and began to kiss her eyes and nose, her cheeks, her lips. "If we didn't talk so much, we wouldn't have so much to fight about, and then we could spend more time doing ... this."

"But we can't live for this, Emilio." She put her hand over his mouth to stop him from kissing her. Why did her face look pained? Why couldn't she live for this?

1948

The hot sun beamed through the open shutters. There was not much movement or noise in the quadrangle beneath the window of his office. Emilio shifted some papers on his desk, but could not concentrate. It was the evening to come that excited him. He leaned back slowly in his chair. He passed his hand over his forehead. It was impossible to wait. He looked at his watch. Barely eleven o'clock. He wheeled around on his new swivel chair. His office door was open and he read his name on the door. They had come yesterday to place the letters neatly below the heading of official translator.

She, too, had stopped by yesterday. He had tried to appear nonchalant when she had congratulated him. Then he had asked her out for tonight and she had accepted.

Virginia. Oh, Virginia. He thought of the way her hips moved when she strode from office to office, carrying those communiqués. Virginia from Wisconsin or Colorado, or California or New York. Come from wherever you come from and let me bury my head between those free-swinging American thighs. Emilio shuddered. American women! They offered themselves to him and he opened his arms wide.

But Virginia was even better. She was smart. In four months her Italian was smooth and sensual. She rolled her

r's! Americans were impossible with r's. Louise was the worst. She couldn't put two Italian words together. He had stopped seeing her, because that annoyed him so much. If she wanted something from Emilio Fiumicelli, she had better be able to say something in his language!

Anyway, Louise was married. He was tired of officers' wives. They wanted intrigue. They wanted to tell stories about Italian lovers. They wanted to complain about their lives, about their husbands. They wanted to go home. Emilio Fiumicelli would stop being just a pastime for unhappy women. They took advantage of him. It would be single women for him, now. Oh, Virginia, why must I wait?

Someone was standing in the doorway. He focussed on the young soldier. It was Roy. Emilio smiled. He liked Roy. He liked them all. He felt like he could embrace the whole American army. They had given him what he wanted. He could afford to give them back their wives.

"'Celli, stop daydreaming. You're supposed to work in this office, you know. Old Sorehead wants that translation by this afternoon."

"What translation?"

"Joking, just joking. There's somebody out there to see you. A skinny middle-aged guy. Says he's your uncle."

"My uncle? Here in Livorno? What's he doing here?"

"Hey, my Italian's not that good. Go find out for yourself."

Roy waved good-bye and sauntered down the corridor,

whistling. Guess I better find out what Vincenzo wants. Emilio suddenly felt scared. Maybe something was wrong back home. He ran out of the building and saw Zio Vincenzo smiling broadly. Emilio reached him and they embraced affectionately.

"You look great, my boy." Vincenzo wrapped his arm around Emilio's shoulders. "Come let's walk a bit. Can you leave this place for lunch?"

"What are you doing here, zio? Nothing's wrong I hope?"

"No, no, nothing's wrong. Can't I come and see my nephew in Livorno if I want to, see how he's getting along?"

"I'm getting along just fine. In fact, I now have an office of my own and I work strictly for the captain. I get to go places with him and..."

"How would you like to come back to Florence?"

"Oh no. I couldn't do that. Not now. I have a career. Livorno's not so bad, you know. Of course, I don't know that many Livornesi, just a few of the ones on the base. My friends are mostly Americans." He felt proud saying that. He wondered how he would talk to an Italian girl on a date. He had never asked one out. They seemed so unavailable. Even the ones that hung around the soldiers. He just wasn't attracted to them. But Americans, they had something. Besides he worked with them.

"Well, let's have a good meal somewhere and talk about it, va bene, Emilio?"

"Talk about what, zio? What's there to talk about?"

I live here now."

"I know, Emilio. I know. But there's a reason for our talk. Perhaps back home your opportunities could even be better."

Had his father sent Vincenzo? Emilio suddenly felt very unhappy. He thought his father had given up by now the crusade against America. The war was over. It was time to look ahead. He put his hands in his pockets and hung his head. Whenever he thought about his father, he felt like a traitor. Why did Zio Vincenzo have to come today? He didn't want to feel guilty. He wanted to be happy, to be successful.

"Hey, Emilio, don't look so glum.. I'm not going to grab you by the collar and drag you home. I'm going to offer you a very attractive business proposition. Vieni, adesso. Let's leave the base and go into town for lunch. You'll see. You'll see what good news I bring you."

In the restaurant Vincenzo explained his mission as they ate. It had nothing to do with his father after all.

"Your mother is opening an albergo. It will be beautiful. Straordinario. Une cosa incredibile. It's being fixed up right now. There are fifteen rooms, but she's converting some storage space into more. It will probably be ready by September. It's in the Via..."

"But what do you want from me? What does she want from me? It sounds like a good idea. It will really occupy her and babbo..."

"No, no, Emilio. Your father has nothing to do with

this. This is your mother's sole enterprise."

Emilio was surprised. His mother's own business? But why?

"I know. I know. You're shocked. Well, Emilio, you have to understand. My sister stands alone, really. She needs her own security just in case..."

"What do you mean, just in case? My father provides for her. She does her own dressmaking but babbo has always..."

"Wait a minute, Emilio. You must see this as a man. Your mother just doesn't wish to depend upon Ettore anymore, because their lives are so, so separate, really. Who knows where Ettore may end up?"

"Do you mean that my father would abandon her? That's ridiculous. He may be a donnaiolo, but leave mamma? Never." But maybe he could. Maybe he could disappear as he had done so often when he was a child during the war. Where had he gone? Had he really gone to his dams, bridges, and irrigation works? Perhaps the Leone had had other reasons for going out of town. Politics? Women? Emilio had his own women now. Temporary absences could become permanent, he supposed. His mother was wise. But still he could not imagine his father being won over by another woman. He was too smart for that. Ah, it was so much better to have many.

"Think what you like, Emilio, about your father. However, your mother is opening her own pensione and she wants you to come home and run it with her. After all, you speak English so well. It's exactly what she needs. American

tourists. Emilio! Think of it! And you will speak to them, make them happy, make them want to stay, help them, make suggestions, answer questions. You will be the mainstay of the place. Your experience..., don't you see, without you, your mother cannot embrace America as you have done. You will be the link, Emilio, the link."

Vincenzo raised his glass of wine. "To success, to business, to prosperity, to America!" He put down his glass. His face narrowed. He was all seriousness.

"You see, Emilio, your mother is practical. She understands the direction Italy is taking. Your father wants black shirts and comradeship and sleeping in the rain for Mussolini! Sacrifice! The way I see it, that is over now. We did our sleeping in the rain. We marched on Rome. We ambushed trains. We beat up socialists. But we lost our war. I am more pragmatic than Ettore, too. We can become a great nation again, but we will take all the help we can get. And we will not break our heads anymore. You break heads at twenty for your leader and everyone applauds you, but in middle age, it is ruffianism. Mussolini is dead." He stopped now. He eyed his nephew carefully, to judge the impression he had made. Then he broke into a smile. He moved forward across the table. His face was inches from Emilio's own.

"Enough now with politics. We are really speaking of opportunity. Do you want to push a pen all day in a little office for someone else, or do you want to be your

own boss?"

Emilio hardly heard the words. Never had he seen  
Vincenzo look so ugly.

\* \* \* \* \*



Virginia was waiting for him outside the women staff dormitories. He had expected to go to her room and be greeted by her there. But instead, here was the slimness, swimming before him as she advanced in the soft twilight. There seemed to be something so pure about her, something so separate from the sordid confusion of his life. She was smiling at him, unknowing of his past, his family, his other self. Perhaps she, too, had another self that she never revealed. The thought that she might be unhappy touched him. When she reached him, he took her hand and kissed it with all the unreleased emotion of his uncle's visit.

"Why, Emilio," she responded with surprise, but she did not reject his gesture.

"You look troubled, Emilio. Is something wrong? You don't seem yourself."

Emilio could not bring himself to say anything. He liked this girl. He wanted her to like him. But everything else had gone wrong already this day. It had drained him of hope, of excitement. The thought that he had to leave. And soon. As soon as the hotel would be finished. He put his hands in his pockets and shrugged. Virginia's bright healthy face looked up at him, concerned. He felt an ache at the centre of him. He shook his head and smiled weakly.

"I had a visitor from home today. Unexpected." He did not go on. He felt unmanly. He wished he could be more carefree and gay, a man without a father or a mother or an uncle, a man with a girl he liked, going to the movies, ready

for the fun that nighttime brings.

"It's nothing. Let's go to the movies."

"You sure, Emilio?"

"Sure. I'm sure. Let us take a stroll through Livorno, smell the sea air..." She interrupted him.

"Let's go down to the docks and look at the ships."

"Yes, I'd love to do that. Dream of faraway places and adventures at sea. We can go to the movies after. There's plenty of time. Let's go." He began to run pulling her hand with him. Virginia ran beside him laughing. They reached the gate and waved to the guards on duty. They ran for a little while longer along the dusty road. A jeep from the base came by and Roy stopped and asked them if they wanted a lift to town. The two of them jumped in, quite breathless and exhilarated from their exertion. Perhaps the night could still bring happiness despite the bad omens of the day. Emilio took a side glance at Virginia. Her cheeks were flushed. Her eyes sparkled. She turned to him and smiled a smile of secret understanding. He took her hand in his and felt his heart throb.

"Where are you going?" asked Roy.

"To the movies. Where else?" Emilio answered. Roy nodded. "But first we want to visit the docks. Maybe there's a ship in from your country." He squeezed Virginia's hand conspiratorially, "Maybe we can be stowaways."

"Are you kidding, Emilio?" queried Virginia.

"Listen, I for one am here because I want to be. What about

you, Roy?"

"Maybe you requested to come here," answered Roy, "but I was sent here during the war." He looked over at Emilio and touched his shoulder for a moment before bringing it back to the steering wheel.

"Don't get me wrong. I like it here, kind of. Course I'd rather be home."

"Where's home, Roy?" asked Virginia.

"Philadelphia."

The jeep went around a sharp corner and Virginia fell into Emilio's arms. She rested there. She spoke, looking at Emilio, not Roy.

"I don't know about going home. I really want to be here. I'm learning all kinds of things."

"I know. I know," said Roy. "There's always that, being in a new country, finding out about another way of life." Emilio was surprised at the cynicism in his voice. He thought of Roy being so carefree.

"C'mon Roy, be honest," said Virginia. She twisted her body around Emilio to see Roy better. Emilio felt her breast graze his hand. He swallowed deeply and tried to follow the conversation, but mostly all he could think about was how much he wanted this woman.

Roy took his hands off the wheel a moment and raised them in the air.

"All right, all right. I confess. There really is a lot that I have learned from being in Italy." Virginia

settled herself back into her place and neither she nor Roy spoke for a while. And then suddenly, in a very serious voice, her eyes gazing out onto some personal landscape not visible to her fellow companions, she spoke again.

"Although, I guess," she began tentatively, "I guess you might say we are postponing our real life over there, putting it on a shelf like a book we haven't finished until some more opportune time." She bit her lip after saying this and continued looking intently somewhere beyond the sea.

"Yeah," said Roy. "There are so many things I could be doing right now, if I were at home, even if I was still in the army. But I guess as long as I'm in the army I might as well be here as anywhere else." He shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, if you feel so strongly about being at home, you could leave the army, or ask for a transfer, or something, couldn't you, Roy?" asked Virginia. Emilio felt Roy's body sag dejectedly beside him. Where was all his gaiety?

"I don't know. I can't make up my mind." They were in Livorno by now, driving quickly through the streets. Roy stopped the car in the central square. Emilio was thinking how unattractive it looked compared to Florence, when Roy suddenly called out.

"Hey, look at that puppet show over there!" He pointed to the far corner of the piazza. A stage had been set up and puppets were being manipulated across it. The audience, either standing or sitting on wooden benches, were laughing and eating lupini beans.

"Well, I guess that's Italy for you," said Roy. Emilio tugged at Virginia's sleeve.

"I want to watch. We still have time before the main feature begins at the Modernissimo." Virginia nodded excitedly. Emilio helped her down from the jeep. They waved good-bye to Roy and made their way to the puppet show. Emilio whispered to Virginia.

"I think I know this play."

"What's it about?" she whispered back, getting closer to him.

"It's about a hotel. You see there's only one room left. That puppet on the right is about to give it away to the person on the left. But later, someone gives the room to someone else, and later another worker gives it away to someone else." Emilio swallowed hard, suddenly feeling tense. His mother, his uncle.

"And then what?" asked Virginia.

"Well, they all end up in the same room and .... You'll see. You'll understand. I'm sure."

"They're speaking a bit fast for me."

Emilio felt the urge to talk about himself, about being forced to leave Livorno to work in his mother's hotel. Well, not really forced but, well, it amounted to the same thing. Could he say no? He pulled Virginia closer to him. Oh Dio. He shivered. This woman. How sad it all was. The Livornesi were all laughing. Virginia laughed, too. He could hardly stand it.

A slight breeze from the sea stirred Virginia's rich blond hair. She was another world for him. He remembered what she had said in the jeep. Was that all Livorno had been for him, too, a postponement of his real life in Florence, where his family and old friends were? How he wished he didn't have to go, not yet anyway.

"What's happening now, Emilio?" Virginia asked him. He felt her lips brush against his ear. The excitement of expectation returned to him. He could forget Vincenzo, Vincenzo il brutto, for a few hours anyway. As he whispered back, he stroked her shoulder and then he kissed her ear, just barely grazing his lips against her skin. She didn't move. Perhaps she hadn't even noticed.

When the show was over, Emilio left Virginia's side with difficulty to go and pay the puppeteer a few lire. He strode quickly back to her.

"Shall we go now to the movies, see the ships later?" Emilio asked her, really just wanting to take her home to his arms.

"Okay. We can see the ships in the dark. That will be fun, too," she replied. They began to walk silently through the streets. Finally Emilio ventured to speak.

"Do you remember what you said before about postponing your life in America? Is it really true, Virginia?" She didn't answer right away. Maybe he had made a mistake. Maybe she didn't really feel like talking about it. Maybe he shouldn't be so serious with her. After all, he was going away soon.

"I guess so," she finally replied. "Maybe we Americans who come to work here in Italy really want to put our life aside for a while, forget things." She sighed.

"Was your life so bad over there?"

"Well, no, not really." She breathed deeply. "It's hard to explain. But it's a little bit like going to the movies. You get outside of yourself for a while. I don't know. Being here is like being at the movies for a few years, instead of a few hours, that's all."

Emilio listened to her voice. The sound warmed him. The words of her language coated him in their foreignness and cut him off from himself. Take me away from here, Virginia. Float me away on the rich sweet syllables of your American tongue.

"Do you understand, Emilio?" She looked at him expectantly.

"I think so." He didn't want to tell her how well he understood. Not yet anyway. But then she asked him a strange question. Well not so strange. She had figured him out.

"Do you ever go out with Italian girls, Emilio?"

"No," he answered, laughing in a slightly embarrassed way. "You're very clever," he smiled at her. "You know that going with Italian girls wouldn't be like going to the movies."

She stopped and faced him. "It's the same for you then. I thought so. You work on the base to get away

from..." She waved her arm at the city around them.

"The war, the bad memories, the feeling of helplessness." His voice almost cracked as he said this. What was he talking about?

What had he done during the war? He had waited and watched and dreamed and hoped. And then everything had just gotten worse and worse. He had stolen food. He had waited for his father to come home. He had wondered about his father's life. He had been scared of bombs. He had seen his mother in a nightmare....

Virginia continued to walk toward the cinema up ahead. She lightly touched his hand.

"I didn't come here right after the war. I waited two years before requesting this job. I didn't want to see the terrible things. But I see them anyway. Even in you, Emilio."

She put her arm through his. They did not talk for the remaining distance. Emilio felt he could drift with her forever through the streets of this town, seeing only the outline of her movement, her body something he barely touched with his fingers, something he sensed through his clothes as she strode beside him, her hips through the film of her dress caressing the material of his trousers, telling him she was there in their movie, their own movie.

In their seats, in the darkness, the screen wide and bright before them, he kissed her passionately. Her mouth was large, a big sweet secret beckoning him to come farther



and farther into knowledge and certainty. She held him tightly, as his tongue poured itself deeper into the darkness of forgetting. The heat crackled around them.

Outside the cinema, they hurried through the summer night toward the docks. His clothes felt damp. They would stop sometimes and he would hold her close, feeling their wetness mingle. Am I in love? Emilio constantly asked himself. He breathed the sea air. Why did he have to leave this enchanted place, this woman whose body promised itself to him unasked?

When they got to the harbour, Emilio pointed to a long cement molo stretching far out into the sea. The ships moored against it twinkled in the darkness.

"Let's walk up this pier, Virginia." She shivered a little, the night air and sea breeze cooling them quickly after the heat inside the movie theatre. Ah, Virginia, Emilio called to her silently, pulling her close, soon, soon, we will create our own heat. Fra pochino. She rested her head snugly against his chest.

"It's so beautiful here, Emilio. I could almost cry," she whispered to him. He bent down to kiss her, but she shook her head. She wanted to go out along the pier. He followed her, as she took his hand, watching her dress move like the waves of the sea against the ships.

"Listen, Emilio. Listen to the sound of the water lapping against the sides. I love that sound." She stopped, faced him, took both his hands in hers, and leaned back slightly.

"I love Italy, right now, Emilio. I wouldn't go home, not now, not for anything." Emilio drew his body close to hers. He hid his face in her neck. It was he who had to leave.

"Let's go Virginia, away from here, right now. Come back with me to my place. Let's let the night last forever. I want you so much. We'll take the sea, the sunlight, and the sounds of water with us. Come."

They moved quickly through the streets to the bus stop. It would have been faster to take a hotel room in Livorno, but he didn't want to, not with Virginia. Emilio was tired of hotels, the desk clerk's knowing glance, the air of congratulation in his manner. And then he remembered that his mother wanted him to do just this, to stand behind the hotel desk, to smile, and know all. He shuddered suddenly, feeling cold. He huddled closer to Virginia. I want you, I want you. Finally the bus to the base came.

Inside his little room, it was as if the clothes fell from her without his interference. She was a woman who ought to have been naked all the time. Her confidence in her body made him appreciate her all the more. As they lay together on the bed, his hands glided over her with a will of their own. He watched them encircle the contours of her shape until he could bear the separateness no longer. He pressed his body heavily upon hers and kissed her flesh where his hands had been.

He could feel her skin awaken beneath his lips. Her

hands gripped his head. She pulled it to her and his mouth met hers. They kissed and rocked. They rocked and kissed. Then he washed over her like some great wave, his hands squeezing her sides as if to wring the sweetness out of her into the night air. He released her mouth and slid down her glistening surface. He wanted to drown between her thighs, cover his ears to any sound outside them, taste the moistness of her pleasure, of her love, know unmistakably, irretrievably, what he must leave.

The sound she emitted came from far away. He made her cry again and again. Then he tore his face from her. He looked at her. Slowly she opened her eyes. She stretched her arms towards him. He took them and pulled her up to him. She slid her legs over his knees and clasped him, gasping. And when he entered her, and began to thrust, it was like pouring himself into her, his disappointments, his frustrations, his longings. He knew he was speaking as they moved in unison, calling, calling out the people in his life, calling out to them to let him go.

They lay in stillness finally, listening to the night outside the window. Emilio heard the moaning of ship sirens. They moaned for him. He turned to Virginia. He felt like smiling at her. He felt like touching her face. He felt like placing his lips softly upon her cheek.

"What does 'leone' mean, Emilio? I know it means lion...but does it mean something else, too?"

"Why do you ask?"

"You said it - many times."

CHAPTER 6

1976

Emilio opened the kitchen door. He looked around the room but Maria was not in sight.

"Maria!" he called towards their bedroom. "Maria, I came a little early today. Giacinta decided not to play tombola." He laughed. "She's had a fight with one of her partners." Emilio took his suit jacket off and carefully hung it over one of the kitchen chairs. He walked toward the bedroom. "Decided she'd work instead. Anyway the hotel will be full by the time I get back. That's for sure." He laughed again. "Maria," he called. "Can you hear me?" He was just about to turn the handle on the bedroom door, when Maria came into the kitchen from behind him.

"Emilio! You're here early." She put some shopping bags onto the table.

"Yes, and I was just explaining why to you, yelling at the top of my lungs. I thought you were in the bedroom."

"Oh, Emilio, you look hurt. I'm sorry. And anyway I never know for sure anymore whether you're coming. You don't seem anxious to see me much." She walked over to him and put her hand out and touched his face. "Poor Emilio. I'm a bit of a rompicatole lately." She sighed concernedly and put both hands on his face. "I feel so awful sometimes about the way we fight. I wish we could, I don't know,

resolve those arguments with conversation afterwards, but you just...I don't know, you'd just prefer to think of me as a disturber of the peace."

Emilio took her hands in his. He could see dark rings around her eyes. Maria, Maria. Perhaps she hadn't been sleeping too much lately, worried by his absences. But when she turned her sad beautiful dark eyes upon him like this, he couldn't remember why he didn't come to visit her so often anymore. He lifted his hand away from hers and circled her eyes lightly with his finger. He loved her eyelashes, long and black. Maria, oh Maria, why such discontent? What did she want? He did not understand. All he ever wanted was a pure silent moment like this in which to contemplate her eyes. Maria moved forward and kissed him.

"I've missed you. When you're gone I think of all the things you didn't let me say to you the last time." She smiled. "We talk so much when you're gone. And we never fight." She hung her head now and Emilio kissed her hair. His lips lingered on the top of her head for what seemed a long time.

Maria moved away from him finally and turned toward the table.

"Why don't I make a wonderful dinner for the three of us tonight? That's if Anna ever comes home. She spends forever at Adriana's house or Silvia's house these days. Or on the telephone, when she's at home." Maria looked sadly back at Emilio.

"She's growing up, Emilio. She'll be thirteen next year, almost a teenager. She has her own life." Maria stopped now. She stared at him strangely.

"Do you miss her, too?"

"Well, it certainly makes me think."

"About what?" He wondered sometimes if Maria had other men on her mind. Did she think about Antonio, Anna's father? Could she want to see him again? See if he still was attracted to her?

Maria walked to the table and began to empty the shopping bags. He watched her body moving as she placed her hands inside the bags and removed their contents. All her body flowed in time to the work of her hands and arms. She seemed thinner lately than usual but her shapeliness, her graceful gestures that always seemed rounded, never sharp, would be with her forever. How could Antonio or any man not be attracted to her?

"About me." She suddenly looked up at him.

"Do you feel older? Is Anna replacing you as the young woman in the family?" Emilio cocked his head to one side and glanced at Maria provocatively. He could make her feel like a young woman day and night if she wanted. All she would have to do was throw away all those words, conversations, questions, that she usually threw between them.

Maria shook her head.

"No, it's not that."

Emilio walked round the table now. This was the right moment.

He reached out to Maria. Let's just go to bed now. Everything could be perfect again. If she wanted to feel young and beautiful, he would take full responsibility for the task. He came close to her and held her. She put her arms around him and leaned her head on his shoulder. Emilio pressed his pelvis against her. He placed a hand on her behind and felt the downward curve. He pushed her more firmly against him. He was so hard now he could feel his trousers tighten with the pressure.

"Emilio?" Maria softly spoke his name with a question.

"What, Maria?" he responded, bringing his other hand towards the roundness of her breast. He tried to make the nipple grow under the touch of his fingers.

"Emilio?" she repeated again.

"What, Maria, what?" he answered impatiently. He kissed her neck, and began to massage both her breasts.

"Do you want to know what about?"

"I don't understand," he murmured into her neck.

"About what I think, now that Anna is growing up."

"I'll take care of it, Maria." He kissed her chin and ran his tongue along her lips. This was the Maria he wanted.

"Take care of what?" she continued. She pulled his face up. She had tears in her eyes.

"Why are you crying, Maria? I want you. You're always attractive to me, except when...you know. Anna isn't going to... She'll be beautiful and all, but, age isn't



important. We'll make love forever, Maria, until the day we die. Let's go to the bedroom now. You're driving me insane." He smiled at her and began pulling her to the bedroom.

"Wait, Emilio. Please, amore. You don't understand. I want to tell you something." She held him back.

"After, carina, after. What if Anna comes home? It's better when she's not here. We can be freer. I love it when you cry out and when Anna's here...you don't let yourself..."

"Oh, Emilio." Maria began to cry. She put her hands to her face.

"Maria!" Emilio was shocked. "What is it?" What was wrong now? Emilio felt so frustrated he could scream. For the first time in so long, she was leaving him alone, not asking him about his mother or his father, their relationship, how he felt about their not living together for so many years, how he felt about his father's past, about his mother's adulterous escapades, about his brother and his family.... And now she was crying! What had happened to them, what they did together so well?

"Oh, Emilio, all these years...we've always...done...we've always gone to bed...first...and then we never...we never.... I don't know...talked about the important things...things I've...been...thinking..."

"What things, Maria? What important things?" He shouted at her furiously. "Why are the things you think about more important than what we do together. That can't be. What we do together is what all couples do together. They

don't talk! Ask me. I know. I run a hotel. Day after day, couples come in asking for a room, Maria. And it's not to talk!" He could feel the anger rising at her. He wanted to shake her, shake sense into her.

"No, Emilio, please. I understand what you mean. We have to be together like that. I know. I know. And I want it, too, as much as you." She reached out for him and caressed his arm. She spoke very quietly. "I love when you make love to me. And I miss it when you're not here. But I miss something else, too." She came closer to him. She held him. He felt his body yield to her. She lay her head against his chest. She continued pleading with him, her voice faltering with emotion.

"I would love you to share your feelings with me. To me, that's part of making love. And I want to tell you the things that are going on in me, too. Like today...I...I... something happened...that...feels right...to me. Before coming home..." She pulled her chin up against his chest and stared at him to see if he was listening. Emilio lowered his face to her. He sighed wearily. Her face was streaked with tears and straining, searching, drawing something from him. What did she want?

"Maria, what do you want? Why...? Why do you want?"

"I'm telling you, Emilio. Listen. It's quite simple...really." She stopped a moment. She half-smiled. "I'm glad you asked." She looked down a moment. Then she withdrew from him. She sat down. She pulled another chair

out from the table. She beckoned for him to sit beside her. Slowly he came forward. He sat down. He leaned his elbows on the table, and placed his head in his hands. He was very tired suddenly. Maria began talking. Her voice was warm and soothing. He hardly listened to the words. Her hand gripped his forearm. He liked the pressure.

"There was a time when I loved just being in my house, caring for my baby, thinking about you, and how good and warm and safe it was here with you, even when you were gone, because really you were never gone, Emilio. You filled this house, and I knew you loved it here, too. You never, really had a home like this. I knew that. It made me happy." He felt her hand playing lightly with his hair, moving down, caressing his back. Oh, Maria. He ached for her, for that warm, pleasant, safe home, that he had dreamt about, and once had with her.

"But something has changed. I guess I have. Anna has. Even you." Emilio shook his head. She took his head between her hands and made him nod up and down. She laughed a clear sweet laugh.

"Yes, Emilio, we all change. Once I thought it was all right not to work and so I gave that up and stayed home and occupied myself with Anna and with you. Something feels wrong, now. Time is quietly ticking away." She turned from him and held her hands out straight onto the table. She clasped them together. Emilio lifted his head and watched her. Did she want to work again? For Guerrini, that imbecile? And Antonio? What about him? He could still be

around.

"Do you remember that sculptress who worked at Guerrini's when I was there? That canadese?" Maria glanced over at him momentarily and he nodded. What about her?

"I saw her today. It was a wonderful reunion. I wondered why I hadn't kept up...our...friendship. She used to teach me so many things. We used to talk about everything, you know, the things we read, the things we did, what art meant to her. It felt so good being with her again. It made me want to...use...I don't know. When I worked at Guerrini's, even if I didn't really do anything original, I used my hands...skillfully. Sometimes it felt so good just holding the plaster." Maria turned to him abruptly, anxiously. Her cheeks were flushed.

"There was a reason why I chose to work in a bronze foundry, Emilio. I could have done other things. I could have worked for a few years, saved money, and gone to university, but I..."

"Got pregnant," Emilio interrupted.

"That's not the point, Emilio. Yes, I got pregnant. But what I mean is I chose to stay there, because I wanted to do that kind of work. I could have spent my life doing that kind of work with my hands. I wanted to learn everything about sculpture, even do it myself, Emilio. Even...do...it...myself," she repeated wistfully, her voice trailing away. Emilio did not move. She can't have regretted our years together. She was too happy.

"I know what you're thinking, Emilio. I didn't make a mistake. I don't think I did. No, it was right." She turned to him, and said emphatically, "I really wanted you, Emilio. I still do. I always do. I want you more than you understand. You wouldn't be so secretive if you understood. You would tell me your thoughts..." She sighed and looked down at her hands. She moved them nervously.

"Why do I think you're not going to like what I have to say next? Why do I think you will oppose me?" She looked back up at him. Emilio waited. What's coming?

"Emilio, she...la canadese...I mean...she asked me if I would work with her, help her. She has a really large project in mind. She can't do it herself. Oh Emilio, I could learn so much. And you know what she said, Emilio? She said that she had always thought that I was very talented and that I had a good sense of design. Maybe I could do something with it. I mean, maybe she could teach me some basic things while we work and I could...I could...start...you never know...I could even..."

"Wait a second, Maria. Are you talking about going back to Guerrini's? You think that I want you to see Antonio and all those other men again? Never."

"No, no, Emilio. She doesn't work there anymore. She works on her own. She has her own set-up, tutto suo. That's why she needs an apprentice." Maria gripped his arm excitedly. She looked beyond Emilio as she spoke.

"I think it's such a wonderful idea, Emilio. It

feels like I've always wanted to do this."

"What do you mean 'like I've always wanted to do this'? I thought you said that you wanted to be with me and that I was right to get you away from Guerrini. And I was right!"

"I know, I know, Emilio. I meant for now. For this time in my life. Please, Emilio, please understand. It has nothing to do with you, with us...except that...I sometimes... feel trapped here...in a way that I didn't before. I don't know Emilio, sometimes I think that's why we...fight, or...wh...  
...I seem to always want more from you. It's only because... I...really want...more...from...me."

Emilio rose suddenly from his chair. He couldn't stand this. Why did she want more now? Why was "now" different? She could say it all day long that it wasn't him. What did she think, that he was a cretino? That he couldn't see, or feel that she might be dissatisfied with him?

"Oh, Emilio, I can see that you're hurt. Emilio!" She rushed up to him. "I don't want to hurt you."

Emilio pulled away from her extended arm. He turned around, his back to her, ready to scream.

"Emilio, my feelings for you have not changed, because I have. I'm still Maria. And I...do...love you, no matter what you think."

Emilio whirled round and faced her, fuming. He screamed.

"Basta con l'amore. Non voglio sentire..." He

stopped, unable to continue. He breathed heavily, his chest rising. Finally he spoke, controlling his rage, letting the words come out of taut, barely opened lips. "I don't want to hear about 'love'. It's just a word, and today more than any other day, I hate words. There are enough words between us to fill several lifetimes. You can tell me all you like about wanting to do things with your hands. A woman wants to do things with her lover. When you wanted to do things with me, you were satisfied with your life, with what I gave you. Now you are not satisfied. But it is because something is wrong with you." He pointed his finger at her. He hated her now. He had wanted to make her feel like a woman, a beautiful woman, because she was, because that was what he felt about her. That is what she had to be. She was made to be a woman, his woman. And he was made to be a man. He could not have felt less like a man.

"How do you think you make me feel? If you don't want to be my woman, but someone else's apprentice, how do you think you make me feel?"

"Why, oh why, do you see it like that, Emilio? They're separate. Don't you see? I can want both things. You want more than just to be my lover. You are more. Why can't it be the same for me?" She stood in the middle of the room now. She stopped speaking. She covered her face with her hands.

He watched her. She was alone and separate from him. He couldn't move towards her. He couldn't move away from her.

He could only watch her. Finally she rushed from the kitchen toward her bedroom. She opened the door and went inside. She closed it behind her. He could hear her crying. Finally he walked to the table. He sat down in the chair he usually sat in when they ate meals together. He placed his elbows on the table and then very slowly, wearily, leaned his head upon clenched fists. He was very very tired. He did not understand. Did she mean that she wanted him? Did she mean that she didn't anymore? Did she mean what she said? Did he want this? What was he to do? He looked toward the closed bedroom door. Should he go in? Could they kiss and make love now? Forget? Should he take his jacket from behind him and leave? Emilio leaned back in the chair, raised his head to the ceiling and closed his eyes. What would Leone have done?

The door swung open and in rushed Anna.

"Ciao, Emilio. Ciao, mamm..." She looked around the kitchen. "Ma... dov'è mamma?" She stared at him. "Where is she? Are you here alone?"

Just then Maria appeared from out of the bedroom. She went immediately toward the sink and began filling the spaghetti cauldron with water. She kept her face turned away from her daughter.

"Where have you been, figlia mia?"

"Da Adriana. What did you think? That I was with Marco perhaps or Rinaldo?" Maria did not answer but put the cauldron on the stove and turned up the heat.

"Anna, could you bring me the pasta from the



cupboard?"

"Dai, mamma. You don't need it yet. The water won't be boiling for another ten minutes. You just want to order me about because you're angry I didn't telephone you from Adriana." She went over to her mother whose back was still to her. "Mi dispiace, mamma. I'm sorry. I won't forget again. I promise. Va bene?" She put her arms around Maria from behind her.

"Va bene. Va bene," Maria impatiently answered.

Anna sprang away from her mother and sat down at the table facing Emilio.

"Ho fame. I was hungry all day today." She looked at Emilio. "You're not saying much. Not even hello." She pouted.

Emilio smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"How are things, Anna mia? I haven't seen you for a while, but then again your mother tells me she doesn't see you much either." Emilio smiled again at her.

"Has she been complaining about me?" Anna twisted herself around to see her mother's reaction to this. Maria still faced the stove. "Well, you won't believe this, but Adriana and I were actually talking about school. Per davvero, mamma. Really, Emilio." She sighed with resignation. "We have this huge project to do in history. Ten pages. What does the professore think? That we are in university? It's only seconda media. And he wants ten pages?"

"What's it about?" Emilio asked, getting interested.

For the first time Maria turned from the stove to hear her daughter's answer.

"About almost anything. That's what's so hard. It has to be something to do with Italian history and it has to be about some event or person in the twentieth century. That could be anything!" She spread her arms out wide and shook her head. "It's nearly impossible!" She paused for a minute and turned up her little face at Emilio. Then she jumped up and danced about the table, talking as she went.

"But I have an idea." She practically sang it. "After talking it over with Adriana for nearly two hours, I think I know what I want to write about."

"What is it?" Emilio and Maria asked together.

Anna stopped her skipping and came up to her mother. Emilio could see for an instant that she took note of the redness in Maria's eyes. But it didn't stop her. She spoke to the room.

"I think I'm going to write about Mussolini," she uttered triumphantly. Emilio applauded instantly.

"Wonderful! But my dear child, ten pages are not enough. He deserves weeks of study and research. There is so much to learn and say about him. You could go on forever."

"So you really think it's a good idea, Emilio, mamma?" she asked them both. Emilio answered first.

"Why, of course. They do not teach enough about him in the schools today. They do not talk enough about the achievements, only the mistakes. He made such a difference

to this nation, Anna. Why he made it a nation. It was as if he put Rome on the map again, as it once had been. The world turned its eyes once again to Italy. Before him our country was a paltry, inconsequential..."

"Emilio, how can you say such things? The world knows what Mussolini really did to our country. You don't have to tell my daughter those kind of lies. How can you possibly believe...?" She threw her hands up in the air in amazement.

Emilio pushed his chair back and leaned forward.

"Maria, listen to me. He was a great man, an exceptional man, despite what history books may say about his defeats and failures. If we had a man like him now, and a country that really understood his ideas, we wouldn't be in such an economic and political mess..."

"Stop, Emilio, stop! I don't want my daughter to hear this." Maria paused for a moment. She looked as if she were about to end the discussion. She made for the cupboard, but before she reached in to get the package of noodles, she came back to the table. She sat down before Emilio. Anna eagerly sat down too, to his right. Maria continued in a calmer manner.

"Mussolini was a Fascist," she began, pronouncing each word with care, trying to control her feelings. "A Fascist. What are Fascists?" She looked at her daughter and shook her head. "They are not great men. They are cruel men, corrupt men, power hungry men." She covered her face with her hands and leaned her elbows on the table.

Perhaps, thought Emilio, the emotion of their previous argument, was weighing upon her. She had not had much time to recover.

"How can you still believe in Mussolini? It's not possible," Maria muttered into her hands, echoing her earlier disbelief.

"It is possible," Emilio rushed to his self-defense. "You don't know what Mussolini did for this country, what he could have done for this country, what he could have done for the world," Emilio made a sweeping gesture with his arm and stood up from the table. He had to make Maria understand. He had to. This subject meant so much to him. It had to do with his life, after all, his father's life. Emilio paced toward the stove, collecting his thoughts. He turned around, finally, and spoke.

"Fascism is an ideology, a very sound political ideology. It has nothing to do with the characters of men. You are thinking about Germany, about the war, about the deprivations suffered during the war. You are confusing politics with, with, something else. It is not the same."

"It is the same," Maria retorted. "All Fascists are the same, whether they live in Germany or Sweden or India or Italy. Politics and history and characters of men are all part of the same thing. You cannot separate them. In Italy, Fascists killed workers, stood them up against brick walls and shot them down. And why? Because the workers opposed the Fascists. All people who opposed them were shot. And"

you know it, Emilio." She pointed her finger at him.

Emilio felt the blood drain from his face. He stood in the middle of the kitchen, feeling unsupported and alone. He pleaded with her. Why did he feel so much as if his life depended upon her understanding?

"No, Maria, no. Fascism was a time of revolution, a throwing out of an old system. It was a dream come true. In times of change, there must be ways of protecting the dream. Those ways may be drastic, but they are essential. Blood has always been spilled for one's ideals. And Mussolini's were great ones, the most important ideas a man can have...the rebirth of a nation, of national pride.... Mussolini made us proud to be Italians." He paused a moment and then came closer to Maria. He searched her face for a glimmer of weakening.

"You were too young, then, Maria, just a baby. You are missing the experience."

Maria shook her head vigorously.

"Do you think a four-year-old has no impressions? Do you think a five-year-old cannot see and feel what the grown-ups around are suffering? Oh, Emilio, you are wrong. I am not missing the experience. It was only too vivid, too horrifying. I lived during the war, Emilio, remember. And the 'leggi razzisti'. You think I did not know what was happening?" She turned to her daughter. "One of the great things Mussolini did, my dear, was create a law, no, accept a law, created by the tedeschi, a law designed to take away the human rights of one people." Anna nodded.

"I know, mamma," she said.

Maria slowly turned her head back to Emilio. She spoke softly, recalling that time.

"I was living with my parents in the country on a farm, near Bagno a Ripoli. It was much farther away from the city then. I was four. The Jews were being taken away in the night, taken away to their destiny. I heard my parents, their friends talking about it. And then one day, this stranger, began to live with us. He hid in the barn day and night. My parents told me he had lost his family, his brothers, his father, his mother. He was running south. The allies were landing in Sicily. They would climb up the length of the country and free us.

"I went into the barn one day. It was early in the morning. I wanted to bring him something to eat. I came into the barn. At first I couldn't see him. But I heard him chanting. Then I noticed him swaying rhythmically in front of the wooden wall of the barn, almost touching it with his forehead each time he moved forward. His clothes were all ragged. He had a torn piece of cloth on his head. I thought he was in a trance. There was a kind of light on his face. Gone was that sadness that seemed to consume him most of the time. Finally he stopped. He turned around. He saw me. I held out the food to him. He came to me and held my hands in his long thin ones.

"What were you doing? I asked him quite courageously, I thought. We sat down on the straw. The two chickens we

had were clucking around us. He looked into my eyes and explained.

" 'I was reciting a prayer, the prayer for the dead,' he said to me. He took my hands in his again. He hung his head momentarily. 'The prayer for the dead is the prayer for the living. I am left here alone. When I say the words of my prayer about the greatness of God, I am with Him, and then,' he sighed, 'I am with them, too.'

"I began to cry. There was something so beautiful and simple about what he said. I couldn't believe that anyone would chase and try to kill such a harmless loving person. When he asked me why I was crying all I could say was, 'if they catch you and kill you, who will say your prayer?'

"Then he said something very strange to me. He said, 'You will,' in the quietest voice imaginable. 'But I do not know how to,' I protested. 'Yes, you do,' he said.

"And then I ran out of the barn. I could not bear to sit with him there, knowing that some day he would be caught. He left soon after." Maria shrugged. "I suppose he did not live."

"Mamma," asked Anna, "do you say his prayer? Do you really know it?"

"I think of him. I remember him. And then, I suppose I am with him. But he felt a kind of joy through his prayer. That I do not have." Maria's voice rose now.

"Because there was no reason for him or his family to die. Someone, someone powerful thought he was unworthy. I think

his executioner was." She looked at Emilio. Emilio nodded.

"Yes, Mussolini made mistakes, Maria. He would be the first to admit it. But it was something he did not want to do, something he was forced to do. But that alone, that mistake can never take away what he gave to us. You do not know what he made men feel."

Emilio took a deep breath. He looked down at Anna and Maria. They were staring up at him. Upon Anna's face there was a look of incomprehension. Maria's face held no anger now. Her expression had softened and her eyes looked filmy with that kind of tenderness that made Emilio glow inside.

"And his voice, Maria. Such a voice. I will play you a record some day of his most famous speeches. What emotion we felt when we heard it. I was just a boy, an ordinary boy who wanted to play and never go to school. But when he spoke, he transformed me. I, too, had ideals then. I, too, cared for more than my own trivial pleasures. And all of the boys of that time felt united and strong with this exceptional thing that he gave to us, this gift of his personality. I would never have been the same without the experience of brotherhood. Young people today don't have that. They are missing something." Emilio seemed to be groping for something just beyond his reach.

"I miss it now..."

Emilio began to walk slowly about the kitchen, touching things as he went, the counters, the pots on the stove, the handles of cupboards, the window, the door, the



table, the wineglasses, the plates, and everything seemed precious to his touch.

"That voice could fill the room, and shape our lives. We wanted to be a part of that voice. We wanted that voice to love us. It had to believe in us. It had to know that we were worthy of it. He had to trust us. He had to feel that we could become someone. And I wanted him to know that I could become someone..."

Maria stood up now and went to the point in the room, by the window, where Emilio had by this time stopped. He was not looking at her. She did not know where he was looking. Gently she tugged at his arm.

"Emilio, who are you talking about?"

1983

Emilio stared down at the river. The sun was setting. The lights from the Piazzale Michelangelo looked strange in the half-dark. He loved the tree-lined Viale Michelangelo as it gradually climbed past the villas and tennis clubs towards the summit. The tiny streets that criss-crossed it led to hidden away farms. He realized that he and Anna had not walked there at all. She had not even seen the church of San Miniato in the days that she had been here. He remembered walks and visits with her as a child to that wonderful world up there away from the centre and prying eyes. What was the game they had played together as they climbed all those stairs to the church? He turned away from the window and looked round at her.

"Anna, what was that game of stairs we used to play when climbing to San Miniato?"

Anna peered up at him from the opened suitcase she was packing on the bed.

"Game? What game?" She looked almost as young as she did then, so many years ago.

"You know the game of the stairs going up to the church," he answered her, feeling as if he wished her to be that little girl once again. If they could play the game just one more time. If she remembered how they played, then

maybe it would save them.

"Oh, that one. It was a counting game. I would run up some steps and then you would run up twice as many. And then, and then...I don't remember. It was so silly, Emilio. Someone used to win at the top, I remember that and we would play it coming down, too."

She stopped and looked at him. There were tears in her eyes, but she was smiling.

"Anna, why do you have to leave just yet? Cancel your flight. I can buy you a ticket anytime. We could go back there and remember. Anna stay, please stay." He walked toward her and stood behind her, placing his hands on her shoulders. He was so frightened that she would leave now and never come back. If he could just prolong this visit a little longer, perhaps he could be sure, sure that she would return, to live here, study here, marry here. He didn't want to let her go just yet. They hadn't talked enough. He wanted to know more about her. He was just beginning to understand what she felt.

"It hasn't been enough. We need more time. Two weeks is nothing. We have so much to catch up.... I have so much making up to do..."

Anna was shaking her head. Then she stood up straight.

"Please, Emilio. It is right for me to go back now. I...I...have so much...to think...about. About me...about you...about mamma...about here. I don't know where my home is. I've got to go back now. Please let me." She turned

around, but did not look at him. Instead she walked over to the window. She leaned her head against the open shutter and stared up at the hill across the Arno.

"I love this place, Emilio." She wrapped her arms around herself and shivered. A light from outside the hotel suddenly went on. It caught her upturned face and made her look strange in the growing dusk, as if she were only half there, the rest of her already gone, gone. "I am so glad we were like tourists here, visiting museums and churches. We never did that much when I was a child. You only took us to places outside of Florence. I've always wanted to see those things. And you know, Emilio, they weren't really new to me. They were all old, familiar things, as if I had lived with them more than even my own lifetime." She sighed and brushed some hair from her eyes. Emilio came closer to her. He wanted to embrace her. But to hear her talk was more important, to hear her voice, her thoughts, herself. Now she turned her eyes on him.

"But somehow, I think I am more confused than before. I know that I love Italy, but, ...I don't know, ...I'm different. Living in America, Emilio...it's...it's so..." She stopped and sighed. She shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know if I could fit back here."

"But you left as a child, Anna. You don't know what it could be like now as a..."

"Oh, Emilio, you don't understand. I don't want... I don't want to feel...alone...here, the way I did when mamma

and I first arrived there. You don't know what it was like. It took so much time." She covered her face with her hands. "I couldn't ever feel that way again...and...and...live." She began to cry. Emilio tried to take her hands in his, but she held them tightly to her face.

"No, Emilio, no. I know what you are going to say. But I can't be cer..."

"Why not, Anna? Just give me more time to show you. I'm here for you. I'm the other half of your family, after all." He put his arms around her but she refused to rest her head against him. Don't go from me now, Anna, he pleaded silently with her.

"I know that I failed you and your mother," he began slowly. "I didn't...I couldn't comprehend the things your mother...wanted so much for me...to...grasp. I suppose it would have saved us, had I really listened. But you...see... Anna, I didn't want to. I wanted what I wanted. And all those questions she asked...about me and my life...my family. Anna...I...I didn't want to know those answers, let alone share them with someone else." He stopped now and pulled her to him. This time she did not resist. He had to tell her something else, though, something more, something that might make a difference to her.

"The best moments of my life, Anna, were with your mother...and you. You and your mother were for real.... Everything else...I loved you both." He had tears in his own eyes now. "It would mean so much for me to have you

here, to give you..."

"Emilio," she interrupted him, "is it for you or for me that you want me to come back? Your guilt, Emilio...it doesn't help...my life." Her face was swimming before him. Her features grew so vague, it could almost have been Maria. Maria, Maria. He swallowed hard. He shrugged his shoulders. He couldn't answer her. It hurt so much. I can't lose you, Anna. Slowly he left her and walked like an old man towards the bed. He sat down on one side of the opened suitcase. He leaned his elbows on his knees and bent forward. He covered his face with his hands as she had done before. He did not speak. And then she was there in front of him, her hand barely grazing his shoulder.

"I'm sorry, Emilio." He shook his head and touched her hand lightly. She withdrew it and as he lifted his eyes toward her she walked to the other side of the bed and sat down. The suitcase lay there between them.

"I know, Emilio, I know you loved us. Mamma...she...knows that, too.... She said so. You...did...your...best.... She did, too." Anna paused a moment. She took a deep breath. "And...and...in these last two weeks...we have also done what we could...I guess."

It was a small offering, but she had made it, nonetheless. He loved her for it. Now came the hard part. It was time to find out what he hadn't yet had the courage to hear.

"Anna?" he asked her softly.

"Yes, Emilio." She looked towards him at the same moment as he let his gaze fall on her. She knew his next question.

"Does your mother...does she...have...another...?"

Anna slowly nodded. "Yes, Emilio." He saw a tear form at the corner of her eye.

He nodded, too. "Oh," was all he could utter in response. "And you, Anna?" He smiled at her. This was a subject he had broached before. So far she had not answered. "Could someone be detaining you...there?" He smiled again.

Anna sighed and looked down at her hands. "Mamma said you would ask me that. 'The first thing he'll ask you, Anna mia, will be, do you have a boyfriend?' And she was right, vero?" Anna laughed a little. Emilio chuckled, too. She knows me well, quella donna, la mia donna. No, not anymore, but once she was my woman. No one can take that away from me. I have that. The past. And the future? Would Anna be in his future? Would he finally become a father?

"Emilio, I have to go now. I will miss my train to Milano." She stood up and clicked the suitcase shut.

"I could drive you to the airport in Milano, Anna."

She stared down at him intently and then shook her head. "No thank you, Emilio. I think I want to see...well, I think it would help me to be alone for a while, watch the landscape, my landscape,...ours,...go by me...without...anyone...to see...me, how...I...react. Do you know what I mean?"

Emilio stood up and sadly nodded. He took her valise down from the bed. He handed her the poster tube leaning against the wall. It contained the Maternità for her mother. It would be, somehow, his link to her.

"Come, Anna mia." He put his arm around her shoulder. They moved slowly to the door. Before he turned the handle, he stopped. He must know if he would ever see her again.

"But, Anna, you haven't told me.... Will you come back?"

Anna did not look at him. Her eyes were focussed straight ahead of her. She shook her head.

"I don't know, Emilio. I really...don't know. There is so much to think about."

"Is there a boy there...in your life?" He felt like telling her to bring him, too.

"Emilio, Emilio...I...can't...I don't..."

"Va bene, Anna, va bene. But you would come and... visit again, no?"

Anna walked to the door, ready to leave. Emilio turned the handle and peered around to catch a glimpse of her eyes. That she could tell him. No? She looked at him a long long time before answering. She was searching for something, some reassurance, perhaps? Or was she thinking of an answer that would hurt him the least?

"I'm sorry, Emilio, I don't even know that," she finally said. She hung her head.



"Why, Anna? Why not?"

"Because, because maybe I think it would be better, maybe, I think it would hurt less if I never came back. Maybe I'll lose something everytime that I come, a part of myself. Maybe it would kill me to come and not stay. Emilio, please, I don't know." She stifled a sob. "Let's go," she said quietly. "I must leave now."

Emilio opened the door, but before she ventured out, he took her head in his hands and kissed her forehead tenderly. He touched her fair hair, Antonio's legacy, and whispered more for himself than for her, "I am your father."

CHAPTER 7

1977

"Why are you and mamma fighting so much lately, Emilio?" Anna, sitting beside him on the front seat of the car, stared ahead of her as she asked this question. She asked it in a normal, untroubled voice as if she always asked him such important questions and always expected a simple answer. But she was not looking at him or cuddling up to him as she might have done. Her eyes were fixed on the passing Romagnolo landscape. Off together just the two of them on an adventure to the sea. It was a fine day and they had taken their bathing-suits. It was early June so the beaches would not be crowded and they could have a wonderful time.

But now this little thirteen-year-old, so much like her mother, was asking questions. Carmela, his own daughter, had never really asked him anything like that at thirteen or at any age.

"Babbo, why don't you and mamma ever say anything to each other?" Certainly she could have asked that one. But then again, why would a child ask about a situation that had remained unchanged throughout her life? Anna, on the other hand, remembered better times between Maria and himself. It was open war, now. As far as he was concerned, it was the questions. Why couldn't Maria be satisfied without trying to know so much about him. He didn't want to know the answers

to all her questions; why should she? He grew angry just thinking about it. He tried to explain it to Anna.

"Anna, let us say that you have a mean, a very mean mother, who always yells at you and hits you and makes you unhappy. And all you want is to find some place, a secret place where she can't find you, a place where you can go and be quiet and happy. One day you meet another child who knows of just such a secret hiding-place where he goes all the time. He has built a little cabin, let's say in a tree, near the Arno away from the city. Together you meet there on days when you have time to get away. You rest there. You stop thinking of your horrible life at home, of your mean mamma, of school, of all the hard things you have to do every day. And you love this place because it is secret. And you have this secret friend, too, who also goes there, and no one knows anything about him.

"Mostly what you look forward to in this place," Emilio continued after taking a breath, and thinking that he was beginning to enjoy this, "is its farawayness, its quiet. It is your special hiding-place. Life gets better even on the outside," he said gesturing now with his hands to make his point, "just because you have this special place to forget in."

Anna was staring at him, concentrating her dark eyes on him. There were little furrows upon her forehead as she listened attentively to his words. She was just so fine and poised as she sat there unmoving, her white shirt and shorts

outlining her slim, still childish body.

He had never really watched Carmela's body as it grew and changed. He couldn't recall what it looked like at thirteen. Now she was a great big twenty..., he couldn't remember how old she was. She was a woman anyway with marriage on her mind.

He was taking Anna to the beach because he wanted to see her swim. He wanted to teach her to be beautiful and graceful in the water. But really, he knew somewhere inside him, he didn't need to. Anyone who moved so well on land didn't have to be taught.

She was becoming such a good little dancer. He wanted that. He wanted other things, too, from her. He never wanted anything from Carmela, though he enjoyed her sometimes. But Anna. He wanted her to develop into someone special, use her body, develop her talents. She was waiting for him to continue his story. So he settled into his seat and went on to the hard part.

"One day your secret friend starts asking you about your other life, about your thoughts, about your beliefs. He doesn't just wait for these revelations to come of their own accord, he pushes you. And you can't just respond simply and leave it at that. Oh no. He challenges you all the time, disagreeing with you about the way you see things and feel about them. He wants to convince you that you are wrong and that he is right. Sometimes you climb into the secret cabin in the tree and an avalanche of his words hits you."

Emilio let go of the steering wheel, reached his arms up high, and dropped them down again, imitating the crashing fall of these words. His hands back at the steering wheel, he went on, his face showing emotion.

"You see what I mean? The peace is gone. There is more pressure from her...I mean from him, than from your other life. All that you longed for in a secret hiding-place is beginning to vanish. You can't just rest your head and forget, because your friend doesn't want you to forget anymore." But why, why was Maria doing this? And when she tried to explain, it all sounded...like nonsense. And why was she there less and less? Why did she have to work last Thursday evening? He had only wanted to rest his head on her pillow, feel her hand linger on his brow.

His voice was getting louder. He tried to relax. He watched the road. There was a sign for Rimini up ahead. La Romagna. Home of Mussolini. How far was Predappio? Perhaps they would have time to visit the grave. He had thought of going for so many years. Perhaps catch a glimpse of the signora, Rachele Mussolini. He would tell Anna about the man. Altro che swimming and the body, there was also the mind. It had to be developed too. He looked again at Anna. She had turned away from him. He could tell she was mulling over what he had told her. It was good to have spoken. He felt tired from the exertion of explaining but it was out now. He felt vindicated. Telling Anna was like....

"Mamma and I...we...are your...secret hiding-place,

Emilio? And, and...you have no peace anymore?"

"Well, Anna, you see, it's uh, it's...the questions. If all you want is peace and quiet, and all you get are questions and quarrels, it's just, oh so tiring. Capito? It would make you angry, no, little one?"

Anna squirmed a bit and stretched her knee. There was a scab on it from a bad scrape she had got from falling down last week. Emilio reached out his hand and touched it. He hoped the salt water would not make it sting.

"And you see, Anna, when you get angry, you fight. You fight, when you get angry, don't you? Especially when you don't get what you expected?"

Anna slowly nodded.

"I think your mother enjoys fighting."

"No, she doesn't," Anna shook her head this time. "She always cries after you leave."

Again Emilio stretched his hand over to her. He touched her head and played gently with her light brown hair. Maria had such black hair. Antonio must have been....

Now he laughed and tried to humour Anna, but she was very serious.

He made funny faces.

"Dài, Emilio, don't be so silly."

"Oh, little one, don't be so serious."

Why did she look so sad now? Poor child. But what could he do about it? That was in her mother's hands.

"Anna, I'm going to take you to a very special place

now, before we go to the beach. It's only ten o'clock. We have plenty of time to swim all afternoon."

"What special place? A 'secret place?" she asked, almost hopefully.

"Well, not exactly. It's a secret place because no one knows we're going there, though."

"But don't we have to tell mamma afterward everything that we did today?"

"Well, maybe. But only your mother. No one else. That way it will be our little secret."

He pinched her cheek and turned off the main road. He felt excited all of a sudden. Predappio, last resting-place of a great man. He would say hello finally, after all these years.

\* \* \* \* \*



The flowers, more than anything, made him think of his mother. His mother who would put an orcio full of flowers into any empty space, at home, in her hotel, in his hotel. Since she had moved into his father's villa, she had covered all the available lawn space with urns, antique and modern. In them she had conjured countless flowers to grow with her magic touch. Maybe that's why she had gone back to her husband. She needed his land for her flowers.

The breeze caused the petals to fall upon the ground beneath. The smell here was delightful. What a garden! Emilio watched Anna solemnly walk around the gravestones. Her youth, the colours, the early summer sunshine. Tears came to his eyes. In 1942 he had been thirteen. The beginning of the end for Mussolini. The loss of the East African Empire, Badoglio slowly adding up his victories, gaining power steadily, getting ready to take over the government. The English and Americans landing in the south.

He breathed deeply. He remembered having no idea where his father was, whether alive or dead. Every now and then Leone would turn up, stay home a while, then disappear. After the war he just came home one day, looking tired, and resettled himself in the apartment. He hardly spoke, except to complain. He grunted more than spoke. His words were harsh. Emilio in Livorno with the americani was a final defeat.

Strange how that had turned out. The "enemy" giving Emilio the excitement he had always craved as a boy. He wiped

away the tears. Anna was coming back toward him. The americani. The fascisti. Mussolini. Leone. The past was made up of those four components. And here he was at the grave of his past with the future walking toward him. Would he pass on to Anna some of his confusion? But greatness was greatness. That was the tie, the link. The fascisti, Mussolini, and even his father had been great in their way, and the americani in their own. In the long run, that was all that mattered. Each of us must try to be as great as possible. This he would tell Anna.

A great man was a great man, even if defeated and brought to ruin by his enemies. Mussolini's time was over. He had done his job. He had given what he could. She must learn to give what she could.

Anna came and stood beside him. White clothes, brown skin. He placed his hand on her hair, and ruffled it. Together they looked at the grave. He tried to remember a story his father had once told him.

"One day my father came home from somewhere far away. I can see him striding into the house, calling to my mother to prepare the macheroni subito. He was hungry. His white shirt sleeves were rolled up above his elbows. His arms were very tanned. His muscles strained underneath the tightness of his shirt. He seemed larger to me than ever before.

" 'Son, he said to me, 'do you know the avanguardisti, the young fascisti, ready to learn, and eager to give their support?'

"I nodded. 'You must join them. Mussolini can no longer wait.' Perhaps I was ten. I remember him bending down towards me. He was so close, I could feel his breath, smelling of exotic tobacco, against my cheek. I could see his immense chest threatening to snap off his shirt buttons. It made me think how much he resembled Mussolini, for his chest, too, was enormous and strong.

" 'And if,' he continued in his deep voice, 'if it so happens that one day you are called to fight for him and lose your life, you will do it with pride. You will execute your duty without question.' He raised himself up and gazed away from me towards the balcony and the blue sky beyond it.

" 'For I have seen something extraordinary in the last few days, my son.' He turned back to me and stared deeply into my eyes. 'I have been with the man, by his side, and I have watched a nation bend upon its knees to him. For the glory of our Empire.' He pointed his finger at me.

" 'For now we are an empire. Vittorio Emanuele III is the emperor of Ethiopia and we are, we must be, the defenders of our kingdom.' Again he bent down to my level, his eyes penetrating my skull. I shivered and wanted to yell, 'Sì, sì, sì!'

" 'What I have seen is this.' He stretched his arm out. I watched his fingertips. 'I have seen Il Duce standing upon our land in the sunlight, farms and vineyards bursting with colour around him, his people, the contadini of these fields, kneeling before him as if he were a god. And he went

to them and took their rugged hands in his. He tried to bring them to their feet. Solemnly they poured into his hands their wedding bands of gold, their crosses of gold, their most precious objects.'

" 'And he took them in his and the tears came to his eyes at their generosity and love. For he knew that he had made them revere their country. He knew that he had kindled in them the fire of patriotism. He thanked them humbly. Told them of the uses to which he would put their valuables, how they by their gesture served the empire and its cause. He pledged to fight against Communism. He pledged to help fascisti everywhere. Their spirit would enflame Franco's soldiers in Spain, their own in Africa.'

"My father searched my eyes, placed his hand upon my shoulder and said in a softer voice, 'Remember this, that if others in this land can give, so can you, when your time comes.'

Emilio sighed and let his hand fall from Anna's head. "I didn't have my time. I was too young." He shrugged in resignation.

"But mamma says..."

Emilio placed his fingers on Anna's lips. "It does not matter little one, whether she thinks Mussolini was bad or good. He made us into a nation. He gave us pride. About that my father was right. Look around you." He waved his arm at the countryside surrounding them. "It was from this land that Mussolini sprang and was nurtured. This beauty

lived in his heart."

La Romagna. He loved his Tuscany, the oliveti, the umbrella pines, the vineyards, the old farmhouses. But here was la Romagna, with its undulating mountain region, and the sea, the Adriatic, gently, oh so gently, tapping the shore.

He remembered once his mother taking him to visit a friend of hers, to the mountains above the Adriatic. He must have been eight or nine. It had been his first impression of Romagna, but it had stayed with him ever since.

This woman, his mother's friend, owned an outdoor restaurant in a tiny village. He remembered looking over the cliff at the town by the beach, thinking that he could see bathers jumping and playing in the water. The signora Antonella cooked outside underneath an improvised open tent. There were no more than two tables with long benches on either side. Everyone ate together. The food was wonderful. He recalled the cooked tomatoes, stuffed with parmesan and bread crumbs and olive oil and basil. It felt as if the woman had pulled them straight off the vine, and had intervened so little before passing them on to her customers. He couldn't find the right word for it. But he felt completely attached to the world, to the nature around him, eating, as they were, right under the sky, with the green mountains sloping beyond him to the blue below!

The signora reminded him of his own mother. They spoke of their husbands, gone away together so much of the time. Where were they? The wives stayed behind and worked

at their small businesses; active, alert, industrious, their husbands bravely risking their lives for the Duce.

Emilio gazed again at his hero's grave. Il Duce. He put his arm around Anna. In unison they walked away. I have given you this, Anna.

"We are all nurtured by a landscape, little one. Ours has a beautiful red cupola, a tall, slender bell tower, and dazzling golden doors. Right?" He looked down at Anna and touched her chin. She did not answer.

CHAPTER 8

1977

Era bella, era bella, era bella  
 Era bello restare con lei,  
 Che c'importa il mondo,  
 Che importa la gente,  
 Che importa soffrire,  
 Che importa morire,  
 Era bella, era bella,  
 Era bella quella donna per me.

It was Carmela singing. He remembered the song from a few summers back. He hummed along with her. But it was the words he liked. Loving a woman for one night, and not caring about anything else, not about the world, people, suffering, or death. Just loving and finding a woman beautiful, finding that satisfying and unforgettable. She sang again:

E giusto si è liberi  
 amare così

It's right to be free to love like that. And it was.  
 Perhaps that was the ideal love.

Se l'amore è una stella d'argento,  
 Quella notte si è accesa con lei.



If love is a silver star, then, that night it lit up with her. But maybe it could only light up like that, on a particular night with a particular woman, and then be no more. That was the nature of it, inextinguishable because eternal only in memory. Clever song. Simple. And he had always liked the beginning too. Because the woman beckoned to the man, and offered herself. He had always liked women who were not ashamed of what they wanted. Women who felt no guilt. Women who knew what they were doing must be right. Let's face it. He liked women who liked making love. He looked at his watch. His wife would be here any minute. Should he go to Maria? Or should he find some willing beautiful woman for one evening? The telephone rang.

"Pronto. Ciao, Lorenzo. Come va?" Carmela came to him from the dining-room. She was still singing. Era bella. Era bella. Era bella. She waved him a kiss and waltzed out the front door. Off to see her fidanzato. Marriage. Marriage. At least she was choosing it of her own free will.

"You want to see me now? Yes, I'll be free as soon as Giacinta comes in. I'll meet you at Paszowski's. Va bene."

Well, he wouldn't have to make a choice after all. He could dream of his beautiful woman. Emilio tidied up his desk in preparation for Giacinta. He finished registering the passport numbers of his clients, and replaced the passports in the numbered cubicles.

He wondered what his brother wanted to talk about. He remembered an earlier conversation, two years ago, when he revealed to Lorenzo his secret liaison with Maria. The shock to him. Dear Lorenzo. A man to be trusted. Since then they had not talked about it much. But Lorenzo knew it was still going on between them. Odd that he should recall that particular conversation. Maybe not so odd. It had been an important one. This one sounded like it would be one too.

He checked the register to see if the clients who had reserved had already arrived. Four reservations and that would make the hotel full. Bene. What had his brother wanted him to do, then? Ah, yes, change his life. Well, he hadn't done that. He hadn't done anything except let it drag on to its present state. Maybe Lorenzo wanted to talk about it again. After all, he was visiting Maria less often now. He could have noticed. Or perhaps there was a change in his appearance? Did he look as if he were suffering? He checked himself. His suit was well-pressed. His shirt immaculate. He still changed it twice a day in the summer. What could he have perceived? Was he moody lately? At that last get-together at his father's villa had he behaved strangely?

Giacinta opened the door.

"Che caldo!" she loudly proclaimed. It was a complaint. It wasn't that hot really. She was so fat lately that anything above freezing was too hot for her. She noisily climbed the two stairs to the reception desk.

"Lorenzo just called. He wants to see me now.

Could you take over?"

She wiped her mouth with a handkerchief. There was perspiration on her upper lip. The water droplets were a permanent fixture of her face. She didn't seem to age though. She just grew larger.

"And since when do I not take over at this same hour of every day? You need no reason to leave."

She was right. Ordinarily he would have lifted the barrier that closed the desk off from the clients, passed through to the other side, waited until his wife took the position he had just vacated, flipped the latch, and wordlessly left. Why had he offered her an explanation today? For the first time in ten years he would not be guilty towards her. Did he want her to know it? That was ridiculous. Then whom was he feeling guilty towards? Maria? Was he entering a new stage of life? Changing a ritual?

He walked toward the door. He turned round to his wife before opening it.

"Giacinta?"

"Si, caro."

"Uh, ciao."

"Ciao."

The street was noisy at this hour. Shoppers and tourists, voices chattering, hundreds of shoes clicking the cobblestones.

"O-o-o, Emilio-o-o," someone called to him.

He looked across the street. Domenico, from the

Grand. Emilio waved. The owner of one of the best hotels was a friend of his. As the man came closer, Emilio felt himself grow more substantial. Maybe, just maybe, it wasn't necessary to have a woman at all. Not for a night, not for ten years. Was it possible that all a man really ever needed was the respect of other men, successful men, more successful men? Anyway there was no reason in the world why he couldn't be as successful as Domenico. Domenico was sweet, too. Not arrogant with his wealth and importance. Everybody liked him. Emilio could be like that. All the other hotelkeepers liked him, too. He just needed to get a little richer, buy a first class hotel, all well within his means now. Then he could have everything. He would live without a woman questioning him all day long. Domenico probably had a lot of different women. And because he was rich, really rich, they probably didn't bother him about anything. They were glad just to spend an evening in his company. That was life. Not - "Why, why, why," for hours on end. God damn you, Maria. You're making me miserable, not happy. Once you made me happy. Not anymore. It's time to say ciao.

"Ciao, Domenico." They shook hands.

"I'm glad I bumped into you, Emilio. I've wanted to talk to you for some time now." He put his arm around Emilio's shoulders and continued walking with him in the direction of the Piazza della Repubblica.

"I'm thinking of renovating my hotel in Siena, but not just the inside. And those boys from the ministero,

those imbroglioni are giving me a hard time. You have experience with them. Who should I talk to?" Domenico threw his hands up in the air. "I'm just about ready to give up." He looked pleadingly at Emilio. He wants guidance from me. And I can help him, thought Emilio.

"Don't worry, Domenico. Don't give up. It can be done. You should have talked to me earlier. Before going the long legal way around it. All those petitions you must be writing." Domenico nodded. "Listen, I'll come and see you tomorrow at your hotel. We can go to the ministero together. I'll get an appointment with that napoletano who runs the show. I can deal with him. Get by all the red tape for you."

"Tomorrow, then? Around this time?" Domenico looked hopefully at him.

"Sì, sì, a quest'ora. I have to see my brother now. A domani."

"Grazie, Emilio." He shook hands heartily and smiled. "I'll never forget this, 'Celli, believe me. You do this for me, and I'll see you get rewarded before you get to heaven." Emilio laughed.

"Va bene, Domenico, va bene. Ciao, amico."

They waved good-bye and Emilio continued to the piazza, still laughing. I can really help him. I know my way around the government better than he does. He walked faster. If Maria could see me now, maybe she'd be a little more satisfied. She'd appreciate her good fortune. Damn that woman. What right has she to make Emilio Fiumicelli

unhappy? She doesn't deserve him. There's my brother. If he tells me to change my life again, I'll tell him he's out of his mind.

"An espresso," he told the waiter as he sat down. "Oh wait a minute. And a gelato, too. Cioccolato." The waiter nodded and strolled through the aisles. Emilio placed his hand heavily on his brother's shoulder and left it there for a moment. The two brothers eyed each other. Fratello mio, what is it you want from me? wondered Emilio.

"Out with it, Lorenzo. I know it's important."

"Be patient, Emilio. It's the surprise of a lifetime."

"All I want to know is, will it make me happy or unhappy?"

"Oh, selfish Emilio. How can you be so selfish?" his brother said jokingly.

The waiter brought the ice cream and the coffee. Emilio started eating. The mixture of hot and cold down his throat rekindled his emotions.

"I can be as selfish as I want to be. I'm mad as hell." That was true. He was mad all the time now. All on account of that Maria.

"Who at?"

"Forget it. What do you have to tell me? Out with it."

"Okay, okay. After I want to know who you're mad at. Deal?"

"Si, si. Muoviti. I'm impatient."

"All right then. Here goes. Our very own father and our very own mother have decided to live together again. Mamma is moving her things out of the hotel and up to the villa. Actually I think she's been sleeping with him over a month. How do you like that? She's almost as secretive as you are. Anyway we know how you come by that trait now." Lorenzo stopped. He smiled happily. Emilio felt strange all of a sudden. Almost sick. He put his spoon down. His father and his mother in the same bed. In the same house. When was the last time? He was probably around nineteen. After Livorno. One night he noticed his father moving his things from his mother's room in the hotel to a little closet of a room down the hall. And there he stayed until he bought the villa.

What a strange family they were. Or were all families strange like that? Maybe it was too hard for men and women to live together for long periods of time. It was just a stupid ordeal that the Church and the world believed was necessary. To suffer was to live in grace. Marriage equals suffering equals salvation. Che orrore! But Lorenzo believed in it and liked it. Seemed to anyway. And Lorenzo couldn't live a lie. Not like himself. Emilio not only felt sick now, but also depressed. For himself. He supposed he was selfish. His brother was right. He ever thought of anyone else? Anyone else's happiness? Anna's perhaps. But what could he do for her? Especially now, when everything was wrong between

himself and her mother.

"So what do you think, Emilio?"

"About what?"

"What do you mean about what? About mamma and babbo, of course. Where are you?"

"I'm here. I'm here. Just remembering when babbo moved out. That's all. Now she's moving in. I don't know what I think. I don't think anything."

"What do you mean? You must think something. Do you think they can do it this time? Do you think they can make each other happy? Do you think they always loved each other? I wonder about that. Maybe they did always love each other. Something happened. Something went wrong, but they were meant for each other. I couldn't imagine another man for mamma. And babbo never found someone else to live with." Emilio passed his hand over his forehead. Why do people like him and Maria have such a strong need to discuss and convince?

"Why should he have?" Emilio rebutted. If he wants to debate, here goes. Emilio spread his arms out, palms facing up to the heavens. "It was good not to live with someone. He liked being alone, and having someone whenever he wanted it." Emilio struck the table with conviction. I can play their game, too, he thought. "When he got the villa, he got it to be alone, and work alone. When he wanted company, he went into town and got it. Then when he got tired of company he went home. Sounds pretty good to me."



Lorenzo shook his head.

"I don't know, Emilio. I don't know. He wants her now, I guess."

"She works all day, Lorenzo. He has her at night, when he wants her. He's too old to go looking for it in town. It's easier if it comes to him."

"You know, Emilio, you're a cold-blooded cynic." Lorenzo gripped the edge of the table, arms spread apart on either side. He looked as if he could throw it, and maybe right at his brother. "I wonder about you sometimes." He leaned forward, face quite red. Do I turn red too, when I get angry? "If it weren't for this woman, Maria," Lorenzo went on, "whom you've been with for so long, and whom, I might add, I have never met, I'd think something was wrong with you." Having said this, his brother drew back, still glaring at Emilio.

"Well, Lorenzo, you can start thinking something is wrong with me. Because it's going to be over soon." If I'm actually saying it, it must be true. Ah, Lorenzo, you have finally brought me to this realization. You are a true brother. "In fact," Emilio pointed his finger at Lorenzo, "you can be glad you never met her. If you had you would have thought there was something really wrong with me."

"So that's it." Lorenzo's face brightened with understanding. "That's why you're in such a foul mood today."

"I'm not in a foul mood. Just because I'm being

realistic about mamma and babbo and not so stupidly romantic about them does not mean I'm in a foul mood. You," Emilio paused and pointed his finger emphatically at Lorenzo, "you just can't read the facts. You think about 'love' every moment you can. That's all."

Lorenzo at first looked as if he were about to retort angrily, but he held his words, sat back and stared at Emilio. He folded his arms. What's he thinking about now? wondered Emilio. Probably didn't answer me because he feels sorry for me over Maria.

Now Lorenzo leaned forward. He looked at Emilio very gravely. It was a challenge he came out with.

"Well, Emilio, should we talk about it some more or should we go?"

"What do you mean? Is it up to me?"

"Yes, I think it is. You've been seeing a woman for I don't know how many years..."

"More than ten years to be precise."

"You've been seeing a woman for over ten years and I've never met her. Don't you think a brother should know the important things going on in one's life? Or maybe I'm wrong. Maybe the 'love' as you so disparagingly call it, in one's life, is not important to you. So it's up to you. If you want to talk we will. If you don't want I won't push you. I can do a lot of other things now. Go home to my own family for one, and be with the people who share their lives with me."

"Why is it everyone talks about sharing one's life?" Emilio threw his hands up in the air in bewilderment. "I get it from her, I get it from you." Emilio pushed the coffee cups and the dish of ice cream away from the centre of the table.

"One lives life, Lorenzo. One does not talk about it with others. One does not go around telling people how one feels about everything. One just does it. One...just...does it," he said evenly, punctuating each word with a flourish of an index finger. "You feel. You live. E basta. Words. They're just syllables in the air. They're there a moment and then they go. They have no meaning. I don't even know if life has meaning." His voice was getting louder and less controlled. "I don't care." This he practically yelled. Feeling self-conscious for having lost control, Emilio paused for a moment and brought his hands together onto the table. He looked at them not at Lorenzo as he finished his declaration.

"I'm here to live it, not interpret it. And if it has no meaning why bother thinking about it anyway?"

"That still does not answer my question," Lorenzo firmly replied.

"What question?" Emilio looked up. He squirmed uncomfortably in his chair. I've had enough. There's no peace anywhere. His father was crazy for having given up his peace and having taken his mother back.

"How come I never met Maria?" Lorenzo asked softly.

"That's what I want to know. What have you been hiding all these years?"

"If you're so interested in her why didn't you ask to see her before? Why has it taken ten years?"

Now it was his brother's turn to shift uneasily in his chair. He didn't answer right away. He looked away from Emilio. Now I've stumped you, darling brother. Lorenzo took a deep breath. He looked almost guilty as he said the next words.

"I was scared to ask." It was almost a whisper. Lorenzo dropped his eyes. "I'm just scared of you. That's all."

"Scared, Lorenzo? Scared of me?" Emilio was surprised. Was he a frightening person?

"Emilio, don't you understand how secretive you are?" Lorenzo's eyes and voice implored him. "Most brothers can be frank with each other. You've been with her ten years, Emilio. Ten years. Do I have to ask to meet her? Don't you ever just feel like introducing her? Scared? Of course I'm scared. I don't know you. You are my brother. And I can't figure you out. You're a mystery. And that's scary."

CHAPTER 9

1952

Giacinta! Giacinta! Why wasn't she like Virginia?

All he could think about was that he didn't want to tell his father, but he had to tell his father. He didn't know what to do and the only person to ask was his father. He could just run away and not tell anyone. He could leave all his savings with Giacinta and go where. To Livorno? They'd find him right away. Send good old track dog Vincenzo out after him. Oh, to be back in Livorno with a smart woman like Virginia, who knew better than to go and get pregnant. Of course he didn't know for sure. Maybe he had left Virginia pregnant, too? Oh God, what a thought. Maybe there were hundreds of little Emilios running around Livorno. Maybe they would all find themselves at his doorstep one day. Or maybe a pregnant Giacinta was their revenge on him.

Nothing ever goes right for me. He wanted to cry. It was like being a child again. The frustration of it all. There was nowhere to go, nothing to do. There was no magic to free him. He remembered wanting to see his father so much. But his father was never there. He remembered wanting to be a hero in the war, but he was too young. He remembered always wanting, wanting, waiting, and never having. And then finally he had something.... And that was over too. Everything was over. He felt as if his life were over.

What was he going to do about Giacinta? Why did she have to happen to him in the first place? He wished he could be anyone else at this moment, anyone. Why did he have to be Emilio Fiumicelli, son of Ettore Fiumicelli? Why? Why?

He would have to tell his father. His father had probably made lots of girls pregnant. He would know what to do. His own friends, Bernardo, Rinaldo, they had no idea. They were good boys! He didn't really like them much anymore. Not since he had known the American soldiers in Livorno. He didn't like anyone anymore. Especially that Giacinta. Why, oh why, did she have to get pregnant? Perhaps he could ask that woman Elena from a few years back. She was older. She would have known those things. Maybe she had had an abortion herself once. Oh, but she probably hated him. The last thing she had said to him was that she would have liked to drown him in the Arno. Oh God, maybe he should drown himself. No more Giacinta. No more, no more, no more, forevermore.

His father would know. But could he tell him? Oh give me the strength to tell him. If he presented himself to his father as a man, nonchalant...carefree, just a little mistake...how to right a wrong...? It was unimportant, just something that could happen to any man who liked women, just as he did, and still does. Where do you go, babbo? Just tell me. I'll take care of it right away. I heard about this old woman down in San Frediano, is it true? Or maybe there is a doctor willing for a fee? Of course, there was the money. He had some money. His mother kept most of it.

It was hard to get it out of her, although he worked hard enough for it, God knows. Oh, why couldn't he be free? Free of all of them.

"The key to room six please."

"Che? Oh the key, yes; sorry. Room six. Here you are. Did you enjoy the Duomo today?"

"Yes, it was lovely. You should have told me that I had to wear a long-sleeved shirt though."

"Oh, I hadn't noticed. What did you do? You got in, didn't you?"

"Yes, my friend I told you that I was meeting there, just happened to have a jacket that I put around my shoulders."

"Well, I'm really sorry, Signorina. Perhaps I could make it up to you. Yes, perhaps tonight, we could go driving in the hills, visit Fiesole? Would you like that?" The girl looked at him distrustfully. And well she should. He was a reckless creature, a fool, who should never have gone out with an Italian woman who lived right in his own city. Why couldn't he have stuck to foreigners, who leave before he could ever know if a child was on its way? Why didn't he...? Oh, it was no use. But this signorina could perhaps make him forget for one sweet night in the hills. She was going to say yes. Tomorrow he would pay. Tonight he would forget.

"Please, Signorina, I deserve this."

"You deserve this?" She laughed. He laughed.

"What do you mean? I almost miss a morning in the Duomo because of you, and you deserve my company this evening?"



"Oh, but Signorina, I work so hard all day, and then I'm forgetful of my clients. It's the fatigue. I need some pleasure in my life. Then of course I would do my job better." He handed her the key at this moment. He had been waiting for the right moment. Something, some joke, some humour shared between them, before any physical contact was always his way. It made everything easier, happier. He touched her fingers gently and looked into her eyes. He smiled again. She smiled back as if to say, oh all right, you win. He liked it like that - a game.

"I'll wait for you here around nine o'clock, va bene? Okay?" He motioned his arm to the doorway, to the great outside. "We will see Tuscany by night. The lights, the hills, the narrow roads, the vineyards, the small villages, the stone façades of country churches, the moonlight.... All waiting for us." He bowed his head and smiled. He was happy at this moment. He could tell that she liked him. She waved her arm ceremoniously and bowed to him as well.

"I accept most humbly."

She turned towards the staircase and began to climb toward her room. But just as he expected, before the curve, when she would go out of sight, she turned back to him. Her face was bright and cheerful. He winked at her. She laughed and ran up the rest of the stairs. She was carefree. No responsibilities, her rich parents probably paying for an all expense paid tour of Europe. She did not have to pay tomorrow. Of course she could get pregnant like Giacinta.

Well, American girls could deal with that in America. It was freer there. He sat down on his stool, placed his elbows on the desk and dropped his head in his hands. Oh Giacinta, Giacinta, what am I to do?

\* \* \* \* \*

He listened to the conversation between his mother and father at the dinner table. His mother was complaining about the mess the siciliani had left in seventeen.

"Che puzzo! Don't they ever wash? It smelled like the den of a sick animal, worse. What kind of people...! I don't understand such things." She shrugged, completely at a loss.

His father grunted.

"Beh." He continued to eat.

What kind of mood was he in? Emilio wondered. Ettore, old Leone. The dark hair on his arms, tanned winter and summer, was smooth and glossy. The hair on his head was thick and wavy, despite middle age. Emilio sat back in his chair and examined his father closely. A rather humourless beast at home, but perhaps different with his friends, surely more fun-loving. He spoke to his mother and himself rarely, except about the past, il fascismo, the south, in the early days, when he was sent down to the Puglie to build giant aqueducts for irrigation, or something. He was really vague about specifics, his father. You just got a feeling about the places he worked, about the life he led, nothing more. He was talking now.

"The pugliesi are different, not like the siciliani, you know, southerners, yes, but not isolani. They are part of us..." But he didn't continue. He jabbed the bistecca on his plate with more interest. Maybe if I spoke quickly enough, he'd hardly be listening. He'd just tell me where to

go with Giacinta, and the scandal of it wouldn't even penetrate. Maybe he'd even be proud of me, following in his footsteps. How was he to know, though? The fact of the matter was, he had no idea whatsoever how his father would react.

His mother got up to bring the coffee. He could speak now. No, no there was not enough time. Besides, he had promised himself an evening with the signorina from room six.

The two men sat in silence while the woman was out of the room. Emilio's father hummed a tune and absent-mindedly clapped his hands together, his elbows on the table. He had large working-man's hands, but Emilio noticed how clean his nails were. They were almost manicured. His father was well-dressed on most occasions, clean short-sleeved white shirt, well-ironed by his mother, well-pressed dark trousers, sometimes with suspenders. He wore a jacket out of the house.

Often they ate with the workers in the hotel, the two chamber maids and the hotel cook. But despite the contact not many words passed between them. Emilio spoke to his mother only of hotel matters. His confession tomorrow would probably bring many words, if his father chose to tell his wife. Of course, his father could choose not to, if he felt it was a trivial issue. But, but, but, who knew? Emilio suddenly felt very tired, tired of the conjecturing, tired of the pressure of not knowing.

Did he really think he could enjoy himself tonight? Perhaps he should speak now and get it over with? He could

hear his mother padding toward them in her slippared feet. She, too, was humming. She came into the dining-room and laid the vassoio with the coffee cups, already filled, onto the centre of their table.

"Brava," said his father. He took a cup and drank in one gulp. He then poured himself some more from the caffetiera. He drank without sugar. Emilio and his mother were still stirring the sugar in the first cup. Ettore leaned back from the table. His first cup of coffee was always taken quickly. He then lingered over the second. He leaned his head against the back of the chair and stared at the ceiling. He hummed tunelessly. Emilio never could distinguish an actual melody from his father's lips. But his mother sang or hummed quite beautifully and with great passion - "Caro-o-o, ti voglio tanto bene, non c'e nessun al mondo piü caro di te..." She seemed to derive great pleasure from singing, as if it were a true expression of herself. Perhaps it was. Perhaps it was. He could imagine her continually dreaming of great love, her chest heaving passionately, as she conjured scenes of romantic intimacy.

She stood now to remove the dirty dishes. She heaped the tray full and left. As soon as she did, Emilio blurted his question.

"Babbo, did you ever make a woman pregnant?"

"Yes, son, your mother." With that he rose and left the room without once turning to his son.

He had expected her to come down the stairs, but here she was at the front door of the hotel. She had probably been out for supper with that friend of hers. He didn't matter, though. He was a business associate of her father's. This he had found out from his night porter. Always good to know if there was any competition to complicate the outcome of an evening.

Emilio was sitting on the couch in the hallway. The night porter was behind the desk. She looked surprised to see him in that unusual place. He responded to the unspoken question in her eyes.

"I don't always work, Signorina Gordon."

"The name's Allison and I thought you said that you work so hard, that..."

"That I forget my client's needs from sheer exhaustion." He got up, walked towards her, touched her shoulder, and leaned his face close to hers as he spoke. She made a slight movement away from him. Ever so slight, barely perceptible, but Emilio made a note of it, and took his cue to be less forward. He hadn't much heart for this evening anyway, his energy being lost in his one great worry. He opened the door for her and they walked down the stairs. He checked to see if he had ten lire for the elevator, and finding only one, decided that they would use it on the way up.

"I always find that I never have ten lire to come up that elevator." He took out his one coin and showed it

to her. "Tonight we will ascend in style. But first we must suffer and walk down in order to enjoy that particular luxury." He threw the precious ten lire in the air and caught it.

"Be careful, be careful," she squealed. "What if you lose it? Then where would we be?"

He checked himself before he blurted out that he had a lot more to worry about than an elevator ride. It would have been too cruel. As he opened the large portone to the street, Virginia and his first date with her came to mind. He had been troubled then, too. How sympathetic she had instinctively been. That time felt so far away now, a whole lifetime away. And another life was now perhaps ending, too.

"The car is just around the corner on Via dei Pucci."

She turned with him and allowed him to place his arm on hers as he directed her towards their destination.

"You know what's so remarkable about you, Signor Fiumicelli?"

"Emilio, Allison." He looked at her conspiratorially, and smiled.

"And what would that be? I didn't know I was remarkable at all. I am a simple ragazzo italiano, going out on a date..." He paused a moment. "With a remarkable American woman."

"No, Emilio. I am a simple ragazza americana, although I have learned one or two words of your language."

Ah, so that was it. "That's very good, Allison. And

you rolled that 'r' remarkably well for an English-speaking person." She had, too. He was beginning to like her a lot more. Perhaps it would be a pleasant evening after all.

"Well, would you like to know what's remarkable about you?" She looked down at her feet a moment. Was she being shy? Of course, he wanted to know. But he knew already.

"I'm dying to know. You gave me a hint, though."

"Oh, did I?" She looked up at him. Such a sweet face. Girlish. Puzzled. She had long straight fair hair, that at this moment came gently across her eyes. Emilio brushed it away with slightly nervous fingers. Would she pull back again?

"Yes," he answered. She did not. She submitted willingly to his attention. "Yes, you did, when you said that you had learned some words of Italian." She smiled and turned her face away again. He hadn't expected her to be so modest. She wasn't Virginia but she was really quite appealing.

"I see how I gave the clue away," she eventually said. "So you must realize yourself then how remarkable your command of English is." Emilio shrugged as if to make light of it. "No, Emilio, don't be so modest. It's a real achievement. You know the American idioms," she began listing, "you never hesitate, your grammar is flawless. And more than that, one gets the feeling that you really love conversing in English, as if it were a special challenge, even a privilege. Sometimes I get the uncanny feeling that you've



been to the States. Is that possible?" Emilio shook his head.

"Well, I have to confess that I didn't learn English just sitting in Florence, waiting for tourists from America to teach me. I guess you could say that I have been privileged."

"How did you learn, Emilio?" They had reached the car. Emilio stopped and opened the door for Allison. It's as good a topic as any, he thought. We will talk about Livorno. As he got into the car on the driver's side, he had a wonderful idea. He would drive there tonight. Just go there and take a look at the place in the dark, hear the ships' sirens, perhaps, and turn around and come back. They would come home rather late but he felt like he was going to his death sentence anyway tomorrow. Might as well stay awake as long as possible. He got in the car and put the key in the ignition.

"Allison, I want you to share a very important experience with me, a return to a wonderful place, a place where I was happy, the happiest I have ever been, the place where I learned to love the American language and American ways."

The car moved out into the street. He loved driving, hearing the heartbeat of the motor, feeling the houses and people in the streets fleeing from him as he passed. It gave him a feeling of hope all of a sudden, as if this projected long drive could save him from his guilt and his crime. Allison

looked at him curiously. She had not been prepared for such seriousness so early in the evening. He was too tired for banter anyway. All he wanted was for her to say yes so he could drive into the night. He wanted nothing from her now. If she wanted..., well, of course, he would oblige, but he wouldn't even try to manoeuvre her into a romantic situation. Of course, if they went to the beach, and there was moonlight, perfect solitude, broken only by the sound of the waves beating the shore gently....

Allison ran along the beach ahead of him. She stopped, bent down, took off her sandals, and then continued to run. Her long hair flew behind her. Emilio removed his own sandals and placed them carefully besides hers. He gazed up at the horizon. A few large ships were anchored some kilometres away. He could not see what nationality they were. For some stupid reason he wished for them to be American. He wanted them to be a symbol of something, something fine, that only this girl Allison would let him touch for a brief moment before the world fell down on him. He looked at his feet and sat down in the sand. He would not run after Allison. He would wait for her to come back. The vision of ships in the distance called to him with greater insistence. Besides Allison could be his and they could not, not ever again. That dream was really over. He had been harbouring that dream for a long time, the dream to one day return here and become one of them, one of the happy. He seduced every American girl

that came his way just to get a taste of it. Perhaps he had gone with Giacinta to end all that dreaming, because he finally knew that it was impossible to realize. His mother would never let him go. Florence would not let him go. The hotel would become his life. He would marry Giacinta. He would become a father.

Allison called to him. She was coming back, running, and kicking the sand.

"Let's go for a swim, Emilio!" She was in the water already. Her dress was over her head. She pulled off her underclothing and threw them on the beach a few metres away from him. Emilio got up, threw his own clothes off quickly and followed her into the water, running and crying as he went in:

"Vengo. Vengo subito-o-o!"

1983

The trees. How he loved those cypresses. He should walk more often. Leave the car in Piazza Ferrucci, and climb the rest of the way to his parents' villa. A car sped past him on the narrow road leading out of the city. Well, it wasn't exactly safe. The curves were so sharp. But all these fragrances in the air! Why had he never noticed how tantalizing nature could be even in the winter?

As he walked, he wondered what his father thought about all day, linked in his way so closely to nature, seeing only his chickens, his grapevines, and his vegetable gardens. Did he think about when his plants needed watering, or fertilizing, or when a chicken was ready to be killed? Or did he think about his past? His glorious past. The question was how glorious was that past really?

But then again, what difference did it make? His father did not seem disappointed in life. It had been a good enough life. And now all he wanted was to be left alone with his chickens and his wine. His father really made good wine, too. His father did all things well, didn't he?

As Emilio opened the gate of his father's villa, it creaked noisily. But his father was probably too far away to hear. Emilio clicked the gate shut, wondering why he had come at this strange hour of the day, four o'clock in the

afternoon, to visit the old man. He had wanted to walk somewhere and something had impelled him here. And yet he knew also, that it was meant to be, that they would talk together and something would come of it. He followed the path at the side of the house towards the chicken runs and fields in the back. With the house behind him and only the land before him, he seemed to breathe new life. How glad he was to be here.

Anna had left him feeling empty and alone. When she was with him, he had felt uneasy at every twitch of an eyebrow, every step taken, every sound uttered into the air around him. But thinking of her, her strangeness, he felt a pang of love. It hurt. His love hurt. His memories hurt. His failure hurt. He knew now how much he had failed her mother too. Maria, Maria, content somewhere in Massachusetts, far far away. It was all done with. If it was over, how could it be that nothing seemed more real?

He saw his father's hunched back. He wore a clean, white shirt, a red scarf, thick grey wool trousers, but no jacket. He seemed to be examining the stalks of some fruit trees. He had started a new nursery. Emilio, coming closer, noticed that his father was grafting small buds to the thin young trunks.

"Ciao, babbo."

His father looked up, and without speaking gave him a sign of recognition. The delicate operation was not yet finished. He made a slit in the green shoot with a tiny

knife. Carefully he placed the bud into the slit. Then with a centimetre wide plastic strip he wrapped the bud securely in place. He tied the knot and stood up satisfied. He pointed down the whole row.

"Tutto fatto."

Satisfaction, thought Emilio, mysterious, elusive, and wonderful. They smiled at each other. Ettore placed his arm across his son's shoulders and together they made their way to the pergola, the marble-topped table and the wicker chairs. Through the leaves, Emilio made out the bronze Bacchus he had bought his father so many years ago.

"A glass of wine, figlio mio?"

Emilio nodded and his father went off to the cellar to get a fiasco of his own vintage. The old man was really getting on now. He moved slowly and his clothes hung loosely. Nevertheless.... What did his father have? Had he come today to find out?

The sun hit the table in uneven splotches. The shadows of the leaves flitted silently across the veined surface of the marble. The winter light played delicately over his arms and hands. He knew he could never leave this spot of the world. Massachusetts held no fascination. This quality of sun and shadow and his father bringing the wine and the bicchieri. This was home. This was life, his life.

Ettore, old Leone, returned and poured the red liquid and sat down. The two men drank contentedly.

"Buono, questo vino." Emilio nodded to his father

as he spoke.

"A good year, if I do say so myself," responded Ettore.

Emilio sat back and held the wine glass up to the sunlight. All he could think of was Anna. He remembered that last outing with her all those years ago. One of the last times he ever saw her, too. Mussolini's grave. He placed the glass back on the table. His father refilled it.

"Babbo, have you ever visited Mussolini's grave in Predappio?" He had wondered that a long time, if his father ever paid his respects to his hero. He sometimes imagined his father, as a young man, as a middle-aged man, as an old man, having this secret ritual, going up there to the graveyard of San Cassiano, once a year without a soul suspecting.

It seemed to take a long time for the question to filter through to the old man's mind. He sat quietly, sipping the wine, showing no reaction whatever to his son's question. Finally he put down his empty glass and looked as if he were about to speak. He shrugged and poured himself more wine.

"Beh."

Emilio waited. Surely the old man would say something.

"Too much talk. Too many stories. Too much gossip."

"What do you mean, father?" Why was his father always so cryptic?

"And what if I would go," he offered by way of explanation, "and there before me, kneeling by her husband's grave, should be Rachele Mussolini herself?"

"E allora? So what? So you would greet her, and, and, . . . nothing, lay your flowers, think your thoughts and go. What would be the problem?"

"Eh, son, but the stories. Everyone knows about the women, the mistresses, the Petacçi woman, for one. And I would stand there and know, and she would know that I know." Ettore shrugged again, as if to say, "You understand." But he did not understand. What was his father talking about? Mussolini had mistresses. So? And he died with one. So? Why should that embarrass old Leone, who had had many in his own time? His father did not seem to want to explain. Perhaps he thought it was wrong, now that it was all in the past. Was he ashamed of himself and in turn of his great hero? How ridiculous. Was it all that important? He looked incredulously at his father. Ettore shrugged again, as if to say yes, it was all that important. But what exactly was important, behaving well in the eyes of others, or in your own? Was his father concerned with real morality, or the avoidance of public scandal?

Emilio said nothing. The two men continued to drink in silence. He heard the squeak of the city bus' brakes outside the gate of the villa, and then the noise of the gate itself. Emilio turned round to the sound of the coming footsteps. It was his mother returning home after a day's work at her hotel. Slowly Ettore rose to greet her. He trudged forward to the reward of his wife's radiant smile. His mother glowed with youthfulness and old Leone showed his appreciation



with as firm an embrace as he could muster. Emilio watched them from his covered bower. He stood up.

So his mother had won at last. Perhaps this was all she had ever wanted and her early plunge into the unholy waters of adultery had been just a survival tactic. Slowly it dawned on him what his father had meant. Mussolini had lost his dignity. Fortunately he, Ettore, had not. What had saved him? His wife? His love, so lately kindled? Ettore's second chance. A lucky man. The old couple looked happy. Emilio was glad.

"Oh mamma," said his father, pointing at him, "look who came for a visit. We were just sitting under the pergola, sampling the vino rosso." His father smiled. "Talking about this and that." It was a smile meant for him. The men had shared a confidence. Emilio smiled, too, went up and kissed his mother.

"What an hour to come. Is your portiere at the desk early?"

"Ah, mamma, it's always business first with you. Norma is there. She can handle it. Besides, it's winter, you know, not too many clients."

"Don't be foolish, Emilio. You never know. There are always passaggi and the occasional tourist. Norma cleans the rooms, but she cannot speak a word of English."

"But, mamma, neither can you, and you always manage."

His mother waved her arm to discredit his last remark of any importance. Such logic, Emilio thought. She thought

what she thought and did what she did, and if they did not coincide, well, it didn't matter. He kissed her again and said he would be on his way. He was walking and hadn't brought his car.

"Ma aspetta un pochino, no? I have just planted a new urn with some Japanese shrubbery. I am learning to love the simplicity of green in my old age." She took him by the arm. "Remember how I always wanted colour and more colour? Flowers were the only thing for me. Well, I've changed my song. Come and see this wonderful new plant from the oriente. Ah, the oriente. I am trying to convince your father to take a trip with me. He's too stubborn. He always wants to stay home. The pigeons need him, he says." She smiled back at the old man who did not follow him.

"Ah, mamma, buon'idea. I am going to feed my pigeons. Ciao, Emilio."

His father turned away toward the pigeon sheds on the other side of the house. Emilio walked arm in arm with his mother towards the antique orcio which she pointed out to him near the back stairs of the villa. Quite a sight. The arms of the tiny tree looked contorted and even unnatural.

"You see, nature can be as creative as modern sculpture, my son," said his mother.

"I can see that, mamma. Interessante. The tree looks as if it were struggling with something, something human, some idea." He looked over at his mother to see her reaction to his comment.

"Può darsi," she observed. "I like the green. I like the brown trunk, too. It goes well in my garden, no?"

Emilio smiled, "Yes, mother, it goes well."

They walked back towards the portone. Ettore came out from his pigeon sheds and walked with them. As Emilio closed the iron gate, he peered through the grill into his father's dark eyes. They were clear, cool, and empty of message. Well, maybe old age was like that. Meanwhile, middle age....

Emilio turned into the narrow street and waved to his parents. In the distance he saw the city bus climbing. He decided to return to town with it. He ran towards it, calling the driver to stop. He mounted the stairs, short of breath.

He placed the coins in the ticket machine. He pulled the ticket from its mouth. Like a tongue, a word, a syllable meant for him. He read the date. February 28, 1983.

1977

When the car emerged from the tunnel, Emilio noticed Anna slumped over, asleep on the seat beside him. He smiled contentedly. They had enjoyed the day together. Mussolini had not disappointed them. The peace that filled the graveyard, the sunshine, the trees, the grass, and a well-timed story about a true hero had made the flow of time enchanting. It was as if all his life he had wanted to pass on that feeling, that special feeling of belonging to a past not actually lived, but alive somewhere inside him. More than his father's actual participation in that history, it was his own spirit that had fired his words with meaning. He placed a hand on Anna's sun-tanned leg beside him. He squeezed it with affection. The tired child did not stir.

Oh, and she would be a powerful swimmer. Little Anna. It was a pity she could not learn in the Arno as he had. It was so much more natural to swim in the waters that were part of your environment, as an animal would. Why did the river have to suffer for man's greed? And how long before the sea would also be littered with unwanted refuse? A leader like Mussolini would have made any offense against nature an act of treason, punishable by death. Emilio gazed at the indistinct blur flashing along the autostrada. He slowed down and manoeuvred into the right lane. Why not take a good look

at this nature?

The yellow-stoned houses with their red roofs punctuated the landscape as far as the eye could see. Houses of contadini, villas of the gente signorile. A tunnel blackened his sight. On and on, it stretched interminably before the sweep of headlights. So many kilometres of road through mountain. Ah, finally some colour up ahead. Emilio snapped his headlights off. A distinct feeling of pleasure overtook him. How he loved this land. His father had the right idea. The city was the place to make quattrini. The next step was to leave it as soon as possible with all your quattrini and settle onto the land.

But where, oh where, had his father got all that money? Had his mother provided it? Had he saved millions of lire in his energetic youth? What had his father done all those years after the war when he and his mother slaved away in the hotel? Had he made his fortune during the war on all his "missions"? Had he been working for his ideals, his government then, or for himself? Was it just possible that Leone had been living off women, including his mother since time began? Or was he some kind of criminal wizard? Emilio sighed in resignation. He would never know. It was a slim possibility that his mother might know. But can you ask your mother a thing like that? Is my father per bene or furbo, decent or cunning? There was a mystery lurking in the Fiumicelli veins. Would he ever penetrate the depth of those sonorous rivers? Ah yes, his blood was thick and murky, like

the sound of cellos.

Emilio looked down at Anna and patted her leg again. Now here was one like himself, with the mystery of her father, slithering around in her veins as well.

Did it matter? Did one really have to know the truth? Hadn't he done well despite everything? He could be proud of himself. He had wealth, certainly. In fact, one day he would buy his own villa in these very hills. He had never negotiated for Maria's house. But there was no reason he could not buy another, something more palatial, further from the city. A sixteenth century mansion with land that rolled right to the edge of the horizon. He felt himself grow larger just imagining it.

The question was: who would live in that house? He alone? His family? His daughter's family? Maria and Anna? All unlikely. He didn't even know if he wanted Maria any more. He could look for a new woman. He was too young to retire into seclusion as his father had originally done. But then his father had gone back and repossessed his wife. Could he do the same with Giacinta? No. Not possible.

They were nearing the city. In the distance he could see the train on the same journey as theirs from Bologna to Florence. The image of the dead soldier's exposed leg flashed before his eyes. So many years ago and he could not forget. He felt a sickness in the pit of his stomach. He calculated. It was thirty-one years ago. And he was still susceptible. Emilio passed his hand over his forehead.

Perspiration. He tried shaking his head for release. The flash came back. He hated that memory. He hated that train. Never had he taken that train ride again. But the memory came back anyway. It came to remind him of something - of what was wrong with his country's history.

Today, with Anna in the cemetery, he had talked only of illustrious deeds. He had left out the deaths, the tragedies, the mistakes. He had talked of his father who was all mixed up in it. In what? In the confusion. But he had not talked of that. That strange marriage of beauty and brutality that pervaded the times. This was the mystery of his father's life. And it had troubled him all his own life. The way to live with it was to only see the beauty. It was the only way.

He wondered what Maria would think of their little diversion. Visiting Mussolini's grave would not be a priority on Maria's list of essentials for her daughter's education. Still, it was history. Maria could not deny that. One day Anna would have had to learn about the man and his role in shaping their country. Now was as good a time as any. Of course, Maria had her own view of old Benito. Well, it was best for Anna to get more than one opinion anyway. Maria couldn't object to that argument, could she? Anna could make up her mind in due course. She was certainly intelligent enough. What they had done then, was perfectly justified in that sense, as far as he was concerned. Maria, as unreasonable as she had become of late, would certainly be

reasonable about this. Besides when they arrived home, she could present to her daughter the other side of the argument, without any objection from him.

Anna was stirring. He touched her head. She opened her eyes. She smiled sleepily.

"Look, Anna. There's the Duomo." We're home." Anna turned her head in the direction of Emilio's pointing finger.

"Brunelleschi, Anna, he was the architect of that red cupola, which tells all and everyone, that they are approaching the city of Florence." Anna fidgeted.

"Emilio, I know that. First of all I learned it in school, but besides that, you must have told me a hundred times, practically every time we pass it."

Emilio laughed.

"Well, just so you'll remember there's no harm in reminding you."

Anna sighed and leaned her arm against the door handle. She dropped her head onto her arm, a gesture of annoyance and frustration. Then she lifted her head up and spoke animatedly.

"You don't have to remind me, Emilio, really. If you want to make sure that I know, all you have to do is ask me once in a while. That way I can prove to you that I actually do have a memory."

Emilio chuckled and turned to her, "Okay, okay, va bene, you made your point, signorina. From now on I will stop myself just before the words jump out of my mouth. And if



I'm really worried about whether you actually know something or not, I will ask a question, instead of giving you a lecture."

"Very good, Emilio, very good." She wasn't really angry at him. They laughed together and then she pulled herself up towards him and kissed his cheek. She pointed a finger at him.

"Don't you forget now. I don't want to hear anymore? And this is the old sacristy designed by Brunelleschi, and this the new one, by Michelangelo, and the Duomo itself was designed by Arnolfo da Cambio, and the Pazzi chapel, by uh..." She turned up her face to him. He saw her wrinkle her little nose, close her eyes, and think hard. "Uhm, uhm, Brunelleschi?"

"Brava, bravissima, little one." He slapped her thigh in excitement. "My, my, you are something, my child. Have I told you all that?" he asked her in wonderment.

"Of course, Emilio. Don't you remember anything?"

Emilio was quite surprised at all that that little head managed to retain. Of course she was thirteen. Feeling pleased with himself, he concentrated on maneuvering the car off the autostrada and back into Florence. If Anna could make him feel this proud, did it matter that she wasn't his?

Anna was on her knees now, facing backward, with her body leaning over the front seat. She was searching in the back of the car "per vedere se abbiamo dimenticato qualcosa, Emilio." Automatically Emilio placed his right

arm out to protect her body from falling towards the windshield. He was taking a sharp curve and anything could happen. Touching her young body like that, in a gesture of protection, made him feel paternal. He slowed the car down as it moved toward the toll booth at the end of the exit ramp. She turned around now and his hand passed over her middle as he drew it back to the steering wheel. He felt a sense of well-being. Anna sat down and smiled.

"Tutto lì, everything's there, Emilio. I thought we might have forgotten my towel. Mamma gets really angry when I forget things." She made herself comfortable in her seat once again. Emilio paid the toll from Bologna to Florence. When the man at the toll handed him back his change, he struck up a conversation with Emilio.

"I, too, have a daughter about her age. You know they should always sit in the back seat. Even when I drive alone with her, my wife always makes sure that Sabrina is in the back. Ha ragione, no?"

Emilio thought about it.

"I guess you're right. And this one moves around too much when she's not sleeping," Emilio agreed with the man.

"Oh, Emilio, that's not true," Anna piped in. "I am careful. And I like sitting in the front when mamma's not here." She pouted as Emilio waved good-bye to the tollkeeper and drove on.

But he wasn't aware of Anna at that moment. He was thinking more of his exchange with the man. Two fathers

sharing ideas. Strange. The three of them seldom went out as a family. This kind of thing was rare for him. It felt strange. Really strange. He didn't know whether he liked it or not. He shook his head. I don't need another family. Or at least not another wife. Not Maria anyway. Giacinta was more suitable. He never quarrelled with her. Wives, women, mistresses. All so complicated.

That was what he hated most about his life, wasn't it? The complications. In business it was to be expected, but not at home, or in the second home. He had reached a point when he was too familiar with that second home. He needed new excitements. He was only forty-seven. It wasn't time to give up or give in. Maria would take him the way he was or not at all. It was pointless to keep fighting. There was no piacere anymore. And she was meant for that, non è vero? he asked an imaginary companion. He nodded his own head in answer.

"Who are you talking to, Emilio?" asked Anna.

"Uh, to my other self," he replied.

"Your other self? You have another self?" asked the child.

"Don't be stupid, Anna," he answered abruptly. He shouldn't have answered so roughly. He touched her arm.

"Never mind. Never mind," he said. Emilio felt tired. Explanations. They always wanted explanations. She looked hurt but did not reply.

They were almost home. Anna contented herself with

looking out the window. The wind blew her hair about and Emilio could not see her expression. Probably sulking. Well, he couldn't be patient any longer. He had done enough for her today. He was glad he wasn't her father. She demanded endlessly. He sighed with relief. The day was over. There was the house. And there was Maria too, sitting on a chair on the small porch. She stood as they approached and smiled.

Emilio stopped the car and Anna jumped out. She ran up all the stairs and into her mother's arms. He watched them in profile. Maria's lips touched her daughter's cheek. Anna was chattering, all of a sudden energetic. Maria listened, her face glowing, as if she were absorbing her daughter's excitement. How young she looked. How beautiful. A magic moment.

Emilio was still sitting in the car. He pulled the key out of the ignition now and slowly opened the door. He had not heard what the child was saying, but she was probably telling her mother all that had happened that day. As he was locking the door, he turned his head up again at that charming scene. But this time he noticed a mood change in the two actresses. Maria's face looked alarmed. She was sending Anna into the house. When he reached the foot of the stairs, he lifted his eyes toward Maria. They were very black, opaque with anger. Emilio stopped. He met Maria's stare, but he did not move his feet. He waited. All he could say to himself was why, why, why, why all that fighting and anger? He shrugged his shoulders resignedly.

Maria turned away from him in disgust. Her hands clenched the railing in front of her. He could see her trying to control her feelings. The tears welled in her eyes. She hung her head.

"A shrug of the shoulders is not enough," she began. "That you should do this, take her...to...that...place..." She could not finish the sentence. She wheeled around to him. "You know how I feel about Mussolini. I do not want my daughter exposed to lies of any kind. To me he was a dreadful and evil man. You may think me unreasonable. I do not care. Why? How? How could you do it, Emilio? Couldn't you think just once about how it would make me feel?" She began to cry. Emilio took a step forward onto the landing. But Maria shook her head forcefully and held her hand out to make him stop.

"But I believe she should be exposed to everything, and that means my ideas about Mussolini, too. My ideas are important, too. She should know them."

"Emilio, why do you want to destroy what little we have left?" She was practically begging him. Why was Mussolini...? "Don't you see, Emilio, how much it hurts me, that...that you...ignore.... We've talked about it so many times before. I can't bear it Emilio. You...never...listen."

He stared up at her. Did he love her? Did he really love her? It was all too complicated. She took away his freedom. She said she didn't want to, but that's what it amounted to. It had felt so good telling Anna all those things. He felt like a man. Why did it have to hurt Maria?

Why couldn't they have come home to her loving arms? Why couldn't it be simple? Goddamn it! Why did this woman feel so much? Why did she care about Mussolini anyway? His father would not have tolerated any woman's opinion of Mussolini. Even his mother's, who adored il Duce. Do I want to try anymore with this woman? Do I really? What draws me back here? He turned his head away from Maria. Maybe I should stay away for awhile. I've often thought it would help. Maybe I really should do it. He started walking back to the car.

"Wait, Emilio. We haven't finished. I...I.... Maybe..." She shook her head. She threw her hands in the air. "I don't know anymore, Emilio." She bit her lip and looked up at the sky. "Maybe, I should...try..." She turned her gaze upon him again. "What's wrong, Emilio? We never resolve anything anymore. It just gets worse. I...don't... seem...to be able to reach you at all now. You're so closed to me. And you don't...you don't...you don't see the truth about anything anymore. It's like the way you feel about Mussolini. To you he did only great and wonderful and heroic deeds. And I...I should only be here for you in the way you imagine in your fantasy. Emilio, listen to me. I'm real. You didn't create me...I'm sorry." She hung her head now, solemn, spent. "I can't be your fantasy...not anymore." Her last words were barely audible. Emilio kept walking toward his car. Each step to his destination was in slow motion. After many decades he reached his car. He opened the door. Then he turned once more to see what he had once cherished. Maria

was softly crying. She called to him finally.

"Good-bye, Emilio."

"Good-bye, Maria," he whispered more to himself than to her.

1983

"Pronto."

Emilio pushed the button that allowed the gettone to slide down the inside of the telephone box.

"Ciao, Sara. Come va?"

"Ah, Emilio, it's you. Everything's fine. You're calling from a pay phone, right?"

"I'm calling from a bar in Piazza Ferrucci. I've just been to see my father. Thought I'd see my brother, too. Is Lorenzo around?"

"Yeah, he's home, just a sec." Emilio heard her call to her husband. He heard the padding of feet in the direction of the phone, and then his brother's voice.

"Emilio, che c'è? What's up?"

"Uh, I don't know. I just visited babbo."

"And so?"

"So nothing." Emilio looked down at his watch. It wasn't really late yet. Lorenzo wouldn't be having dinner with his family. "Look, Lorenzo, could I see you now? Are you free?"

"Emilio, what is it?"

"I don't know, Lorenzo. I don't know. Let's talk."

"Anything you say, fratello mio. Where are you?"

"I have my car. I'm just across the bridge. I



could be in your area in two minutes. Meet me in the bar near your house."

"Da Angelo?"

"Si, si, da Angelo. Fra due minuti. Ciao, Lorenzo."

"Ciao."

Emilio put the receiver back on the hook. What did he want to see his brother for anyway? His mind was quite blank. When he had gotten off the bus that took him from his father's villa to the piazza in which he had left his car, he hadn't gone to his car. He had walked to the nearest phone.

He moved now, uncertain, toward his parked car. Having heard his brother's voice, something frightened him. But he couldn't think. The piazza was noisy with cars, with motorini, with buses, with people. Everything dazed him a little. He crossed the street. A motorcycle screeched to a halt centimetres from him. He hadn't seen it. The young man took off his helmet and began cursing him. Va bene. You're right. Hai ragione. I should have been more careful. Emilio kept moving. He got to the other side. Instinct ordered his hand to his pocket. He felt for his keys. He found them and unlocked the door to his car. He got in.

Somehow the car started and drove him across the bridge, down some streets, and then parked itself near Angelo's bar. Emilio stepped out of his car and automatically locked it. Inside the bar, his brother was sitting at the only table in the tiny place. Emilio could see him in conversation with a woman standing beside the table. She

may have had a serious problem for Lorenzo was listening intently, his hand occasionally stroking his chin, a gesture of deep consideration. Lorenzo's arms circled the upper side of his chair as he leaned back and stared up at the woman. His legs were stretched out in front of him. As Emilio walked closer, it seemed almost as if Lorenzo were hugging the chair. He supposed it was a part of Lorenzo, this intimate, embracing way of talking. Just as Emilio opened the wide glass door, Lorenzo smiled at his friend. It was a loving smile. Emilio turned his gaze upon the woman now. Strange. It looked as if she felt better, having told Lorenzo her story. She touched Lorenzo's shoulder. He heard her parting words.

"Ciao, Lorenzo. Parlerò con la Sara. She will have good advice for me."

"Buon'idea, Teresa. Ciao." Lorenzo nodded at her. He turned toward his brother. The woman brushed past Emilio and continued out the door. Lorenzo smiled at him now, a peaceful, content sort of smile. Ah Lorenzo, perhaps all these years, you could have helped me, too. But he hadn't wanted Lorenzo's attention. It had felt in some ways like Maria's prodding. And yet, Lorenzo had not rejected him, for here he was, waiting, waiting for Emilio to begin.

Emilio sat down and wiped his hand over his face. He said nothing for a while then it came out.

"She's gone, you know."

"Who?" Lorenzo queried.

Emilio turned and looked around the bar. Angelo was making espresso for them. His wife was chattering with a neighbour of Lorenzo's. Angelo's daughter was cleaning the metal counter with a wet rag. The son-in-law was washing cups and saucers. He talked to his wife as he worked. Emilio continued his close scrutiny of the activity around him by swivelling his chair to face the entrance. Outside the door, people were hurrying by, hurrying home, going somewhere. Life continued. Lorenzo touched his arm.

"Emilio, who's gone?" he asked softly.

Emilio had to stop and think a few seconds before he could catch what his brother meant. Why was he feeling so strangely? Outside himself. Disembodied. When he had first left his father's, he had had a sense of conclusion, almost satisfaction. But that feeling was only in reference to the past. The present gnawed on, unfinished. He finally planted his gaze upon Lorenzo, and smiled weakly.

"Who, Emilio? Who?" Lorenzo asked a third time.

Emilio nodded, still smiling, as if to say, I'll get there, don't hurry me. Lorenzo leaned back in his chair, letting his brother know by this gesture that he would be patient. Angelo's son-in-law brought them their coffee.

"Good to see you, Lorenzo. And this is your brother, I believe."

"Emilio, this is Marco." Emilio nodded at Marco.

"And how is business? You have many hotels, don't you? Lorenzo has told me about you. Do you keep them full in the winter months?"

"I manage." Emilio shrugged non-committally. He did not wish in the least to talk to this Marco. Why was his brother always so polite? So interested in everybody, right down to the owner of the corner bar? Lorenzo was covering for him now. Thank God, he had a knack for that. Emilio certainly didn't know how to make small talk. With a woman, maybe, when he had something to gain by it. That was one of the essential differences, he supposed between himself and his brother. I am not good, he thought.

Emilio drank his coffee and stared out into the street again. A young woman walked by with a small child. He wondered if Anna would ever settle and have children, do what most people did, what his daughter had done. Would she be different? He sighed. Oh, yes, most certainly. She already was. He swallowed hard. His throat hurt.

Marco had walked off by now, back to his cups and saucers. Emilio turned from contemplation of what lay outside the door. He gazed intently at Lorenzo. He made an effort to speak. Here it comes.

"It's Anna that's gone."

"Anna?"

"Yes, yes, Anna; Maria's daughter," answered Emilio impatiently. "Remember, I told you that I received a

telegram from her."

"And so, she's come and gone, has she? Was she supposed to stay longer?" Emilio didn't answer right away. A vision of Anna as he had last seen her at the railroad station flashed through his mind. She seemed so small and defenseless as she climbed the stairs to the train. But somehow he knew that she wasn't weak. Perhaps it was really he that was weak. She could live without him. Her mother could. Could he live without her? Could he live without knowing whether he would see her again? Dio how many mistakes he had made. And now he was paying.

"Emilio?" Lorenzo reached out and touched Emilio's hand. "You seem very upset. Did she leave too soon?"

Emilio nodded. He thought if he opened his mouth he would only cry. He looked down at Lorenzo's hand on his. He covered his eyes with the other one. It was easier to speak this way. He didn't want to see.

"Dio, Lorenzo, how I have hurt her. I don't know if I can ever..." The words wouldn't come. He breathed slowly. He concentrated on each inhale and exhale of breath. He felt Lorenzo's hand tighten his grip. "It's all right. I'll be all right, Lorenzo." He took his hand away from his eyes and looked at his brother.

"Oooh, Emilio, are you sure? You don't look that good."

Emilio smiled weakly. He didn't deserve to feel good either. He had failed with his child. Not so different than his own father after all. History repeats itself.

"I've deprived her, Lorenzo."

"Of what, Emilio?"

"Of me." He shrugged his shoulders. There was almost nothing else left to say.

"And now?"

"And now, what? What do you mean?" Emilio asked back.

"And now this time. What happened this time? Did you deprive her of yourself this time too?"

Emilio shook his head. "But it does not matter, Lorenzo. This time is too late. I've already done the damage. I abandoned her. I hurt her. I never conveyed a single syllable to her for six years. That's a long time in the life of a nineteen year old. Especially when the culprit is...her...father." He could almost see a smile on Lorenzo's face, as he said this. What did Lorenzo have to smile at? Lorenzo was nodding now. "It's as if I have this pain," Emilio pointed to his heart. "Right here and I'm going to have to live with it...forever."

"Dio, Lorenzo, how I love that child. How could I have treated her as if she were not mine? She grew up with me for ten years! How could I have been so...so...?" He shook his head again. There was no word to describe how he had been.

Lorenzo kept on nodding. Say something, dear brother. But Lorenzo did not speak. And now it came to him how all these years he had hurt his brother too. By his silence.

Maria had been right. Sometimes...it...is...necessary...to speak. It comes before.... It is...love.

"You know, Lorenzo, she...Anna...she's...like me. Or maybe she just is like that with me."

"How, Emilio?"

"You know...diffident... She doesn't talk easily of herself. But then again, it was hard for her to trust me." Again Lorenzo was nodding. "I tried to show her that I loved her and that...if...given the chance...again...I could take care of her. Oh, Lorenzo, how much I want her to come back here and live. She doesn't really love it over there in America. I can see that she's not happy there. But...she... just...doesn't know if she has anyone to come back to. But she does, Lorenzo, she does!" Emilio covered his eyes now with both hands. He knew he could cry. My poor dear Anna. Come back. Come back.

"Emilio," Lorenzo slowly began, "you have told her this...how you feel?"

Emilio nodded but did not show his face. "I lost her mother, Lorenzo. Why,...I have nothing and I didn't know it until she came back to...show...me...how empty...my life is." He spread his arms out to signify the whole world.

"Successful, wealthy, Emilio Fiumicelli, who has everything, the world, women, money, property..." His voice sounded harsh and mocking. "Dio, how poor he really is. His little girl doesn't even know if he could share a little piece of his patrimony with her." Emilio shook his head. "How could

I have let that happen, Lorenzo? Why does it take me...so long...to...learn?" He knew his face was streaked with tears now. He wiped them with his finger tips. "Why couldn't I do it all over again? Can't we go back, Lorenzo? I only want six years." He swallowed hard. Perhaps Maria, too,.... "Maria has someone else.... She has her daughter.... She has a place to live.... She has everything.... And I...Lorenzo, I don't even know if I'll see that child again. She says it could hurt too much to come back. It's better to sever... yourself.... That kind of thinking.... I thought like that, too, once. Do you know that in Livorno I left...never mind... never mind." He hated himself. That's what it amounted to.

"Emilio, stop this torture!" Lorenzo leaned forward. "You've suffered enough. Don't prolong your... Emilio! Emilio!" Emilio had turned right around now. He couldn't bear to let Lorenzo see his face, his guilt, his pain. He could hear Lorenzo sighing and drawing back to his side of the table.

Night was coming. Where was Anna? Asleep somewhere in Boston. Maria, too, beside some better man. He knew the address now. It was on a piece of paper in his pocket. He had wanted it. It felt better this way. He could point to a map of Boston and say: there, right there.

"Emilio, what will you do now?" Lorenzo asked softly. Do? Do? What was there to do? Live life. Wait. Hope. He did not say these things to his brother. He didn't answer. Lorenzo repeated the question.



"Emilio, what will you do now?"

Emilio shrugged. What is there to do, fratello mio? He turned around. Lorenzo's face, Lorenzo's sweet face, was like a gift. He could feel Lorenzo's grey eyes touch his heart where it hurt. Oh, Lorenzo, I do not deserve you.

"Emilio, listen. You must do something for Anna, for yourself."

"But Anna wants to be left alone. What can I do for her? She's over there. I'm here. If she comes I will do everything."

"No, Emilio, no. She wants something now."

What did he mean? She went away. He had hurt her. He had told her he loved her. But she went away anyway.

"Emilio. I know she's gone. That she may not come again. But she came once. She wanted something from you."

"You mean reassurance? But I told her Lorenzo. Maybe she will take it. Maybe she won't. I don't know." He shrugged his shoulders.

"Are you just going to wait?"

What else could he do? What was Lorenzo...?

"You can't just wait, Emilio. You have to keep on telling her. Don't stop now. You abandoned her once. Don't do it again. Whether she decides to come here or not, you have to keep letting her know what you feel, if it changes from week to week, if it doesn't change. Tell her who you are. You know what I mean, don't you? For her. Stay in her life. You have her address?" Emilio nodded. "Write

to her. Not to convince her. Just to..." He didn't find the word. He made a vague gesture with his arm.

"To what, Lorenzo?" He must know. "To what?" Emilio wanted desperately to know. He wanted to hear the word.

Lorenzo only sighed. This had been difficult for him, too. He sat silent, thoughtful. Angelo removed their cups and turned away. Emilio watched his broad strong back. Angelo, embracing angel, arms spread wide, cup balancing cup, blotted out the view of his family.

Lorenzo finally answered. The words came out slow and uncertain.

"It's what...we...you and I..." He pointed first to Emilio and then to himself, "are ...finally...doing."

Emilio reached out for his brother's hand. He clasped it firmly in his own.

"After all these years?" Emilio asked, his voice cracking. His brother nodded.

"Yes, ...after all these years."

Emilio, tears in his eyes, turned away from Lorenzo. I'm catching up to you, dear brother, I'm catching up.