

Alabaster Bone

Rocello Jonica, Italy, Summer, The Present

Florianna

Friday:

train station so familiar broken up by white clouds old women carrying ugly satchels filled with bread and meat and cheese dark repulsive drab clothing young men in cheap suits smoking outside the door families and children laughing looking forward journey out of Rocella this town I hate so much I want to scar my skin no one ever goes very far where do they go what do they do how can they stand the heat my shirt so hot the silk pants clinging silk yellow silk Luca bought me from Rome how I hate that he buys me things I like I don't want him to know what I like a very sad long journey in a hot stuffy train they are waiting I have no taste for a long train ride I cannot go but if I stay what then *un donna di mistero* he called me I spit in his face I am walking past these groups they will not stare they will stare at me their satchels filled their tickets ready oh that young man in the white suit as white as languid hot paper milk an ivory idle man smoking a cigarette in a white suit with a straw hat the straw hat pallid bloodless stainless glaring in the sun the diffident white-suited man with deep-set melancholy eyes those eyes those not Luca's eyes so corrupt his manner so immoral so apart from the usual townspeople here so formless I am a kindred spirit he is raised his hand he is touching the tip of the white panama hat as I walk by he sees my breasts he knows me does this conspiracy only two of us that excluding all the other

hello he tells me in English how does he know I brush past him cheeks are luminous I know color of gold and olive and faint tinge of pink I think he thinks of me he sees thinks of the colors of the ocean gold strands my deep brown hair catching the light

-Want a cigarette?

-I don't smoke. You are a stranger here.

-Yes.

-Where are you from?

-Sligo, Ireland.

-You've come a long way.

-I've come all this way to see the likes of you.

I laugh caustic shy not shy bold not so strong he not so light but no the heavy
joining of the legs up to the chest the eyes stare

-O—my English is so bad.

-Not so bad.

-Well, with a line, as you say it, like that—how can you expect much?

-It works with the young girls in the streets of big cities.

-It won't work here.

but it will work I feel the working of the tip his hat so glaring in the light of my
eyes do not reflect it is what the fear I am not sure he smiles smiling past my ripening my
fullness his expression disdain disobedient counterpoised to sun he looks the women oh
he knows disparaging his flirtation but I do not because he knows the war conquest
further on down the line keep on moving the tracks a train

-Would you be so kind as to accompany me about this lovely town of yours?

-I don't think so. I am a married woman you see.

-Well—this is simply an offer from a tourist to a tour guide. Would you be my
guide?

Longing to be free life impossibility change not one small bit best enjoy oddities
coming to me my own coming toward me all the way coming away illusion lit
fragmentary partial rescue infidelity nothing Luca! *Rimuov dall'adore della vostra
ragazza!* intoxication moment desire

-All right. How shall we travel?

-I've rented a car. Parking lot. Over there. My name is James, by the way. And
yours?

-Rosaria! lie and laugh inside the insubordinate mutinous moment opium
oppression afflicted deathless

-Shall I drive or you?

-I will.

ease into white leather seats rented car my own not his his own not mine the lovely beach house outside of town

-Brilliant! James sliding, slithering, with velocity departing ocean speeding window past he sees peach peaks cresting waves silver gray clouds huddled impossible blue sky of my eyes not my his eyes

-Italy is a peach of a place!

exclaiming thought slipping his arm across my seat my shoulder feels touch his hand repudiation liberated monster

death so intimate and destined but joy? Luca my arbitrator my fate was he after all was he? James car interwoven his hair this day of life itself interfering roguish act violent death blood relationships kindred spirit not the same thing no after all no the no the car no death gliding along the road no death the car beside the sea

the bridge over the bridge over the James sees the hills beyond village bathed village glowing pink and yellow slant of sun oh James you glow the village death

-This is so beautiful, he said.

-Oh yes! I could drive off the bridge right into the sea it is so beautiful!

-And would you?

-Why not?

-I want to live! That's why I am here! I love this place!

hate though love but wheel turning sharply this place toward the bridge plunge one hundred feet damage remember nothing extensive ripping small acts of boldness defy scrupulous logic

moments before— car ripping through steel and concrete—landing on the sandy beach see a small baby tossed up into the air—my own—myself? small baby, hands of alabaster bone, comparisons defy blanco white lies told and forgotten silvered white as sheet flaxen the heralded love I hate I feel dun white ashen achromasia--creaminess tarnished in flesh abbreviated life. 'You skinny man!' I speak to screaming mouth of James, 'I hate you!' brought down to the nub pure economics elicit business he is Ragman I am Smuggler—playing roles we fly timeless through the air to *morte* the contraband smuggled goods streetwalking pimping life—all good for a night night will not come again 'You got me wholesale!' I scream into bloodshot wind 'negotiated the

deal cheap—I came for the transaction and thank you! The dirt was Dirt Cheap!’ I shriek-
-metal enlightens my gaze--rips into my soft warm belly my body of dream--I float into
acquaintance of white sky once again still birthed bloody into folded water waves
serigraph of human wish his *profil perdu* I see-- *Rimuov dall’odore della vostra ragazza!*
Alberto’s face smashes into mine I see it is James blinding intersection mouth contorted
eyes wide angry shouting *La mie ossa e carne sono la vostra fino alla morte. My Bone
and Flesh are yours until Death* desire nerves erythrocytic emotion awake asleep my
eyes close to the mental world metal element heedless—open me to the rhythm of wet
sand sluggish water and weeds.

Alberto

Thursday:

Memories flood in when I see my mother's ample body standing at the kitchen stove, that body holding anger and revenge and resignation, a body that reduces everyone around her to total silence and a bitter feeling of fear. Cecelia makes no bones about the fact that as Comiso's Godchild she holds in her hands a great deal of power. Cecelia reminds me of my mother. Julianna was born into a Calabrian family there is nothing to be done about that. They must bleed and confess or they die for unintended sexual ways. It comes out of the eyes, those dark hooded eyes that send eruptions of energy out at people—eyes that have seen betrayal, abandonment, ancestral traps and natural disasters, eyes that know the nature of large and small, petty instances, religious appetite hungering for untranslatable passion (*my passion*), human chaos, devastation and quiet denial, eyes that with a quick look or glance will silence even the priest. Out in the distance I hear the children shouting to one another. The bells of the Church greet me as I step into the house. My mother's eyes. *Gli occhi che conoscono il mio cuore che non conosce il mio cuore. The eyes that know my heart that do not know my heart.*

-Where have you been?

-Walking along the beach. Where are the children?

My mother takes care of my brother's children. My brother who died in a drowning accident but I know it was not an accident but we can never talk about this.

-I must get back to the Church, mama, I have a class.

-Busy sempre! Il mio ragazzo il priest!

I meet Florianna on the road as she takes off her sweater. Her high, firm breasts are revealed by the pale, peach shell she is wearing, the color of the peach sets off her deep green eyes and olive skin. I am not unaware of Florianna's special beauty—after all, we are childhood friends and everyone in Rocella notes her beauty. Trapped into marriage with Luca—those family connections make me feel such a hunger! Depressed—the thought of all this inevitability hopeless drowning every time I set eyes upon her. Secret moments I think: had I not been a Priest? Perhaps I would have married her and taken her away from Rocella. The closeness of the town, incestuous connections, blood ties—well—I have a calling and yet here I am woven into the fabric. I move in and out of people's lives. It gives me protection. My station. The distance. The garments of the priest hunger me, hang on me, the undercurrents of violence and sex fascinate me. I need constant prayer to war against the distaste.

-Will you come for lunch, Alberto?

-No, I must get back. I just had lunch with my *mama*. I have a class this afternoon. Young boys.

-Oh—you must—

I am climbing up the hilly pathway strewn with rocks.

-I need to see you, she says, the trail of her voice lifting off into the wind.

-All right. Come to my office later.

Florianna hates my social graces. I can see it in her eyes. The eyes of Florianna. *Not my mother's. Alberto a priest! Laughter rips into my belly like a knife. A priest!* She thinks my gestures are mock humility, hypocrisy and even worse—obsequiousness layered with ridicule—she despises me. What happens to a man when he takes the

priesthood? Obviously they do not cut off our dicks! She wonders about this. I have heard her talk of her brother and his snide remarks. The priesthood hides homosexuals. She will not consider this with me. She refuses to. Father knew that my urges were for girls.

Father always said over and over, *Migliori per sposarsi che bruciarsi!**

*Better to marry than to burn

I take long meditative walks in the evenings after vespers. It clears my mind to feel the air and think about things that go beyond the lives of those in this small town. I need to forget lives. *Il Dio mi da il solitudine*. God gives me solitude. Again I see Florianna on the path. How our paths have crossed twice in one day! She did not come to see as she said she would.

-I waited for you.

-I was busy.

Her breath comes in short gasps. Her hair is loose and messed up, the shawl hangs lazily along her left arm.

-I missed the children from school—I need to hurry back.

-I give her the wing of my arm.

-I've skinned my knee.

I bend down to look.

-Oh yes you have! Nothing to do about it now. When you get home wash it—

-I know what to do Alberto.

-I love these nights.

-I hate them. Everything shuts up and dies. *La morte della note*.

-Night is not death—it can be rebirth, don't you think?

-No.

I see a small white stone shining out of the darkening deep blue twilight.

-This is something from the sea, all smooth and round and soft. Feel it.

-Cold.

-Not now. I held it in my hand. Feel.

-It's just a stone Alberto! What the hell's the matter with you? Oh! I am so heartily sorry—I didn't mean to swear in the presence of a priest!

Her sarcasm does not bite me anymore it gives me joy. I know only those she loves will receive her contempt. She tosses the stone across the pathway. I look into her defiant dark green eyes and feel the stroke of life vibrating. My mother's eyes.

Florianna's eyes. They lie about everything. They lie to themselves. Their hearts are filled *Forgive me father for I have sinned against I have sinned I against the sin the I*

-You are being tougher than you are.

-Am I?

She mocks me *Et Iesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui, nobis post hoc exsilium ostende*

-I don't care if you swear and you don't mean it anyway. I am more friend to you than priest. Here is the Church.

I kiss her lightly on the brow the skin so soft and moist something so dreadful as hell could I?

I saw her sweet body run through the trees I might catch her I caught she runs down to the sea and lays down on the side her breathing and her breasts I lie on top of her to feel her heart beating I am all with her alone and she puts her arms

-Domani, Florianna.

-Ciao, Alberto, il mio Priest dolce.

Friday Morning:

she left the house wearing the yellow silk pants Luca gave her from Rome a tank top and a jacket warm weather can turn cold the sea brought cool clouds and maybe rain walking along the path to the Church I see her coming from the window lit a candle at the altar in the office I am waiting some notes grading papers she comes I turn

-Alberto—

-Flore—aren't you working?

-Not today. I need to talk.

Calm orderly walls mahogany bookshelves filled books she picks my book from her absent-minded smells of gardenia why don't you

-What is this?

-Science Fiction.

-About what?

-Transcendence.

-I see.

book jacket cracks dark rich trickled into how do the discrete I must lie

-You want to borrow it?

-All right. Alberto—I cannot stand—I cannot stand—

-What?

-My life.

-What can you do? You made choices. You have to be responsible.

-Oh responsibility! I am sick of that! And anyway—

-What do you want me to do? You can't divorce.

-I can kill myself.

-Don't talk like that.

-I won't. What then? What's left?

-What's left? You have two beautiful daughters to raise. And Luca.

-Luca!

*her profile tense beautiful features transformed detached oh God sorrow desire
wish deny*

-I cannot go against Luca and his family you know that. What about Cecelia?

-The Comisos have bought the Church! What kind of religions is in bed with the
Family?

-Stop it Flore—I will not go there.

-I have to leave.

-Where are you going? Let's have lunch. I'll ask Marie to bring something from
the kitchen some sandwiches or—

-No.

Florianna stretches *her long flat golden taut rib cage with the shirt rising up from
her belly*

-You love me don't you Alberto?

-You'd better go.

-You know they did not cut off you dick did they?

-Chiuda in su! shut up will she she will not shut the ruining of my eyes my tears a face of twilight odor soft sweet like death the sweet gardenia my blush shame anger unseemly professional revealing

-I'm sorry. I didn't mean to get angry. You cross the boundaries all the time, Flore.

-I know you Alberto. You forget I know you.

-All right.

Florianna walks around the desk grabbing me my shoulders pulling me hand shot out from the small body breathing high rubbing my head the nape of my neck to my crown my soft dark curls her fingers like talons clutching my head bringing my head to her mouth her mouth kisses

-All you men are children.

-I am a child of God.

-Your God does nothing for you! Better to be child of a woman.

breathing my heart feel the top of my head memory of touch the texture hand remains burning erotic thoughts she places hot and ugly weep seep my brain yellow silk pants high breasts sunlight dark hair waves of hair water dangerous soul the vow not my sin oh heartily my mother eyes oh heartily just what would happen if

I watch Florianna run from the Church down the path to her house and what remains of the moment of the day I am not certain her dark hair flowing down her back she cannot ever come to this office again I will not allow her when I am alone everything like the violet sky deepening into twilight my eyes my mother's eyes Florianna hurts. She

hurts like cold infusion next to the sea coolness more than water and wind-- who once
traversed this tip of Italy history Ionian Sea why was she here? those yellow silk pants

Luca

Thursday:

Un piccola whore della citta. Those small town whores. They never change. I hate them all. I work up early on Thursday and saw my mother in the kitchen making breakfast. It was eight o'clock in the morning. She thinks I am the king of the sun. My two daughters were eating at the kitchen table and I kissed them both. The older one is going to become a whore like her mother, I thought. *Ndrangdeta* told me when I was eighteen years old that this was who I must marry. I saw her when she was only ten—a small girl with long legs and a haughty air but I knew I could bring that down.

I was not going to leave my mother or the mother church but I vowed I would make Julianna bleed and confess if I had to. All of those whores lie under the Ionian Sea at one time or another, in their dreams or waking moments and in those moments between dream and wakefulness.

-This coffee is shit! I told my mother who always made it too strong.

-Your wife is still in bed. Tell her to make it.

It is nearly nine o'clock now and I had a meeting with someone—an Uncle of my Godfather. My initiation into *Ndrangteta* was a cutting intersection between violence and sex but I don't remember all of it I was so drunk. I had to avenge some husband whose wife was a whore like mine—making her name all over the town with other men. She confessed just before I killed her but her bleeding and dying was to my pleasure, although I did not wait to see it all happen—I threw up. I was only eighteen. It was not a pretty sight.

One of my brothers lied for me and said I did it. Then I went through the ceremony. They asked me—well, I looked up and saw it was after nine and I would be late.

There was plenty of time to follow the whore.

I met my friends at the café and we talked--Sal and Aldo and Lorenz. We've been together since we were small boys trying to pretend to kill each other all over the rocks and hills.

-I am going to make sure that she knows who is the boss in her life.

-That's right Luca. You cannot allow a woman to do this to you.

-It has gone on long enough.

-While her children are in school!

-She sees Roberto.

-Yes, that *regazzo del giornale*. He works for the local paper.

-He writes?

-Those articles about *Ndrangdeta!*

We laughed at this since we knew Roberto as a young man with ambitions to expose the family but he had as much chance of that as he had staying alive after he fucked my wife.

-You must watch her.

-Oh I do.

-Follow her and catch them in the act.

-She waits until Cecelia goes over to the old woman next door and then she sneaks out. After I bought her those yellow silk pants from Rome!

-These whores are ungrateful.

-No wonder we need girlfriends. My girl is in Giossa.

I brought out a picture of my girl. Friday night is girlfriends and Saturday night is always wives.

-What's her name?

-Cara.

-How old?

-Sixteen.

After ten o'clock I figured it was time to move out of the café and go toward the town, check on some business, meet with my Godfather's Uncle and wait for Florianna. I knew her every move. She came out after twelve with her satchel wearing the yellow silk pants I bought her in Rome. I followed at a small distance in the car until she went down the pathway to the beach. Then I had to park the car and get out. She walked along the path and I saw the deep blue and silver gray reflections bouncing off the water. Peach peaks crested the waves that came toward the shore. Clouds came and changed every color to its complement—pink, orange, purple and white. The cold wind threaded into my clothes, I only wore a jacket. I was getting so cold I felt like *gelatoso*, ice cream—but it was more than wind and water. That sea has memory.

She walked along the beach but no one met her. Then she turned toward the Church. There was nothing I could do about that. I knew that she and Alberto had been childhood friends. This girl had been *amici* with everyone. And I do not take that lightly.

-You have to do something about this! my godfather's Uncle told me. Cesare was an old man who spent his time in cafes and ordering people around but I respected him because I had to and because he had been around so long without getting killed. His face was the color of a pig in mud. He told me:

-I once saw a bladder of a man lying on the pavement next to his feet. He was still breathing and his eyes were open staring at his own bladder.

-Luca, he patted me on the cheek with a large, beefy hand like a spatula, you are not necessarily such a bright boy, but I like you nonetheless.

-How dumb am I? I am running a quarter of the business your boys let fall into practically ruination.

-Oh with business you get some help. But for God's sake Luca, you can't control your wife? We all have to control our wives.

-She's out there with her little ass in the wind.

-Her little ass in yellow silk pants you bought her! Must you buy yellow? It's so conspicuous!

I left that meeting with a bad taste in my mouth. Cesare tried to get me to buy a beer and sit down with him at the café but I was too busy for that. Some people have to work for a living, I told him, and he was retired--a retired general that gave orders from the safest place in town. Hah! They could pick him off in a second if they wanted to, but the price on a head such as his, rolled in pig shit or not, was heavier than even anyone wanted to argue about.

I walked through the town wondering when Julianna would leave her meeting with the Priest and saw that shit Roberto ride by on his red scooter. I waved to him but he

pretended not to see me. Just as well. I always had a small gun in my pocket but to kill this *fucker della mogli* I wanted to drag it out and make it mean something. But I knew I could never kill him anyway because I had never killed anyone in my life. I hated the sight of blood and he was a reporter for the newspaper. It would be all over the place. I was just a businessman. I left the killing to others. Even when I had to kill that girl for my initiation everyone knew I did not do it, I simply could not do it. I left it to one of the brothers. I'm just too soft a touch and I know, which is how I ended up in letting Julianna make a fool out of me! Still, Cesare told me on Thursday in his own way that I needed to clean this up—clean up this mess because it was becoming embarrassing that I could not control the situation and they feel that a man ought to control his wife if nothing else.

After she left the church I followed her all the way to her cousin Alessa's. Now there is a dark-haired full-breasted whore! She had two children, two fathers and no husband, living alone on the hillside. She fancied herself a visual artist with her paintings in galleries in Florence and Milan and Rome—she had no second thoughts about what we thought about it. Alessa was a cousin to Florianna so I imagine there was teaching going on there. While Florianna was tall and thin and beautiful, with her high breasts and girlish arms, Alessa was the opposite—really a fat looking woman whose ass swayed when she walked. People stayed in Alessa's place—it had become a kind of *tryst* for lovers so I knew that Julianna and Roberto met there sometimes but I had never bothered to catch them. Alessa spent most of her time in Rome or New York and the endless stream of immorality that came and went inside her place—craving physical and whatever stimulation—she always winked, tossed her head and told people: *la sua vita era la sua propria*. Her life was her own! But not Florianna's!

So I never actually saw her with Roberto. But everyone knew and so we all knew that the guy had some kind of dirt coming his way. There would be a reckoning and I also knew the Church would turn a blind eye. But I worried about Alberto because he loved her. Every guy in town loved her! He might protect her.

Friday:

Segua la famina, Cesare told me so I watched her because she went out early for a change. Walked to the train station of all places! I think she went by the beach. I drove on the road over the bridge high above and could see the flashes of her silk pants through the trees. I had to find a place at the station where she could not see me so I hid in the men's room and looked out of the window at the top. The whole place was filled with people because the ten o'clock train was leaving for Rome and it would take them two days to get there. She wouldn't be going to Rome! I thought to myself. Some young man in a white straw panama in a white suit approached her and wouldn't you know? The whore went off with him in a rented white *Fiat*.

I got my car from the back parking lot and followed them and what I saw could never be described but I now know she is lucky. She disappeared from this town and will never be heard from again. Along with that young man who probably had it coming to him but still—he didn't know what hit him. After that happened I found a deeper communion with God. I went to the Church first but then I had to go home and tell Cecelia and of course now I was left with two children and no one to be their mother, but I am not so lonely. Being in this town as the wronged man has its advantages and I don't want to tell you it brings out the pity in a lot of women and girls too.

Thursday:

They undressed quietly in Alessa's bedroom. The bedspread made of lace eyelet and woven threads of deep gold and *colore rosso di anima* gave off the smells of sex and flowers and food. It had been the bed of many lovers old and young; it held within the tiny threads secrets of erotic fantasy, limbs and faces; strained tears and some guilty pleasure; torrential moments beyond mere pleasure etched into the weaving as some kind of invisible strand of thought—energy passed from the humans who lay there to the cloth of the spread—cloth that had the power to wound those who came upon it with unspoken memory.

Undressed, Florianna appeared girlish. The woman dropped away and her small thin body appeared frail and vulnerable. Her breasts small, apple-shaped and perfect in symmetry made Roberto want to burn the house down and declare war on the town—at least on Cecelia and Luca and Comiso, the Godfather, and the entire Camerra family. Instead he warred with his erection against Florianna's long, deep golden thigh, moving closer into her sacred places, listening for the sounds from her throat to signal his time to thrust inside pushing her into and out of time. Time was of no importance when they met inside Alessa's house—exactly the opposite. Time ran counter clockwise—back into a childlike innocence or pre-existence more amorphous than dreams.

The two lovers fell onto the bed entwined around each other's bodies like weeping wet vines clinging to the side of a church or a hut or a dwelling made of rocks. Shadows from the trees outside the window signaled the coming of evening, a salt air penetrated the window. Florianna exhaled with the breath of climax and felt herself

plunge deep into Roberto. Her thoughts stopped and started like a car with mechanical problems.

-I've got to go now. The children are home.

-Cecelia thinks you went to Church or something. Stay a little longer.

-I have to go.

-Why don't you go to confession? That way if—

-Forget it.

She got up from the bed, took some Kleenex from the nightstand and wiped his semen from her thighs.

-You need to take a shower.

-I know. Luca won't be home until later. He's in Giosa.

-All right.

She dressed quickly.

-I'll walk.

-It'll be dark by the time you get home.

-Then drop me at the bottom of the hill. Never mind. That scooter of yours makes such a stupid noise. I'd better walk.

She put on her shoes, flat-soled sandals with a thin strap along the ankle and twisted her skirt around to fasten the hook.

-Your bra.

She tossed the bra into her satchel and kissed Roberto affectionately on the ear.

-I'm just fine. Don't worry!

Roberto sat on the bed naked and watched her shadow on the wall made from the small lamp next to the bed, dark flames dancing up the wall to the ceiling.

Ciao. She blew him a kiss and started down the hill to home. Lights were on in all the houses. As she jumped down onto the path leading to her house her sandals slid on the gravel.

-*Merda!* A tiny hole had ripped her skirt near the hem. As she got up a hand reached down to her.

-What are you doing out here? I thought you'd be home with the children.

-I went for a walk. Her breath came in short gasps.

-I'll walk you home.

She took his soft warm hand and followed Alberto down the path. At home Luca stood in the kitchen with his mother. Cecelia stirred the pot of *Zuppa di Pesce* as the smells rose up in the kitchen permeated the walls and Florianna's skin. Luca turned.

-I want to sit with you and talk Flore.

-Not now—I've got too many things to do. And I have to go to work Saturday.

-You need that job? I don't make enough?

-I like the job.

-Stop arguing. The children will hear, Cecelia said, it's not necessary. The children were in the den watching television and playing video games.

-Let's go to the bedroom, Luca announced and walking toward their room.

Florianna stood still in the middle of the kitchen.

-Go with him, Cecelia ordered.

-No.

-Go.

-What for?

-Because you are his wife.

-Does that equate with slave?

Come here! Luca's voice ripped through the still night air from the bedroom.

Florianna turned in anger and walked to the bedroom, the silk of her yellow pants making a gentle whispering noise.

In the bedroom Florianna and Luca locked eyes in the silent, unbridled gaze that had been going on for years. Ever since Luca had made his life, her life had been cut out for her like a paper doll.

-I like those pants, he said, as she watched him hang his shirts up in the closet.

-You bought them.

-Do you want to go for a shopping trip in Rome?

-I don't care. She lay face down on the bed.

-I'll take you. You can spend as much as you like. I don't know why you need to work that job. You don't make any money.

-This is the 21st Century Luca and woman have the choice to do other things with their lives than sit at home and wait for their children to grow up!

-There's nothing more noble than being a mother, Flore. *La maternita e sacred.*

-What's so sacred? Every god damned woman on earth does it!

-Don't swear at me. It's not my fault.

-Whose fault is it? Your mother—

-Forget it Flore.

Florianna grabbed his cell phone from the bed and paged through the list of numbers to see who had called. Luca took the phone from her hands.

-Your whole life is secret from me.

Luca slid onto the bed, turning her over to look at her face. He put his hands through her long, dark hair; the thick curls Ilanna had inherited.

-Ilanna has your looks.

-Don't kiss me.

Luca leaned over and kissed her hard on the closed lips.

-I can smell her.

-You cannot.

Luca got up.

-Just take a shower Luca. *Rimuov dall'adore della vostra ragazza.*

-My girl? Luca laughed and went to the bathroom. No one smells as good as you!
he shouted over the sound of the shower.

Friday

When Alberto heard Florianna had driven off the bridge onto the rocks and sand with a strange man in a rented *Fiat* he wondered whether faith would ever reach his deep inner sanctuary again. After she had left the Church Friday morning Alberto followed her. He wanted to know where she was going. The memory of her touch breathing heavily—he felt the top of his head where her hand had been. The texture of her hand remained as though she had placed something burning there; something hot and ugly began to seep into his brain. He needed a sandwich, a hot shower and a long day of prayer—none of which, he realized he would do. He looked out the window and saw her running past the front gate in her yellow silk pants, her high breasts catching the sunlight through her top, the dark flowing hair in long waves down her back. He hated her. He hated himself for having this thought. He did not believe in hatred. This woman was a dangerous temptation to his soul and he made a vow never to—at least not when he was alone—never to—not in the middle of the day.

-Better a train than a boat, Florianna thought as she passed the skiff on the sand walking to the train station.

When Florianna met the young man from Ireland she knew that this was a fated thing—a gift for all the suffering.

Alberto ran down to the beach as soon as Father Augustino, a fat old man from Sicily who trapped his religion behind the cage of iron enclosed in a velvet curtain, came panting into his office.

-You must come! There's been a terrible accident! Someone drove off the bridge!

The two bodies inside the car were mangled beyond belief. Alberto turned away with disgust and felt a terrible sickness come over him. He wanted to perform their last rites even though they were dead but the police were there, the town had gathered, Roberto drove up in his scooter, Cesare and his people gathered. He heard the word suicide.

-Nothing like this is an accident, Cesare announced.

-You don't know, Alberto said.

-There was no traffic on the bridge. She just drove the car off. I saw her.

-You did not. You were busy at the café! one of the young boys said.

-So I was. I have eyes in the back of my head! Cesare shouted at the kid.

The bodies had to be cut from the car with the jaws-of-life. A portion of Florianna's left leg had to be severed. Alberto left before they did this. He knew his job was to talk to Cecelia and the children. If this was the result of endurance he was having nothing to do with it! He would have to lie to the children. But perhaps his whole life he had been lying.

The car had ripped through steel and concrete and landed on the beach face down. The funeral would have a closed casket and the young man would have to be identified and his family notified. Alberto had seen this kind of mess before—he never thought it would be Florianna.

Alberto took Ilanna for a walk after he broke the news to the family. Josie hid inside the comfort of her grandmother but Ilanna was filled with anger.

-I hate this place! I want to leave here! It killed my mother!

-You must never hate your mother or this place!

-My father!

-Or your father either. Look at these old trees, Alberto told her as they walked into the woods near the beach just below the house. When it comes to love, we're all in the dark. It can't be measured. Does it last? Does it transcend? Some say these trees bemoan their imprisonment—their roots stuck in one place, but I've never seen a discontented tree. The roots keep them firm and stationary, unmoving, solid and yet I believe the tree really loves standing in one place and experiencing everything.

-My mother was not a tree, said Ilanna, and neither am I.