

## MARIO PUZO

*Before Mario Puzo (1920– ) produced his bestseller The Godfather, he wrote probably the single best novel about Italian-American life, The Fortunate Pilgrim. The book's first chapter conveys, without a shred of sentimentality, the immigrant generation's stubborn existence in New York as urban villagers, close-knit and suspicious of the American ways that would inevitably erode their communal ties.*

### FROM THE FORTUNATE PILGRIM

LARRY ANGELUZZI spurred his jet black horse proudly through a canyon formed by two great walls of tenements, and at the foot of each wall, marooned on their separate blue-slate sidewalks, little children stopped their games to watch him with silent admiration. He swung his red lantern in a great arc; sparks flew from the iron hoofs of his horse as they rang on railroad tracks, set flush in the stones of Tenth Avenue, and slowly following horse, rider and lantern came the long freight train, inching its way north from St. John's Park terminal on Hudson Street.

In 1928 the New York Central Railroad used the streets of the city to shuttle trains north and south, sending scouts on horseback to warn traffic. In a few more years this would end, an overhead pass built. But Larry Angeluzzi, not knowing he was the last of the "dummy boys," that he would soon be a tiny scrap of urban history, rode as straight and arrogantly as any western cowboy. His spurs were white, heavy sneakers, his sombrero a peaked cap studded with union buttons. His blue dungarees were fastened at the ankle with shiny, plated bicycle clips.

He cantered through the hot summer night, his desert a city of stone. Women gossiped on wooden boxes, men puffed cigars of the De Nobili while standing on street corners, children risked their lives in dangerous play, leaving their blue-slate islands to climb on the moving freight train. All moved in the smoky yellow light of lamp posts and the naked white-hot bulbs of candy-store windows.

### THE FORTUNATE PILGRIM

At every intersection a fresh breeze from Twelfth Avenue, concrete bank of the Hudson River, refreshed horse and rider, cooled the hot black engine that gave warning hoots behind them.

At 27th Street the wall on Larry Angeluzzi's right fell away for a whole block. In the cleared space was Chelsea Park packed with dark squatting shapes, kids sitting on the ground to watch the free outdoor movies shown by Hudson Guild Settlement House. On the distant giant white screen, Larry Angeluzzi saw a monstrous horse and rider, bathed in false sunlight, thundering down upon him, felt his own horse rise in alarm as its tossing head caught sight of those great ghosts; and then they were past the intersection of 28th Street, and the wall had sprung up again.

Larry was nearly home. There was the pedestrian bridge that spanned Tenth Avenue on 30th Street; when he passed beneath that bridge he would be home, his work done. He set his cap at a jauntier angle, rode straight in the saddle. All the people sitting on the sidewalk from 30th to 31st Streets were relatives and friends. Larry made his horse gallop.

He passed swiftly beneath the bridge, waved to the children leaning on its rails above his head. He made his horse rear up for the people on the sidewalk on his right, then turned the animal left into the open railroad yards that formed a great spark-filled plain of steel down to the Hudson River.

Behind him the huge black engine chugged white clouds of steam, and as if by magic, the bridge and its children vanished, leaving behind them thin beautiful screams of delight rising to the pale, almost invisible stars. The freight train curved into the yards, the bridge reappeared, and scores of damp children hurtled down the stairways to run along the Avenue.

Larry tied his horse to the hitching post by the switchman's shanty and sat on the bench against the shanty wall. On the other side of the Avenue, painted on a flat screen, the familiar world he loved came alive inch by inch.

The brightly lit bakery was near the corner of 30th Street, its festooned lemon-ice stand surrounded by children. The Panettiere himself filled white-ridged paper cups with cherry-red, pale-yellow and

glittering-white crystals of ice. He scooped generous portions, for he was rich and even went to race tracks to squander his money.

Next to the bakery, toward 31st Street, was the grocery, its window filled with yellow logs of provolone in shiny, waxy skins and prosciutto hams, meaty triangles hanging in gaily colored paper. Then there was the barber shop closed for business but open for card playing, the jealous barber even now alert for any freshly cut heads that did not bear the mark of his scissors. Children covered the pavement, busy as ants, women, almost invisible in black, made little dark mounds before each tenement door. From each mound a buzzing hum of angry gossip rose to the summer, starry sky.

The dwarf-like switchman came from the tracks and said, "No more trains tonight, kid." Larry unhitched his horse, mounted, then made the animal turn and rear up.

As the horse rose in the air, the row of tenements, the western wall of the great city, billowed, tilted toward Larry like some fragile canvas. In the open window of his own home, on the top floor of the tenement directly opposite, Larry saw the dark shape of what must be his little brother Vincent. Larry waved but there was no answering motion until he waved again. In the wall there were only a few scattered panes of yellow light. Everyone was down on the street, everyone was watching him. He struck his horse across the neck and galloped up the cobblestones of Tenth Avenue to the stable on 36th Street.

Earlier that evening, in twilight, when Larry Angeluzzi saddled his horse in St. John's Park, his mother, Lucia Santa Angeluzzi-Corbo, also mother of Octavia and Vincenzo Angeluzzi, widow of Anthony Angeluzzi, now wife of Frank Corbo and mother of his three children, by name Gino, Salvatore and Aileen, prepared to leave her empty flat, escape the choking summer heat, spend her evening with neighbors in quarreling gossip, and most of all, to guard her children playing in the darkness of the city streets.

Lucia Santa was at ease tonight, for summer was the good time—the children never ill with colds or fevers, no worries about warm coats, gloves, boots for the winter snow and extra money for

school supplies. Everyone rushed through supper to escape the airless rooms and move with the tide of life in the streets; there were no evening quarrels. The house was easily kept clean since it was always empty. But, best of all for Lucia Santa, her own evenings were free; the street was a meeting place and summer was a time when neighbors became friends. So now, heavy jet black hair combed into a bun, wearing a clean black dress, she picked up the backless kitchen chair and went down the four flights of stairs to sit on the Avenue.

Each tenement was a village square; each had its group of women, all in black, sitting on stools and boxes and doing more than gossip. They recalled ancient history, argued morals and social law, always taking their precedents from the mountain village in southern Italy they had escaped, fled from many years ago. And with what relish their favorite imaginings! Now: What if their stern fathers were transported by some miracle to face the problems *they* faced every day? Or their mothers of the quick and heavy hands? What shrieks if *they* as daughters had dared as these American children dared? If *they* had presumed.

The women talked of their children as they would of strangers. It was a favorite topic, the corruption of the innocent by the new land. Now: Felicia, who lived around the corner of 31st Street. What type of daughter was she who did not cut short her honeymoon on news of her godmother's illness, the summons issued by her own mother? A real whore. No no, they did not mince words. Felicia's mother herself told the story. And a son, poor man, who could not wait another year to marry when his father so commanded? Ahhh, the disrespect. *Figlio disgraziato*. Never could this pass in Italy. The father would kill his arrogant son; yes, kill him. And the daughter? In Italy—Felicia's mother swore in a voice still trembling with passion, though this had all happened three years ago, the godmother recovered, the grandchildren the light of her life—ah, in Italy the mother would pull the whore out of her bridal chamber, drag her to the hospital bed by the hair of her head. Ah, Italia, Italia; how the world changed and for the worse. What madness was it that made them

leave such a land? Where fathers commanded and mothers were treated with respect by their children.

Each in turn told a story of insolence and defiance, themselves heroic, long-suffering, the children spitting Lucifers saved by an application of Italian discipline—the razor strop or the *Tackeril*. And at the end of each story each woman recited her requiem. *Mannaggia America!*—Damn America. But in the hot summer night their voices were filled with hope, with a vigor never sounded in their homeland. Here now was money in the bank, children who could read and write, grandchildren who would be professors if all went well. They spoke with guilty loyalty of customs they had themselves trampled into dust.

The truth: These country women from the mountain farms of Italy, whose fathers and grandfathers had died in the same rooms in which they were born, these women loved the clashing steel and stone of the great city, the thunder of trains in the railroad yards across the street, the lights above the Palisades far across the Hudson. As children they had lived in solitude, on land so poor that people scattered themselves singly along the mountain slopes to search out a living.

Audacity had liberated them. They were pioneers, though they never walked an American plain and never felt real soil beneath their feet. They moved in a sadder wilderness, where the language was strange, where their children became members of a different race. It was a price that must be paid.

In all this Lucia Santa was silent. She waited for her friend and ally, Zia Louche. She rested, gathering up her strength for the long hours of happy quarreling that lay ahead. It was still early evening, and they would not return to their homes before midnight. The rooms would not be cool before then. She folded her hands in her lap and turned her face to the gentle breeze that blew from the river below Twelfth Avenue.

A small, round, handsome woman, Lucia Santa stood at the height of her powers in health, mental and physical; courageous and without fear of life and its dangers. But not foolhardy, not reckless. She was strong, experienced, wary and alert, well-equipped for the

great responsibility of bringing a large family to adulthood and freedom. Her only weakness was a lack of that natural cunning and shrewdness which does so much more for people than virtue.

When she was only seventeen, over twenty years ago, Lucia Santa had left her home in Italy. She traveled the three thousand miles of dark ocean to a strange country and a strange people and began a life with a man she had known only when they had played together as innocent children.

Shaking her head at her own madness, yet with pride, she often told the story.

There had come a time when her father, with stern pity, told her, his favorite daughter, that she could not hope for bridal linen. The farm was too poor. There were debts. Life promised to be even harder. There it was. There could be found only a husband witless with love.

In that moment she had lost all respect for her father, for her home, for her country. A bride without linen was shameful, shameful as a bride rising from an unbloodied nuptial bed; worse, for there could be no recourse to slyness, no timing of the bridal night near the period of flood. And even that men had forgiven. But what man would take a woman with the stigma of hopeless poverty?

Only the poor can understand the shame of poverty, greater than the shame of the greatest sinner. For the sinner, vanquished by his own other self, is in one sense the victor. But the poor are truly vanquished: by their world, by their *padrones*, by fortune and by time. They are beggars always in need of charity. To the poor who have been poor for centuries, the nobility of honest toil is a legend. Their virtues lead them to humiliation and shame.

But Lucia Santa was helpless, though her sulky, adolescent rage endured. Then a letter from America; a boy from the neighboring farm, her companion when they were both little children, wrote and asked her to join him in the new land. It was all done correctly through both fathers. Lucia Santa tried to remember the boy's face.

And so one sunny Italian day Lucia Santa and two other village maidens were escorted to the town hall and then to the church by their weeping parents, aunts, and sisters. The three girls went on

board ship, brides by proxy, sailing from Naples to New York, by law Americans.

In a dream Lucia Santa entered a land of stone and steel, bedded that same night with a stranger who was her legal husband, bore that stranger two children, and was pregnant with the third when he carelessly let himself be killed in one of those accidents that were part of the building of the new continent. She accepted all this without self-pity. She lamented, true, but that was not the same thing; she only begged fate for mercy.

So then, a pregnant widow, still young, with no one to turn to, she never succumbed to terror, despair. She had an enormous strength, not unusual in women, to bear adversity. But she was not a stone. Fate did not make her bitter; that was left to friends and neighbors—these very neighbors who so intimately shared the summer night.

Ahh, the young wives, the young mothers, all the other young Italian women in a strange land. What cronies they were. How they ran to each other's apartments, up and down the stairs, into the adjoining tenements. "*Cara Lucia Santa, taste this special dish*"—a platter of new sausage, Easter pie with wheat germ and clotted cheese and a crust glazed with eggs, or plump ravioli for a family saint's day, with a special meat and tomato sauce. What flutters, what compliments and cups of coffee and confidences and promises to be godmother to the yet-to-be-born infant. But after the tragedy, after the initial pity and condolences, the true face of the world showed itself to Lucia Santa.

Greetings were cold, doors were shut, prospective godmothers disappeared. Who wished to be friendly with a young, full-blooded widow? Husbands were weak, there would be calls for assistance. In the tenements life was close; a young woman without a man was dangerous. She could draw off money and goods as the leech draws blood. They were not malicious; they showed only the prudence of the poor, so easy to mock when there is no understanding of the fear which is its root.

One friend stood fast. Zia Louche, an old, childless widow, came

to help, stood godmother when the fatherless Vincenzo was born and bought her godson a beautiful gold watch when he was confirmed so that Lucia Santa could hold up her head; for such a magnificent present was a mark of respect and faith. But Zia Louche was the only one, and when mourning time had passed Lucia Santa saw the world with new and wiser eyes.

Time healed the wounds and now they were all friends again. Perhaps—who knows?—the young widow had been too harsh in her judgment, for these same neighbors, true, in their own self-interest, helped her find a second husband who would feed and clothe her children. There was a marriage in church. These same neighbors gave her a glorious wedding-night feast. But Lucia Santa never let the world deceive her again.

And so on this heavy summer night, with her first batch of children grown and safe, her second batch of children no longer infants except for Lena, and with some money in the post office; now, after twenty years of struggle and a fair share of suffering, Lucia Santa Angeluzzi-Corbo stood on that little knoll of prosperity that the poor reach, reach with such effort that they believe the struggle is won and that with ordinary care their lives are safe. She had already lived a lifetime; the story was over.

Enough. Here came Zia Louche, completing the circle. Lucia Santa paid attention, prepared to enter the torrent of gossip. But she saw her daughter Octavia coming from the corner of 30th Street, past the *Panettiere* and his red glass box of pizza and pale tin cans of lemon ice. Then Lucia Santa lost sight of her daughter; for one blinding moment her eyes were filled by the *Panettiere's* wooden tub, brimming with red coppers and gleaming silver fishes of dimes and nickels. She felt a quick, hot surge of passionate anger that she could never possess such treasure and that the ugly baker should find fortune so kind. Then she saw the *Panettiere's* wife—old, mustached, no longer able to bear children—guarding that wooden tub of copper and silver, her wrinkled shell-lidded dragon eyes flashing fire in the summer night.

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their hips and thighs touched. This always irritated the mother, but her daughter would be offended if she moved, so she accepted it. Seeing her daughter so oddly handsome, dressed in the American style, she gave the old crone Zia Louche a smile that showed both her pride and a hint of derisive irony. Octavia, dutifully silent and attentive, saw that smile and understood it, yet she was bewildered once again by her mother's nature.

As if her mother could understand that Octavia wanted to be everything these women were not! With the foolish and transparent cleverness of the young, she wore a powder blue suit that hid her bust and squared the roundness of her hips. She wore white gloves, as her high school teacher had done. Her eyebrows were heavy and black, honestly unplucked. Hopelessly she compressed the full red lips to an imaginary sternness, her eyes quietly grave—and all to hide the drowning sensuality that had been the undoing of the women around her. For Octavia reasoned that satisfying the terrible dark need stilled all other needs and she felt a frightened pity for these women enchanted into dreamless slavery by children and the unknown pleasures of a marriage bed.

This would not be *her* fate. She sat with bowed head, listening, Judas-like; pretending to be one of the faithful, she planned treason and escape.

Now with only women around her, Octavia took off her jacket; the white blouse with its tiny red-ribboned tie was more seductive than she could ever know. No disguise could hide the full roundness of her bust. The sensual face, crown of blue-black curls and ringlets, great liquid eyes, all mocked the staidness of her dress. With malice she could not have made herself more provocative than she did in her innocence.

Lucia Santa took the jacket and folded it over her arm, an act of love that was maternal, that meant possession and dominance. But above all an act of reconciliation, for earlier that evening mother and daughter had quarreled.

Octavia wanted to go to night school, study to become a teacher. Lucia Santa refused permission. No; she would become ill working and going to school. "Why? Why?" the mother asked. "You, such a

beautiful dressmaker, you earn good money." The mother objected out of superstition. This course was known. Life was unlucky, you followed a new path at your peril. You put yourself at the mercy of fate. Her daughter was too young to understand.

Unexpectedly, shamefacedly, Octavia had said, "I want to be happy," and the older woman became a raging fury, contemptuous—the mother, who had always defended her daughter's toity ways, her reading of books, her tailored suits that were as affected as a lorgnette. The mother had mimicked Octavia in the perfect English of a shallow girl, "You want to be happy." And then in Italian, with deadly seriousness, "Thank God you are alive."

In the cool evening air Octavia accepted her mother's act of peace, sat gracefully, hands folded in her lap. Remembering the quarrel, she mused on the mystery of her mother's speaking perfect English when mimicking her children. Out of the corner of her eye Octavia saw Guido, the dark son of the *Panettiere*, wavering through the warm summer night toward the light of her white blouse. In his dark, strong hand he bore a tall paper cup of fruit ice, lemon and orange, which he gave her, almost bowing, whispering hurriedly something that sounded like "Don't spoil your shirt," and then hurrying back to the stand to help his father. Octavia smiled, took a few mouthfuls out of politeness, and passed the cup to her mother, who had a passion for ices and sucked on the cup, greedy as a child. The buzz of the old women's voices went on.

Her stepfather turned the corner of 31st Street and entered the Avenue, wheeling the baby carriage before him. Octavia watched him go from 31st Street to 30th and back again. And as her mother's irony bewildered her, this tenderness of the stepfather confused her emotions. For she hated him as someone cruel, villainous, evil. She had seen him give blows to her mother, act the tyrant to his stepchildren. In the faded memories of Octavia's childhood his courting of her mother followed too swiftly the day of her real father's death.

She wanted to look at the sleeping baby, the little sister she loved passionately, though she was her stepfather's child. But she could not bear speaking to the man, looking into his cold blue eyes and harsh

angular face. She knew her stepfather hated her as she hated him and that each feared the other. He had never dared strike her as he sometimes struck Vinnie. And she would not have minded his blows to his stepson if he had been paternal in other ways. But he brought presents for Gino and Sal and Aileen and never for Vincent, though Vincent was a child still. She hated him because he never took Vincent for walks or haircuts with his natural children. She feared him because he was strange—the evil mysterious stranger of story books, the blue-eyed Italian with the Mephistophelean face; and yet she knew that really he was an illiterate peasant, a poor, contemptible immigrant who gave himself airs. One day she had seen him on the subway pretending to read a newspaper. She had rushed to tell her mother, laughing, contemptuous. Her mother had only given her a curious smile and said nothing.

But now one of the black-clad women was telling a story about a villainous young Italian girl (born in America, naturally). Octavia attended. "Yes, yes," the woman said. "They were married for a month, they had finished with their honeymoon. Oh, she loved him. She sat on his lap in his mother's home. When they visited she played with his hand. Like this—" two gnarled hands with warty fingers linked themselves lovingly, obscenely, in the storyteller's lap—"and then they went to dance, in the church. The foolishness of those young priests who do not even speak Italian! Her husband won a prize for entering the door. He took the prize and dropped to the earth, dead. His poor heart, he was always sickly. His mother had always warned him, cared for him. But now. The young bride, dancing with another man, is told. Does she rush to the side of her beloved? She shrieks. She cries, 'No, no. I cannot.' She fears death like a child, not a woman. The loved one lies in his own piss, alone, but *she* no longer loves him. She cries out, 'No, I will not look at it.'"

Slyly Zia Louche, her tongue rolling up both meanings, said, "Ah! You may be sure she looked at It when It was alive." A great burst of coarse laughter from all the women filled the Avenue, drawing jealous looks from other circles of women. Octavia was disgusted, angry that even her mother was smiling with delight.

To more serious things. Lucia Santa and Zia Louche stood fast against the rest of the circle on a point of ancient history, the exact details of a scandal twenty years ago across the sea in Italy. It amused Octavia to see her mother defer to Zia Louche, and the old crone valiantly do battle for her mother, each of them treating the other like a duchess. Her mother turning to Zia Louche and asking respectfully, "*E vero, Comare?*" And Zia Louche always answering imperiously, "*Sì, Signora,*" showing no callow familiarity before the others. Octavia knew the relationship behind this, her mother's gratitude for that valuable alliance in the hour of her most terrible misfortune.

But the quarrel was too finely drawn and Octavia became bored. She got up to look at her baby half sister, staring down at the carriage, not greeting her stepfather. She gazed down at the baby girl with an overwhelming tenderness, an emotion she did not even feel for Vincent. Then she walked toward the corner of 31st Street to look for Gino, saw him playing, saw little Sal sitting on the curb. She took Sal back to his mother. Vinnie was missing. Looking up, she saw him far above her, sitting on the window sill of the apartment, dark, motionless, guarding them all.

Frank Corbo, somber, watched his big stepdaughter lean over his baby. Strange with blue eyes, object of amusement (what Italian male wheeled his baby in the summer night?), illiterate, his mind mute, he saw the beauty of the stone city in darkness, felt the hatred of his stepdaughter without returning hatred. The harsh thin face concealed a wordless and consuming anguish. His life was a dream of beauty felt and not understood, of love twisted into cruelty. Countless treasures went by like shadows, the world was locked away. In search of deliverance, he would leave the city tonight and desert his family. In the early morning hours, while it was still dark, he would meet a farm truck and disappear without a word, without quarreling or giving blows. He would work in the brown and green fields of summer, gain peace from love, restore his strength.

He suffered. He suffered as a deaf mute suffers who would sing seeing beauty, who cannot cry out in pain. He felt love and could not give caresses. There were too many people sleeping in the rooms around him, too many beings walked the streets around him. He

dreamed terrible dreams. Tapestryed on black, his wife and children circled him round, and from their foreheads each drew a dagger. He had cried out.

It was late, late; the children should be in bed, but it was still too hot. Frank Corbo watched his son Gino run crazily in some sort of tagging game incomprehensible to the father, as was the child's American speech, as were the books and newspapers, the colors of the night sky, the beauty of the summer night and all the joys of the world he felt cut off from, all colored with pain. The world was a great mystery. Vast dangers that others could guard their children against would bring him and his loved ones into the dust. They would teach his children to hate him.

But still, the father, never knowing he would be saved, wheeled the carriage back and forth. Not knowing that deep down in his blood, in the tiny mysterious cells of his brain, a new world was forming. Slowly, day by day, pain by pain, beauty by lost beauty, the walls of the world he feared so much were crumbling in the timelessness of his mind, and in a year a new fantastic world would spring up, himself the god and king, his enemies startled and afraid, his loved ones forever lost and yet that loss of love not felt or mourned. A world of such chaotic pain that he would be drowned in ecstasy, mystery and fear banished. He would be free.

But it was like magic, and no hint nor warning could come beforehand. Now, this night, he put his trust in one summer of tilling the earth, as he had done so long ago, a boy in Italy.

The world has a special light for children, and sounds are magical. Gino Corbo moved through the clang of engines, circles of mellow lamp-post lights, heard young girls laughing, and played his game so intently that his head ached. He ran back and forth across 31st Street, trying to capture other children or surround them. But someone always backed against a wall, hand outstretched. Once Gino was trapped, but a taxi cut his opponents off and he ran back to his own sidewalk. He saw his father watching and ran to him shouting, "Gimme a penny for lemon ice." Snatching the coin, he ran along Tenth Avenue and planned a beautiful trick. He tried to run

past his mother and her friends. Zia Louche grabbed his arm and pulled him off his feet, her bony fingers a trap of steel.

His dazed, impatient eyes saw a circle of old women's faces, some hairy and mustached. Frantic to be away, afraid the game would end, Gino tried to run. Zia Louche held him like a fly, saying, "Rest—sit with your mother and rest. You'll be sick tomorrow. Feel how your heart is beating." And she put her withered claw upon his chest. He pulled violently. The old crone held him and said with ferocious love, "*Eh, come è faccia brutta.*" He understood she was calling him ugly, and that made him still. He stared at the circle of women. They were laughing, but Gino did not know they laughed with delight at his fierce desire, his blazing eyes.

He spat at Zia Louche, the fake spit of Italian women that shows contempt in a quarrel. It got him free, and he was so quick that his mother hit his face only a glancing blow as he sped away. Around the corner, along 30th Street to Ninth Avenue, up the Avenue to 31st Street, and then through 31st Street to Tenth Avenue he would go; having traveled the four sides of the city block, he would swoop into the game out of the darkness and with one masterly stroke shatter the enemy.

But as he ran full speed toward Ninth Avenue, a line of alien boys formed a wall against him. Gino pumped his legs higher and faster and burst through, shattered them. Clutching hands tore his shirt, the wind rushed against his face. On Ninth Avenue the boys came after him, but when he turned into the darkness at the top of 31st Street they did not dare to follow. Gino stopped running and walked softly along the stoops. He was on the final side of the square and below him, at the foot of the street, near Tenth Avenue, painted into the dim yellow cones of light cast by lamp posts, his friends scurried to and fro like little black rats, still playing. He was in time.

He rested in darkness and then went very softly, slowly, down the street. In a basement room he saw a little girl leaning against a wall half white, half electric blue. She rested her head against her arm upon the wall, hiding her eyes from the cold, artificial light of the room, empty, deserted behind her. Gino knew she was playing hide



and seek, not crying, and that if he waited, the deserted room would come magically alive with shrieking girls. But he did not stop, not knowing he would always remember the girl alone, hiding her eyes against a blue and white wall; desolate, never changing, as if by not stopping he left her there forever, enchanted. He went on.

A dim patch of light made him pause. He shivered. Sitting at the window, leaning out of her street-level flat, an old Irish crone rested her head on a furry pillow and watched him move past her down the empty silent street. In that weak yellow light her head was bony with age, her thin, whiskered mouth bloody with the light of a holy red candle. Behind that feral face, faintly visible in the shadows of her room, a vase, a lamp, and a graven image gleamed like old bones. Gino stared at her. The teeth bared in greeting. Gino ran.

Now he could hear the shouts of his friends; he was near the circles of light on Tenth Avenue. He crouched on the steps of a cellar, hidden, powerful, ready to strike. He never thought to be afraid of the dark basement below or of the night. He forgot his mother's anger. He existed only for this moment and the moment he would enter the pool of light and shatter it.

High over Tenth Avenue, Gino Corbo's half brother, Vincenzo Angeluzzi, thirteen years old, brooded to the softened, whispery sound of the summer night that floated up to him. He brooded on his window sill, the long line of rooms behind him dark and empty, the door from the hall to the kitchen securely locked. He was self-exiled.

The dream of summer, freedom, and play had been taken from him. His mother had informed him that in the morning he would start working for the *Panettiere*, and work until school started in the fall. He would carry heavy baskets of bread in the hot sun while other boys swam in the river, played stickball and "Johnny Ride the Pony," and hitched onto the backs of trolley cars to see the city. There would be no sitting in the shade eating lemon ice or reading by the wall of Runkel's factory or playing "Bankers and Brokers" and "Seven-and-a-half" for pennies.

A watcher on the western wall of the city, everything weighed

down his soul and spirit, the wasteland of railroad yards, steel tracks, deserted box cars, engines giving off dirty red sparks and low hoots of warning. The Hudson was a black ribbon beneath the cragged Jersey shore.

He dozed on his window sill, and the babel of voices rose like a faint shout. Far down the Avenue he saw the red lantern of a dummy boy leading his freight train from St. John's Park. The children below him played on, and Vincent waited with gloomy satisfaction for their shouts of joy, savoring his bitterness at not sharing their pleasure. And then the children were screaming and scrambling up the steps of the bridge to wait for the damp cloud of steam that would make them invisible.

Vincent was too young to know that he was melancholy by nature, that this distressed his sister Octavia so that she brought him presents and candy. When he was a toddling infant Octavia used to take him into her bed, tell him stories, and sing songs so that he would go to sleep with a remembrance of smiles. But nothing could change his nature.

Below, he could hear Zia Louche quarreling shrilly and his mother's strong voice supporting her. The resentment came that this old crone was his godmother and that the five-dollar gold piece she gave him every birthday must be paid for with a kiss—a kiss he gave only to make his mother happy. He thought his mother beautiful, though she was fat and always dressed in black, and he always obeyed her.

But Zia Louche, ever since he could remember, had made him hate her. Long ago when he played on the kitchen floor between his mother's feet, Zia Louche would study him. The two women would be talking violently, without their public formality, recalling with gusto their misfortunes through the years. There would be a silence. The two women would look at him thoughtfully, sipping coffee. Then Zia Louche would sigh through age-browned teeth and say with hopeless, angry pity to the little boy, "Ah, *miserabile, miserabile*. Your father died before you were born."

That was the climax; the old crone went on to other things, leaving him bewildered and watching his mother's face go pale and her

eyes turn red. She would reach down to touch him, but she never spoke.

Down in the street Vincent saw his sister Octavia get up to look at the baby. He hated her, too. She had betrayed him. She had not protested their mother's sending him to work. Then the dummy boy rode under the bridge, and Vincent saw his brother Larry riding like a real cowboy on a black horse.

Even from so far up he could hear a loud clatter of hoofs on cobblestones. The children disappeared and the bridge vanished in a cloud of steam from the engine. With a great shower of sparks, the train slid into the railroad yards.

It was late. The night air had cooled the city. His mother and the other women picked up their stools and crates, called to husbands and children. His stepfather wheeled the baby to the tenement door. It was time to get ready for bed.

Vincent left his window sill and went back through the bedrooms to the kitchen. He unlocked the door to the hallway, opening the house for his family. Then he took the thigh-sized loaf of Italian bread and sliced off three thick, crusty chunks. Over these he poured red wine vinegar, then thick, yellow-green olive oil. He stood back and scattered salt over all three, inspecting them with a satisfied air. The coarse bread was a lovely red dotted with blots of greasy green. Gino and Sal would be delighted with this bedtime snack. They would all eat together. He waited. From the street, through windows still open and coming down the corridor of rooms between, he heard Gino's voice in a loud continuous scream.

That scream froze Lucia Santa with the baby in her arms. Octavia, on the corner of 30th Street, turned toward 31st. Across the Avenue Larry wheeled around on his horse. The father, his temples bursting with fear, started to run and curse. But the child's scream was one of hysterical triumph. Gino had shot out of the darkness and circled his enemies and was screaming, "Burn the city, burn the city, burn the city." So ending the game, he could not stop screaming the magic words or stop running. He aimed himself at his mother's enormous menacing figure with great leaps into the air, re-

membered his insult to Zia Louche, and swerved away, through the door and up the stairs.

Lucia Santa, with every intention of striking him to the ground, stood overwhelmed by a fierce pride and tenderness at her child's wild joy, the spirit that she must some day break. She let him pass unharmed.

The Neapolitan Italians dissolved from the dark streets and left the city to the clatter of hoofs on cobblestones as Larry Angeluzzi galloped his horse to the stable on 35th Street.