

bleary, to query why she was wearing funeral best to go to the school. She knew about security, the care that must be taken. It was ingrained in her, like grime embedded in the wrinkles of a labourer's hands. She had changed in the toilet of the delayed flight and had looked the part of a mourner when the aircraft had dropped down to the tarmac at Capodichino. Her trainers were in the holdall, which was in the boot of the Fiat, which was stuck in traffic more than two hundred metres behind her. Immacolata swore, and heard laughter billow from an Alfa level with her. She scooped up the damaged shoe, from which the broken heel hung at an angle, and pushed it into her bag.

She hopped and limped to the gate, sensing the softness of baked dust against her left foot, then wincing pain, which meant a glass shard or a sliver of metal. At the gate three or four families were with the flower saleswoman. She barged in front of them, dropped a fifty-euro note on the table, took a bouquet of white roses and greenery from a bucket and kept moving. If she had queued and waited for the change, the flowers would have cost her twenty euros at most. In Naples, she had learned that she had no need – her father's daughter – to pay for anything. She headed through the gate, wiped her arm across her forehead and went in search of a burial.

The cemeteries Immacolata Borelli knew in Naples were on the extreme edge of the Sanità district, where her father had interests, and out beyond the Poggioreale gaol. Both sprawled over many acres, communities of the dead, with myriad buildings for the cadavers to rot in. This one, seemed smaller, insignificant, but it served a town of only thirty thousand. A statue faced her, a life-size image of a young woman of the same size and youth as her best friend, with a fresh daffodil hooked in her bronze hand. Her name, set in the stone wall beside her, was Angelabella, and the dates showed that she had died in her nineteenth year. Her face showed innocence. Immacolata was jolted – she had thought too much of the filth on the verge leading to the gates, her broken shoe, the size of the cemetery, and not sufficiently of her friend, whose death had brought her here.

She didn't know where to go.

She tried, twice, asking: where was the burial chapel of the Rossetti family? A man shrugged. A woman grimaced. She ran up the steps of the Reception, noticing how acute now was the pain in her stockinged foot – saw a smear of blood behind her – and demanded an answer from an official who sat a desk and sipped rank-smelling coffee. He, too, showed no interest. She told him that the burial was taking place now and his shoulders heaved, as if to indicate that many funerals took place *now*. She swore, that word for excrement from the gutters of the Sanità and the Forcella districts. The official pointed above his head to a chart that mapped the layout of the Nola cemetery.

Immacolata went past the family chapels, where small candles burned and plastic flowers bloomed, where photographs of old and young fought against time's ravage. She crossed an open space where the sun shimmered on white stone grave markers. She went towards the far wall, using the pathways between the stones. She approached a small group, their backs to her. She saw two ladders above the shoulders of the mourners. An elongated bundle, wrapped in white sheeting, was lifted and two men climbed the higher steps of the ladders and took its weight.

Immacolata remembered the shape of Marianna Rossetti's body, where it was full and where it bulged, the width of the hips on which a skirt would twist when she walked, but the men on the ladders lifted her corpse as though it weighed nothing. The Rossetti family vault was on the fourth level. The bundle went above the names and dates of the lower levels, the plastic flowers commemorating strangers in life and companions in death, then was level with a gaping hole. It had been hard to believe, when Silvio had telephoned, that her friend was dead, harder now to believe it as her friend was lifted level with the hole, then given a decisive shove towards the back of the burial place. As the men came down the ladder, she heard women weeping. Now the men went back up the ladders and grunted as they raited the hole's cover, slotted it into place, then gave it two loud thwacks to satisfy themselves that it was securely

fastened. Perhaps an aunt of Marianna Rossetti, or a grandmother, or an elderly friend of the family, would come to the elevated grave in two years, time to clean the bones of the last decayed flesh and gristle, then stack them in a small space further back against the rear wall.

The noisy weeping was over. The ladders were carried discreetly to the side and the mourners started to shuffle away.

They came towards Immacolata.

She wondered whether Maria Rossetti would hug her, kiss her, cling to her. She wondered, also, whether Luigi Rossetti would shake her hand, composed, or whether his head would sink on to her shoulder and wet it with his tears. She hardly knew them, had never been to their home – it would have been impossible for her to reciprocate Marianna's hospitality, for her friend to come to the Borelli clan's apartment – but she had assumed that a daughter would have told her mother of a friend. She thought she would be thanked for the respect she had shown their daughter.

Lopsided, balanced on one shoe, she waited for the little group to reach her.

Peculiar. They seemed not to have seen her.

Maria and Luigi Rossetti were nearing her – perhaps a few of their brothers, sisters, cousins with them – but none in the group smiled in the wan way of the grieving. She might as well not have been there. They came on. She did not know what to do with the flowers and they were in her hand, which bring against her hip, and her hat had slipped to the side as she had hurried through the cemetery – the veil no longer covered her left eye.

She had met – engineered occasions – Maria and Luigi Rossetti at the college where she and Marianna had studied. It would be hard for her to step aside without standing on a grave, and, if she wobbled – as she might without a shoe – she would knock over two or three vases holding artificial blooms . . . It was not as if they hadn't seen her. The parents' eyes were now wide open, assimilating who was astride their path.

Immacolata knew that she was seen and recognised and the

greeting came first from Luigi. He stopped in front of her and, as she held out the flowers from which water still dripped, spat on to the concrete path, halfway between her feet and his own brilliantly polished toecaps. He looked into her eyes, unwavering, and the word came silently, so that his wife would not hear it cross his lips but Immacolata would read it. He called her a whore. He did not utter the word a historian would have used when lecturing on the sex trade in Pompeii or Ercolano, but the one that would come naturally to today's dockers in the port of Naples. To her best friend's father, she was a vulgar whore of no worth unless her legs were wide and her knickers dropped. And the father was a respected teacher of mathematics to eighth-year students. She gasped.

He stepped a half-pace to his right and made room for his wife to pass. His eyes were without life, as if grief had purged it. Not so the mother's. Her eyes burned with anger. Immacolata had a moment in which to evade the attack but her reaction was not fast enough. The mother was personal assistant to the manager of a well-respected insurance company and had a reputation for integrity, dignity and probity. She reached out and caught the tight-drawn lapels of Immacolata's blouse, ripping the buttons from their holes. Her other hand frebbed the pretty little lace bow between the cups of Immacolata's brassière and the fabric split. Immacolata fell back, feeling the sun's force on her bare skin before she ducked to cover herself. Then the mother said, soft and controlled, that a whore should display herself and feel no shame because she cared for nothing but money. Someone kicked her shin – she didn't know whether it was the father or the mother. She went down on her knees and saw the bouquet crumpled beneath her, the stems snapped.

The father snarled, "You are a whore and you have no decency. I know everything about you. I know who you are, what nest of snakes spawned you, the poison that comes from you – which took the life of our beloved child. She died from leukaemia. We were told at the hospital by the oncology department why – how – she contracted leukaemia. You and your family are responsible.

You may be welcome beside the *autostrada* as you wait for your clients, but you are not welcome here. Perhaps the only language you understand is that of the gutter – so fuck off.”

The mother said, “For four or five weeks, she complained of tiredness. We thought she’d been studying too hard. It was only when bruises appeared that we went with her to the doctor. She seemed anaemic. He examined her closely, particularly her eyes. They are trained to hide anxiety, but he rang the hospital, told them she was a priority case and sent us there immediately. I rang my husband at work and called him out of his class.”

Around Immacolata, cold, harsh faces blocked out the sun. When she dropped her head she saw the men’s trousers and the women’s knees, and if she stared at the dust there were shoes, men’s and women’s, and she feared she would be kicked again. She tried to make herself smaller, dragging her knees into her stomach, her elbows across her chest, but she couldn’t shut out what she was told.

The father said, “Of course, we know of the Triangle of Death – we’ve read about it – but we don’t talk about it. In Marigliano, Acerra and Nola we’re familiar with its mortality statistics, and the criminality of the Camorra in our town. They are paid to dispose of chemical waste – and dump it in fields, orchards and streams. That is what the Camorra, those foul gangsters, do. For two decades – starting long before we knew of it – the ground and water table were contaminated with poison so that the camorra could get richer. They and their families have the scruples and greed of whores. You are part of a family so you’re guilty too.”

The mother said, “They found her platelet count was low. They took a sample of bone marrow to evaluate her condition, but there was no need to do any tests because that first evening her condition was obvious. First, she had an agonising headache until she lost consciousness. We were in a ward of twenty beds, most occupied, and had just a curtain for privacy as we watched the team struggle to save her life. We could see that they it was hopeless because they work in the Triangle and had been in such situations many times before. A neuro-surgeon was called, but

she died in front of us. They tried to resuscitate her, but within forty minutes she was gone, snatched from us in a public ward, festooned with cables and breathing aids. There was no opportunity for us to comfort her, or send for the priest because that day he had gone to Naples to buy shoes. Her death hurt too much for us to weep. We were so unprepared.”

The words rang in her head. She knew now that they would not kick her again. They would have seen her hands trembling as she covered her breasts and clutched the shredded blouse.

He said, “A doctor told me she could have contracted the disease as much as a decade earlier, swimming in a stream, playing in long grass in a field or under the trees in an orchard . . .”

She said, “I used to take her to the fields and the stream behind our home. She would swim, splash, play, then roll in the grass to dry herself. While I watched her, laughed, and thought of her as a gift from God, she was being poisoned.”

The father said, “The doctor told me that the farmland around Nola and the water table are saturated with dioxins. If I wanted to know more, I was told, I should see the *carabinieri* . . . I didn’t think they’d speak to me. But yesterday I saw a *maresciallo* – I teach his son. He told me of the camorra’s criminal clans who make vast profits from dumping chemicals in this area: they call them the eco-Mafia. He said the clan leader in Nola had sub-contracted the transportation of waste materials from the north to the Borellis from Naples. I believed him. You’ve prostituted yourself for greed. Go.”

The mother said, “There’s evil in your blood, but I doubt you’re capable of self-disgust or shame. Your presence here is an intrusion. Go.”

In all of her life, Immacolata had never before been spoken to in such a fashion. She couldn’t meet their eyes but kept her head low as she bent to pick up the destroyed flowers.

She passed a young man with a tidy haircut and a suit but no mourner’s tie. He wore dark glasses and she couldn’t read his expression. She made her way out of the cemetery. She had known for a decade and a half that her father dealt in long-distance heavy-