

THE TRUTH ACCORDING TO PARVIZ MANSOOR SAMADI

A few days ago—it was barely eight o'clock in the morning—sitting in the metro, rubbing my eyes and fighting sleep because I'd woken up so early, I saw an Italian girl devouring a pizza as big as an umbrella. I felt so sick to my stomach I almost threw up. Thank goodness she got out at the next stop. It was really a disgusting sight! The law should punish people who feel free to disturb the peace of good citizens going to work in the morning and home at night. The damage caused by people eating pizza in the metro is a lot worse than the damage caused by cigarettes. I hope that the proper authorities do not underestimate this sensitive issue and will proceed immediately to put up signs like “Pizza Eating Prohibited,” next to the ones that are so prominent at the metro entrances saying “No Smoking!” I would just like to know how Italians manage to consume such a ridiculous amount of dough morning and evening.

My hatred for pizza is beyond compare, but that doesn't mean that I hate everyone who eats it. I'd like things to be clear right from the start: I don't hate the Italians.

What I'm saying is not beside the point—far from it. I really am talking about Amedeo. Please be patient with me. As you know, Amedeo is my only friend in Rome, in fact he's more than a friend—it's no exaggeration to say that I love

him the way I love my brother Abbas. I really love Amedeo, even though he's a pizza addict. As you see, my hatred for pizza doesn't come from hostility toward Italians.

In fact, it's not important whether Amedeo is Italian or not. My concern is to avoid at all costs the consequences of my aversion to pizza. For example, a few weeks ago I was fired from my job as a dishwasher in a restaurant near Piazza Navona when the owner happened to find out that I hate pizza. Bastards. An outrage like that, and there are still people who maintain that freedom of taste, expression, and religion, not to mention democracy, are guaranteed in this country! I would like to know: does the law punish pizza-haters? If the answer is yes, we've got a real scandal here; if the answer is no, then I am entitled to compensation.

Don't be in such a hurry. Allow me to tell you that your biggest failing is hurry. Your watchword is impatience. You drink coffee the way cowboys drink whiskey. Coffee is like tea, you should avoid gulping it down—it should be sipped. Amedeo is like hot tea on a cold day. No, Amedeo is like the taste of fruit at the end of a meal, after you've had bruschetta with tomatoes or olives, then the notorious first course, which includes all those different pastas I can't stand, like spaghetti and company (ravioli, fettuccine, lasagna, fusilli, orecchiette, rigatoni, and so on), and finally the second course, of meat or fish with side dishes of vegetables. All things I've gotten to know from my occasional jobs in Italian restaurants. I really love fruit, so don't be surprised if I compare Amedeo to fruit. Let's say Amedeo is as sweet as a grape. The juice of the grape is so good!

It's pointless to persist with this question: is Amedeo Italian? Whatever the answer is, it won't solve the problem. But then who is Italian? Only someone who was born in Italy,

has an Italian passport and identity card, knows the language, has an Italian name, and lives in Italy? As you see, the question is very complicated. I'm not saying that Amedeo is an enigma. Rather, he's like a poem by Omar Khayyam: you need a lifetime to understand its meaning, and only then will your heart open to the world and tears warm your cold cheeks. Now, at least, it's enough for you to know that Amedeo knows Italian better than millions of Italians scattered like locusts to the four corners of the earth. I'm not drunk. I didn't mean to offend you.

I don't despise locusts; in fact, I respect them, because they procure their food with dignity—they don't count on anyone. And then it's certainly not my fault if the Italians like to travel and to emigrate. Even today I'm amazed when I hear speeches by certain Italian politicians on the news and on television programs. Take, for example, Roberto Bossosso.

You don't know who Roberto Bossosso is? He's the leader of the Forza Nord party, which considers all Muslim immigrants enemies. Every time I hear his voice, I'm assailed by doubts; I look around in bewilderment and ask the first person I see, "That language Bossosso speaks—is that really Italian?" Up to now I haven't gotten any satisfactory answers. Often people will say to me: "You don't know Italian," or "First, you have to learn the language better," or "Sorry, but your Italian is very poor." Usually I hear these poisonous phrases when I'm looking for work as a restaurant cook and in the end they shunt me into the kitchen to wash dishes. "It seems that the only thing you know how to do, dear Parviz, is wash dishes!" Stefania likes to provoke me and tease me like that. There's no question that she's disappointed in me, since she was the first person who taught me Italian, or, to be more precise, tried to teach me. I'm not

Amedeo, that's as clear as a star in the peaceful sky of Shiraz. But I'm sorry to inform you that I'm not the only one who doesn't know Italian in this country. I've worked in restaurants in Rome with a lot of young Neapolitans, Calabrians, and Sicilians, and I've discovered that our language level is about the same. Mario, the cook in the restaurant at the Termini station, wasn't wrong when he said: "Remember, Parviz, we're all foreigners in this city!" I've never in my life seen anyone like Mario: he drinks wine like water, and it has no effect on him.

O.K., I'll tell you about Mario the Neapolitan some other time. Now you want to know everything about Amedeo—that is, start dinner with dessert? As you wish. The customer is king. I still remember the first time I saw him. He was sitting in one of the desks in the first row near the blackboard. I approached; there was an empty seat near his, I smiled and sat down next to him after saying the only Italian word I knew—"Ciao!" This word is really helpful, you use it when you're saying hello to someone and when you're saying goodbye. There's another word that's just as important: cock. It's used to express rage and to calm down, and males don't have a monopoly on it. Even Benedetta, the old concierge, uses it all the time, without embarrassment. Speaking of which, old Benedetta is the concierge of the building where Amedeo lives, in Piazza Vittorio. This wretched woman has a nasty habit of lurking near the elevator, ready to pick a fight with anyone who wants to use it. I adore the elevator, I don't take it because I'm lazy—I meditate in it. You press the button without any effort, you go up or descend, it could even break down while you're inside. It's exactly like life, full of breakdowns. Now you're up, now you're down. I was up . . . in Paradise . . . in Shiraz,

living happily with my wife and children, and now I'm down . . . in Hell, suffering from homesickness. The elevator is a tool for meditation. As I told you, it's a practice I'm used to: going up and coming down is a mental exercise like yoga. Unfortunately Benedetta watches me like a cantankerous cat, and as soon as I set foot in the elevator she yells at me: "*Guaglio'! Guaglio'!*"¹

"*Guaglio*" is Benedetta's favorite word. As you know, *guaglio'* means "fuck" in Neapolitan. At least, that's what a lot of Neapolitans I've worked with have told me. Every time she sees me head for the elevator she starts shouting, "*Guaglio'! Guaglio'! Guaglio'!*" In Iran, it's customary to show respect for old people and avoid bad words. That's why, instead of answering the insult with another insult, I confine myself to a brief response: "*Merci!*" I leave and go away without looking at her. By the way, you know that *merci* is a French word that means "thank you"? Amedeo told me, he knows French well.

I met him at a free Italian class for immigrants in Piazza Vittorio. I had just arrived in Rome. Amedeo was different from the others because he went to all of Stefania's classes, he didn't miss a single one. At first I didn't understand why he was so diligent and so good. But passion is like the shining sun and no one can resist its rays, passion is youth's best friend. There's a Persian proverb that goes: youth is as intoxicating as wine. A few months later Amedeo decided to go and live with Stefania in her apartment, which overlooks the gardens of Piazza Vittorio, and he also stopped coming to school, since he didn't need lessons for beginners, the way I did. But we stayed in touch; we met almost every day at Sandro's bar to have a cappuccino or a cup of tea. Sandro

¹Literally, "boy."

is a nice man, but he gets mad easily. All you have to say is “Go Lazio!” to make him furious, whereas if you’re a fan of the Rome team he treats you like an old friend. Once he asked me if there were any Rome fans in Iran, and not to disappoint him I said, “Of course,” and then he hugged me.

Obviously I also saw Amedeo at his house. I’m very fond of his small kitchen. It’s the only place that brings solace to my aching heart. When I think of my children, Shadi, Said, Surab, and Omar, and my wife, Zeinab, I get very sad. Where are they now? Wandering, I suppose, God knows where. How I wish I could kiss them and hug them. Only tears and these bottles of Chianti put out the fires of longing. I cry a lot and I drink even more, to forget my ordeals. I got into the habit of going every day to sit near the fountain across from the entrance to the church of Santa Maria Maggiore to feed the pigeons and cry. No one can take the Chianti away from me except Amedeo, he’s the only one who dares pull me out of the hell of my grief. He sits beside me in silence, lets me cry and drink for a few minutes, then suddenly he gets up as if a snake had bitten him, and says to me in a tone of confusion: “My God, we’re late! We have to make dinner, Stefania’s having a party. Did you forget, Parviz?” He always says the same words, in the same way, with the same seriousness. I look at him and laugh until I’m exhausted, laughing helps me breathe. In the meantime Amedeo confounds me with jokes so hilarious that we laugh like lunatics in front of the tourists. Before we go to his house we stop at Iqbal the Bangladeshi’s shop in Piazza Vittorio to buy what we need for the party: rice, chicken, spices, fruit, beer, and wine. I take a shower and change, and there is Amedeo opening the kitchen door: “Welcome to your kingdom, Shahryar, great sultan of Persia!” He closes

the door and leaves me alone for hours. I immediately start preparing Iranian dishes, like *gormeh sabzi* and *kubideh kebab*, *kashk badenjan* and *kateh*. The odors that fill the kitchen make me forget reality and I imagine that I've returned to my kitchen in Shiraz. After a while the perfume of the spices is transformed into incense, and this makes me dance and sing like a dervish, *ahi, ahi, ahi . . .* In a few minutes the kitchen is in a Sufi trance. When I finish cooking I open the door and find the guests waiting for me in the living room. Then the party begins.

Each of us has a place where we feel comfortable. For some it's a church, for some a mosque, a sanctuary, a movie theater, a stadium, a market. I feel comfortable in a kitchen. And it's not that surprising, because I'm a good cook. It's a skill that was handed down to me from my grandfather and my father. I'm not a dishwasher, as they say in the restaurants of Rome. In Shiraz I had a good restaurant. Damn those bastards who ruined me, in the blink of an eye I lost everything: family, house, restaurant, money. People keep telling me: "If you want to work as a chef in Italy you have to learn the secrets of Italian cooking." What can I do if I can't bear pizza and spaghetti and company? Anyway, it's pointless to learn Italian cooking. Soon I'm going back to Shiraz. I know I am.

I wonder why the Italian authorities continue to deny what all honest doctors know: pasta makes people fat, and causes obesity. The fat gradually starts to block the arteries until the poor heart stops beating. It even happened to Elvis. You remember how thin and handsome he was when he sang "*Baba bluma bib bab a blue . . .*" In those days, he ate rice every day, but then, unfortunately, he got used to pizza that he ordered in from the Italian restaurants in Hol-

lywood, because he didn't have time to cook, to sit down at the table and eat. Poor Elvis had too many commitments, and the result was that in a short time he got as fat as an elephant and died—the fat saturated his heart, his lungs, his eyes, his whole body. No one can contain that deluge of fat. I've warned Maria Cristina, the home health aide, not to eat pasta. When I met her two years ago, she was thin, too, then she got used to spaghetti and blew up like a hot-air balloon. Once I said to her, "Why have you abandoned your roots—isn't rice the favorite food of Filipinos?" Poor Maria Cristina, recently they decided to forbid her to use the elevator, out of fear she'd break it. "You weigh more than three people put together"—that's how they justified keeping her out. So why doesn't the ministry of health add to the labels of pasta packages the words "Seriously hazardous to your health"?

Amedeo is like a beautiful harbor from which we depart and to which we always return. When I'm sacked from a job I'm like a person who's been shipwrecked, and Amedeo's the only one who helps me out. He always says to me: "Don't worry, Parviz, come on, let's have a look at *Porta Portese*." And so we sit in Sandro's bar. Amedeo opens the paper and marks the important ads with a little x, then we go to his house to make the phone calls. I stare at him in astonishment, like a child looking at a rainbow. Amedeo is amazing. I listen to him speaking his elegant Italian. After a few phone calls he takes the *TuttoCittà*, the city guide, and glances at the pages to be sure of the exact street names, makes some notes in his notebook, and then looks at me and says, "The restaurants of Rome await you, Signor Parviz!" We go together to see the restaurant owners, and obviously I say nothing—I let Amedeo speak for me. He's so convinc-

ing, fantastic! Very often I start work that same day as an assistant cook, even if a few days later I'm packed off to wash dishes. It's hard for me to take orders in the kitchen. I hate being assistant cook, I prefer to wash dishes and put up with the pain in my back and a bit of arthritis rather than take orders: "Parvis, peel the onion!" "Parvis, put the water on!," "Parviz, prepare the pasta!," "Parviz, get the carrots from the refrigerator!," "Parviz, check the spaghetti!," "Parviz, wash the fruit!," "Parviz, clean the fish!" For me the kitchen is like a ship. Parviz Mansoor Samadi doesn't set foot on a ship unless he's in command, that's the truth. Amedeo always goes with me to any administrative proceeding, like renewing my residency permit, or dealing with other bureaucratic matters . . . When I went to the city offices by myself I'd lose control at the drop of a hat, and start shouting, and they'd throw me out every time like a mangy dog. They'd yell things like "If you come back here again we'll call the police!" I don't know why they always threaten to call the police!

Where is he now? Who knows. All I know is that Amedeo will leave a terrible hole in our lives. In fact, I can't imagine Rome without Amedeo. I still remember that wretched day in the police station on Via Genova, where I had gone to pick up the decision from the High Commissioner for Refugees. The words of the police inspector shocked me: "Your petition has been rejected, all you can do is appeal." I went into the first bar I came to on the street, bought some bottles of Chianti, I don't remember how many, and headed for Santa Maria Maggiore to sit near the fountain, as usual, but that time I went to drink and weep. I was devastated that my petition had been rejected, because I'm not a liar. I fled Shiraz because I was threat-

ened, if I go back to Iran there'll be a noose waiting for me. They took me for a fraud and a liar. But it had never crossed my mind to leave Iran. During the war against Iraq I fought in the front lines and was wounded several times. And then why would I abandon my children, my wife, my house, my restaurant, and Shiraz, except to avoid being killed! I'm a refugee, not an immigrant.

Ah no! This is an important fact, it has to do with my friend Amedeo. I told you, I wept for a long time, and I drank a lot of wine, and then I had a clever idea. I went back to the welcome center where I lived, got a needle and thread, and carried out my plan. I still remember the social worker's cries: "Oh my God, Parviz has sewed up his mouth!" "Oh God, Parviz has sewed up his mouth!" Many people intervened, they tried to persuade me to back down, but I refused. They called an ambulance, the doctor tried to make me stop, but it was useless. After several attempts, lasting for hours, they called the cops, who tried by every possible means to take me to the hospital. But I resisted with all my might. I closed my eyes and it seemed to me that I was sleeping near the mausoleum of Hafiz in Shiraz, the way I did as a child. I made a tremendous effort to convince myself that everything that was happening was just a bad dream or a delirium caused by alcohol. Then I opened my eyes to a policeman who was shouting and waving his club, saying: "Either you go to the emergency room on your own or we put you in a straitjacket and take you to the psychiatric ward." I said to myself, "The only way I'll move from here is inside a coffin." I closed my eyes again as if I were a corpse. At some point I felt a warm hand, and I struggled to open my eyes. In front of me I saw Amedeo. It was the first time I'd seen him cry. He embraced me the way a mother

embraces her child who's trembling with cold because he was caught by surprise in the rain on the way home from school. I cried for a long time in his arms, in a flood of tears. When I stopped, Amedeo went with me to the emergency room, where they removed the thread from my mouth, and with great difficulty I started to breathe again. Amedeo insisted that I spend the night at his house. The truth is that Amedeo is the only one in this city who loves me.

It's impossible! Amedeo a murderer! I will never believe what you're telling me. I know him the way I know the taste of Chianti and *gormeh sabzi*. I'm sure he's innocent. What does Amedeo have to do with that thug who pisses in the elevator? I saw him with my own eyes, I said to him: "This is not a public toilet." He gave me a look of such hatred and said, "If you say that again I'll piss in your mouth! You're in my house, you have no right to speak! Get it, you piece of shit?" And then he kept shouting at me, right in my face: "Italy for Italians! Italy for Italians!" I didn't want to argue with him, because he's crazy. Have you ever heard of a sane man who shamelessly pees in the elevator and is called the Gladiator? Frankly I wasn't sorry about his death. That Gladiator kid isn't the only lunatic in the building. Amedeo has a neighbor who calls her dog sweetheart! She treats him like a child, or a husband; in fact, once I heard her say that he sleeps next to her, in the same bed. Isn't that the height of madness? God created dogs to guard the flocks, to protect them from wolves and keep away thieves, not to sleep in the arms of women!

Look for the truth somewhere else. I'm suspicious of that young blond guy who lived in the same apartment with the Gladiator. He has to be a spy or an agent of some secret service. I've often seen him follow me and watch me from a

distance feeding the pigeons at Santa Maria Maggiore. Once he overwhelmed me with a lot of odd questions: “Why do you like pigeons so much?” “Why do you always use the elevator?” “Why are you always drinking Chianti?” “Why are you so friendly with Amedeo?” “Why do you hate pizza so much?” So I yelled right back, “What do you want from me, you spy?” Goddam spies, they’re always tracking down secrets! At that moment he looked at me in surprise: “Don’t you understand that I need all this information about your life for my film.” Amazed, I asked, “What do you mean?” and he said, “I’m talking about the film I’m making, and you, Parviz, are going to be the star.” That’s when I asked myself, disconcerted, if this damn blond guy was a spy or a lunatic. When I talked to Amedeo about it, he smiled: “Parviz, don’t be afraid of the blond kid, he dreams of becoming a film director someday. Human beings need dreams the way fish need water.” I didn’t entirely understand what Amedeo was saying, but it doesn’t matter, what really counts is that I trust him completely.

I’m sure there’s been a mistake. After that business of my strike against talking, Amedeo persuaded me to file an appeal, taking responsibility for the expenses. After a while they re-examined my case and admitted that I had been telling the truth, that I hadn’t lied. And in the end they granted me political asylum. Besides, I’m frank and honest because I have nothing else to lose—I’ve already lost my children, my wife, my house, my restaurant. Let me say that I don’t have much faith in the Italian police. So many times they’ve hauled me in to the police station to interrogate me like a dangerous criminal!

What I’m saying makes a certain amount of sense. Answer my question, please: is feeding the pigeons a crime

punishable by Italian law? Now let me explain: as you know, Piazza Santa Maria Maggiore is a place where pigeons like to gather. I love the pigeons, I feel happy when I feed them. A man surrounded by pigeons is a sight that arouses the admiration of tourists, and inspires them to take souvenir pictures. And so I contribute to the promotion of tourism in Rome. But that doesn't protect me, because on more than one occasion the police have prevented me from getting near the pigeons. I've objected: "What's the law that prohibits feeding the pigeons?" I've done my best to explain that the dove is the symbol of peace in all traditions, it's even the symbol of the United Nations! I wonder how Italy can keep me from feeding the pigeons if it's a member of the UN. The police mistreated me even though I hadn't done anything serious, in fact they insulted me by saying, "You want to make beautiful Rome into a garbage dump? Go back where you came from and do whatever you want there!" I refused to give in to their threats and I kept fighting, I swore to remain faithful to the pigeons. I'll never let them die of hunger. Amedeo acted as a mediator between me and the police and they made me feed the pigeons with food provided by the city. I didn't understand the point of this agreement, but what's important is not to have any more trouble with the police and to be able to get the food without spending a cent.

But forget the abuse I get from the police. Let's talk about the concierge Benedetta, who won't stop being a bitch, just to annoy me. One time I lost patience and said to her, "It's disgraceful for a woman your age to say *guaglio*!" but she went on repeating it shamelessly. The insults of that wretched woman have no rhyme or reason. Once she asked me, rather arrogantly, "Do you eat dogs and cats in Alba-

nia?” I kept calm, and answered her, “Do you know Omar Khayyam? Do you know Saadi? Do you know Hafiz? We are not savages who eat cats and dogs! And what the hell do I have to do with Albania!” I’ve been brought up since childhood to respect old people, that’s why I walked away from her saying, “*Merci, Signora.*”

But let’s get back to Amedeo. He’s not the murderer! He can’t have had anything to do with this crime. Amedeo is not stained with the Gladiator’s blood. I’m sad because of his absence. I don’t know exactly what’s happened to him, but of one thing I’m sure: from now on no one will take any notice of me when I cry and drink wine in Piazza Santa Maria Maggiore. Who will take the bottle of Chianti away from me? I’m thinking seriously of leaving. If Amedeo doesn’t come back in the next few days, I’m leaving Rome and never coming back. Ladies and gentlemen, Rome, without Amedeo, is worthless. It’s like a Persian dish without the spices!

FIRST WAIL

Wednesday March 5, 10:45 P.M.

This morning Signor Benardi, the owner of the restaurant Capri in Piazza Navona, where Parviz works as an assistant cook, called me. He said Parviz doesn't do what he's told because he doesn't understand Italian, and can't distinguish between a frying pan and a saucepan, between zucchini and carrots, between basil and parsley. After a long list of complaints he offered Parviz the choice of leaving or washing dishes, and Parviz chose the second.

Thursday March 19, 11:49 P.M.

Signor Benardi called me again, telling me that he was sorry but he had to fire Parviz, because his mouth never leaves the wine bottle during working hours. He's reprimanded him many times, to no avail. Poor Parviz, he's convinced that the reason he's always getting fired is his hatred of pizza and not his poor Italian and the fact that he drinks during working hours. Now the problem is that Parviz is unemployed, so he gets even more depressed and drinks twice as much. Tomorrow, on the way home, I'll pass by Piazza Santa Maria Maggiore and find him, as usual, near the fountain, weeping and drinking. It takes a Persian meal to pull him out of that melancholy state. I'll have to remind

Stefania to invite some friends for dinner tomorrow night, so Parviz can cook his favorite dishes.

Saturday June 24, 11:57 P.M.

I've gotten fat. It seems that Parviz is right when he says, "You're a very special kind of drug addict—your drug is pizza!" I became aware of my greed for pizza only recently. There is no doubt that pizza is my favorite food, I can't do without it. By now all the symptoms of addiction are obvious. Pizza is mixed with my blood—I've become an alcoholic of pizza, rather than wine. Soon I'll soften into dough and become, in my turn, a pizza.

Thursday November 3, 10:15 P.M.

Parviz isn't wrong when he says that each of us has a place where he feels comfortable. It's enough to see him in the kitchen. He's like a king in his kingdom, finding peace and quiet in a few seconds. It seems to me that I'm seeing Shahryar, the sultan of the *Thousand and One Nights*, calm and serene after listening to one of Scheherazade's stories. The bathroom is the only place that guarantees us pure tranquility and sweet solitude; it's no coincidence that we call it the Restroom. I find tranquility in this small bathroom. It's my nest, and this white bowl where I sit to take care of my needs is my throne!

Saturday July 3, 11:04 P.M.

I've tried many times to persuade Parviz to learn the secrets of Italian cooking, but he always refuses. This subject raises many questions beyond the culinary. I think Parviz is afraid he'll forget Iranian cooking if he learns Italian. It's the only explanation for his hatred of pizza in par-

ticular and pasta in general. As the Arab proverb says: "You can't fit two swords in a single sheath." Parviz thinks it's impossible for them to live together in harmony. For him Iranian cooking, with its spices and its smells, is all that's left of his memory. Rather, it's memory and nostalgia and the smell of his family rolled into one. This cooking is the thread that ties him to Shiraz, which he has never left. Parviz is strange, he lives in Shiraz, not in Rome! So why do we force him to learn Italian and cook Italian style? Do people speak Italian in Shiraz? Do they eat pizza, spaghetti, fettuccine, lasagna, ravioli, tortellini, parmigiano in Shiraz? Auuuuuuuuu . . .

Friday April 14, 11:36 P.M.

Today I wept! I couldn't believe it, the tears flowed without my even realizing it. I never imagined finding Parviz in such a state. The social worker didn't go into details on the telephone, she said only, "Parviz is sick, hurry, before it's too late." I said to myself maybe he had drunk more than usual. I hurried to the refugee welcome center, and made my way among policemen and nurses. When I saw him with his mouth sewed up, I felt a tremendous earthquake in every part of my body. I couldn't speak, I took his hand and embraced him tightly. Oh, my God! Where does such sadness come from? What is silence? Is there any point in speaking? Are there other ways of telling the truth, without moving your lips? The authorities had told Parviz that his story of fleeing Iran was an invention, that it had nothing to do with politics, but instead with cooking! They told him, "Your application has been rejected." They didn't believe that he fled Shiraz after the Revolutionary Guard found some anti-government leaflets from the People's Mujahideen

in his restaurant. It's true that Parviz is not a political activist and has no relationship to any parties, but his life was in danger. One desperate night he fled, without kissing his children or his wife goodbye; he didn't have time to say farewell to his Shiraz!

I ask as loud as I can, from this hole that has a stink to take your breath away: who possesses the truth? Rather, what is the truth? Is the truth spoken with words? Parviz spoke his truth with his mouth sewed up: he spoke with his silence.

Today my hatred of the truth has increased, and so has my passion for wailing. I'll wail for the rest of the night from this confined space, and I know that no one will hear me. To this small tape recorder I'll entrust my ceaseless wailing, then console myself by listening to it. Auuuuuuu . . .

Monday August 5, 10:49 P.M.

Peace between Parviz and the police! The controversy over the pigeons in Piazza Santa Maria Maggiore dragged on. It wasn't easy to persuade him not to feed his pigeons anymore. Parviz adores pigeons, because he's sure that someday a pigeon will land on his shoulder carrying a letter from his wife and children. He's still waiting for the promised message, especially after hearing the story of the miracle that happened in Santa Maria Maggiore in the year 356, when it snowed in August. In the meantime, the city has decided to make life difficult for the pigeons in the big squares in Rome with the excuse that there are too many of them, and they shit on the citizens and, worse, on the tourists. So it decided to prohibit feeding them in the squares. In fact, it went further, introducing free birdseed laced with birth-control chemicals. I suggested to Inspector

Bettarini that he give Parviz the job of feeding the pigeons, using the city's birdseed, and after some hesitation the police agreed. I had no trouble persuading Parviz, and obviously I said nothing to him about the nature of the city's birdseed. Sometimes it's best not to know the truth. For example, I agree with doctors who hide from a patient the true nature of his illness. What stupidity drives a doctor to say to a patient, "You're going to die in two months"? Poor man, let him live his two months without the burden of knowing the hour of his end! Is the truth a remedy that cures our ills or a poison that slowly kills us? I'll look for the answer in wailing. Auuuuuuu . . .

Saturday February 25, 11:07 P.M.

I couldn't convince Parviz that Johan Van Marten isn't a spy but a Dutch film student who dreams of restoring the glory of neorealism with the rebirth of a De Sica or a Rossellini. Johan, or Blondie—as the residents of the building call him—is trying to gather information about the lives of Parviz, the concierge Benedetta, Sandro, Antonio Marini, Elisabetta Fabiani, Iqbal the Bangladeshi, and all the others. Johan's dream is to shoot a film in Piazza Vittorio, in black-and-white, that tells their stories. He's asked me insistently to help him persuade Parviz, Benedetta, Iqbal, Maria Cristina, and the others to be in the film. He said that Parviz is a talented actor, with remarkable artistic gifts. You merely have to watch him weeping spontaneously and feeding the pigeons near the fountain of Santa Maria Maggiore to find the many resemblances between him and the fantastic Anthony Quinn. He paused on the name. He suggested giving Parviz a name worthy of an emerging film star: Parvi Bravo instead of Parviz Mansoor Samadi.