

The Memory of Bodies

(La memoria dei corpi)

by

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It appears absurd, and yet it is exactly true that,
being that all reality is nothing, there is no other reality
nor other substance in the world than illusions.

Giacomo Leopardi *Zibaldone dei pensieri*

Prologue

There were ten minutes left until the scheduled bus time. The girl sped up her pace, for nothing in the world she would have wanted to miss it: that stop shelter on a country road gave her the chills. In the winter, at dusk, it would have not been pleasant to have to sit there in the cold and humidity of the plains, with cars speeding up in the distance.

That afternoon there was another passenger besides her. A man was standing by the post, leaning on it, seemingly waiting for the same coach bus. His back was turned, and he remained immobile even after she arrived.

The girl took a seat under the shelter, pulled the cellphone out of her purse, wished the bus would arrive soon. That man, all dressed in dark colors, upset her. She could hardly discern his face.

“Excuse me, may I ask you for directions?”

A young woman driving a black SUV had stopped, not far from the bus shelter. She wore a wool hat, sunglasses and a smile.

The girl drew closer to the car. She didn't know the area well, but she didn't want to be rude.

“I need to go to Parma, am I in the right direction?”

“I would say so. It's easy, just keep driving straight ahead.”

“Are you also going to town? I could give you a ride, so I'll be sure not to go the wrong way.”

The girl looked inside the vehicle: nobody was accompanying the young woman. It was cold, and rather than waiting under a bus stop shelter in the company of an unsettling figure standing at close distance, the prospect of traveling inside a comfortable and well heated car completely convinced her to accept the ride.

She got in. It was a well accessorized SUV and immediately she was enveloped by a subtle rose perfume and notes of opera playing in the background.

“Do you always take the bus?”—the young woman asked while turning the engine on.

“Yes, when I go to work. I haven’t got a driver’s license yet, sooner or later I should get one.”

“How old are you?”

“Twenty one.”

They were about to leave when the girl realized that somebody had open the back door.

“Well, then I’ll grab a ride myself too.” She heard a male voice.

It was the man who had been standing at the bus stop. The girl caught a glimpse of him out of the corner of her eye as he was taking a seat in the back, just behind her. She turned to look at the young woman next to her: unexplainably, she wasn’t batting an eye.

When she felt something pressing on her face, the girl tried to react.

Within a few seconds, she lost consciousness.

“I’d say it went very smoothly,” remarked the man, while leaning the head of the girl on the seat.

“No cars drove by when I approached her, and there are no cameras in this area. It couldn’t have been easier...”

“Let’s go home now. We have a lot to do.”

On their way, they saw the coach bus pass by, perfectly on time.

They, however, had been faster.

ONE

One only damn card. He squeezed it in his hands, unable to conceal his disappointment. He grabbed the bowl of red wine,¹ gulped it to the last drop, took another card from the deck on the table and stared at it. Another useless one.

The usual rush. Now I will no longer be able to call it.

Ottavio was observing him, his eyes staring at him from below, the chewed toothpick between his teeth dancing from one side to the other. Tinu and Tugnot were instead focused on their cards, which they kept fanning out, obsessively rearranging their sequence.

Ottavio is too relaxed, surely he is bluffing.

He was just about to curse after having fished yet another Queen of Hearts, when his attention was suddenly and irresistibly diverted by a female figure appearing at the tavern right at that moment. Only for a few brief seconds. Wrapped in a black satin trench coat, a blond young woman asked the barista for information and left quickly without ordering anything. “Another round of Bonarda², fellas?” — the host asked the players, approaching the table.

¹ In the area around Parma it is traditional to drink red wine from a little white ceramic bowl known as “fojeta.” This detail is important because it denotes the wish of the protagonist for a simpler and more authentic lifestyle, a connection with the community.

² Bonarda is a red wine made from the ancient autochthonous grape variety bonarda produced in the regions of Piemonte and Emilia Romagna.

“What did the blonde want?” — asked Tinu, squinting one eye.

“She asked for directions to town. When I saw her — so refined,—I thought she was a friend of our lawyer here, but I was wrong.”

“Oh well, too bad...”

Giorgio Saberi had the habit of coming to this small town every Friday evening, and nobody here called him by name. For everybody he was “the lawyer.” And had he had any children, he was certain that they would have been “the lawyer’s children.”

“Fellas, sorry to give you the news, but I am calling it!”

Ottavio, with the smile of a scoundrel on his face, had played two three of a kind and a straight. Giorgio could barely contain a surge of anger: he slammed on the oak table the only card he had left, then suddenly got up, but not before slipping a 50 Euro bill to his opponent.

“You are not telling it right.”

He said it through his teeth, while still holding a smile. Then he left the tavern, opened the door of his Porsche 911, fired the engine and sped off laying rubber behind.

Giorgio could not stand losing.

Under any circumstances, including playing cards. He could not stand it. Even worse, if his opponents were the locals... He had come to town, as on any given Friday, to relax. Instead, he was returning home paralyzed by hostile anger. Occasionally, he would make promises with himself to stay away from that one weekly appointment with the so called “community,” to then systematically capitulate every Friday afternoon. In truth, he loved visiting that countryside tavern, drinking low quality wine from bowls, enduring patiently the usual incoherent small town gossip. It was as if — even for just a little while,— he could assimilate that simple everyday life he was never allowed to aspire to. Sitting at the table with his habitual friends, listening to their elementary observations, letting his eyes linger on their facial wrinkles while trying to guess their preoccupations, their obsessions, their vices— all this was relaxing. These people were so different from anything that existed in his world, they were so damn naive.

I am sure Ottavio is cheating. I must figure out how ...

In the pitch black obscurity of a starless and moonless night, he saw a car idling on the edge of the road, an unremarkable sedan. From the open door he could discern the slender silhouette of a female ankle towering over a 5 inch heel. He paused, startled by the apparition, so unusual in a remote hilly road. He pulled

over, got off the car and cautiously leaned towards the owner of that spectacular pair of legs. When he was close enough he immediately recognized her: she was the woman who had come to the bar a little earlier. Blond, soft ringlets framed her perfect oval, and her wide open eyes were like those of a little girl who has been caught stealing candies. She was holding her cellphone, her fingers frantically wiping across the screen.

“Good evening, I don’t mean to intrude, I just would like to make sure you are don’t need any help.”

Her eyes widened even more, she took a deep breath. A hint of a smile crossed her face, barely revealing her immaculate white teeth.

“My car suddenly stopped” she said, “and as if it weren't enough, my phone has no signal. Is there a hotel nearby?”

“There is a small one at about 10 km away. Would you like me to take a look at your car?”

“You would do me a favor”

Giorgio lifted the hood, rummaged for a few minutes in the engine compartment using his cellphone to light it up. Then, he unlocked the suspension bar and closed the hood with a sharp snap.

“It looks like everything is where it should be, but I am not an expert. You might want to call a mechanic tomorrow morning.”

“And what am I going to do now?” — a line furrowed her forehead.

“I could accompany you to the closest hotel, the inn I mentioned, ten kilometers from here. I only hope it’s still open: the owner is an old lady who goes to bed early. It will take us only 10 minutes, I will be glad to give you a ride.”

She remained silent, uncertain on what to do. She gave the man a sidelong glance, trying to understand better what kind of person was the one standing in front of her. Giorgio looked like he could be in his forties, with salt and pepper hair, regular features. A man like many. Only two details livened up his otherwise ordinary face: a dimple on his chin — so deep that it looked like a scar. And his eyes. They were black, intense, with an elongated cut.

He stared at her somewhat impatiently, as if he were in a hurry to leave. “At this time you surely won’t find a taxi in this area. Your call.”

“Alright, then. I will gladly accept a ride. I just hope I will not be an inconvenience.”

“No inconvenience at all. The inn is not far.”

They got in the car. The young woman took her seat and looked outside her window in an attempt to put a distance between them. Giorgio could not suppress giving a fleeting glance to her legs. She had gently pulled down as much as she could the edge of her skirt, but her slim ankles, her slender yet well defined calves, her silky skin were drawing him with a seduction that was hard to ignore. Giorgio turned his eyes again on the road ahead of him, commanding himself to not let his eyes linger any further on her body. The young woman looked furtively at him, then she decided to break the silence.

“I was beginning to be concerned. There wasn’t really anyone driving on the road. The worst place where you car might break down.”

Giorgio observed her briefly: she looked like a lost, uncertain soul. He smiled, as if to reassure her.

“Luckily I drove by. I just hope Rita, the owner, will be still awake. As I explained, she is old and also a little hard of hearing. When she goes to sleep nothing will awake her, not even cannon balls.” The young woman now turned toward him, appearing concerned.

“It can’t be the only hotel in the area!”

“Within 40 km there’s nothing else. It’s almost midnight now, it will be hard to find an open inn even in Bobbio.”

She raised her eyes to the sky, in what looked like a sort of exorcism. Five minutes later they were in front of Rita’s inn. The window shutters were closed, the lights all off. Giorgio got off the car and rang the bell. There was no answer. He tried again and again, unsuccessfully.

Meanwhile, the young woman had come out of the car. “And now, where will I go?”— she asked him, in dismay.

“We could try Bobbio, but I doubt we will find something open.”

“I had dinner with friends this evening, I could go back there. But they are about half hour from Bobbio, and I won’t tell you how many turns you have to make to get there. Maybe I could call them...”

“As you prefer. Anyway, I don’t live far, I have a big house and would gladly offer you a place to stay. I have a trusted mechanic: I could call him tomorrow to ask him to take a look at you car. It’s your decision.”

The young woman did not respond immediately. She pulled back a loose lock of hair that was covering most of her face, and in a whisper said: “Alright.”

A large wrought iron gate opened as a fan on a grey cobblestones path.

A white villa, seemingly built in the 1800s, emerged from the thick vegetation of the surrounding park. The facade had a neoclassic style. Four columns supporting a prothyrum framed the doorway in front of which two twin and perfectly symmetrical winged stairways ascended. The architecture was sumptuous, and yet graceful at the same time.

The young woman left the car with Giorgio and stared in stupor at the ancient residence.

“You live here?” Suddenly and without thinking, she was addressing him informally.³

“Yes... I spent my childhood in this house, and my teenage years. Then I moved to Milan to study in college, I got married and remained there. When my wife left me, I returned to the fold. It’s the same old story of many divorced men.”

“I am sorry.”

Silently, they climbed the left wing of the stairway. The two oak shutters of the doorway opened up on a salon with frescoed ceilings. A massive fireplace framed by white Carrara marble occupied the central part of the spacious room. Old, mostly 16th century paintings, imparted the room a dark, almost claustrophobic atmosphere.

The young woman wandered hesitantly around the large room, as if struck by a reverential fear before the cluttered display of antique furniture and art pieces. She stopped in front of a painting, a most explicit and gory one. It depicted the martyrdom of Saint Sebastian.

“Would you allow me a remark?”

Giorgio nodded in assent, stealthily observing the young woman’s expression of constant wonder. The same expression that, since he could remember, he had always noted in any person who would enter his house-museum for the first time.

“There is an astonishing concentration of paintings with the same themes: martyrdoms, sufferings, blood... I won’t question the quality of the works, by all means, but seeing them all together here upsets me, it gives me some sort of anguish. I would have alternated them, with - I don’t know — maybe one still -life or two, a couple of reassuring Madonnas with babies...”

³ The young woman is suddenly switching from the pronoun “lei” (used for formal addressing) to a more confidential “tu”.

“My father selected these works. I simply maintained the configuration he gave this place throughout the years.”

“If I were you, I’d lighten it up a little.”

“Hey, you’ve barely arrived and are already suggesting me how to change the decor.”—Giorgio laughed.

“I would not dare” — she replied, somewhat embarrassed.

“Come on, I am joking. In truth, I do like these paintings. You know who made that Saint Sebastian? It was attributed to none other than Procaccini. Not bad, right?”⁴

“It may even be a Procaccini, but I still find it unsettling.”

“It was precisely what my father was looking for. He used to say that suffering should not be concealed, but exhibited, because it is part of the fate of a man. Yes, he would say exactly this: the fate of a man.”

“He must have been an uncommon person...”

“You cannot imagine how uncommon.”

The young woman diverted her attention from the paintings, and stopped remarking on them. A note of bitterness in the man’s voice made her more hesitant. She worried she had come too close to a sensitive topic.

“Sorry for being so direct, it’s my personality, I have been like this since I was a child.”

“Come on, don’t be too harsh on yourself. It may not be a flaw.”

Giorgio fixed his intense, piercing eyes on hers. As soon as she realized, she lowered them, unable to sustain the depth of his gaze. She hinted a smile, surely one of her winning weapons.

“By the way, I haven’t introduced myself: my name is Giulia Bruschi.”

“Nice to meet you, Giorgio Saveri.”

They shook hands. She took off her black satin trench coat, the silk scarf with a paisley pattern, and she sat on a couch upholstered in burgundy brocade.

“How come you are so elegant, were you at a party?” —asked Giorgio.

“A dinner with the friends I mentioned earlier. They own a farmhouse after Bobbio. You have to go through a delirium of turns to arrive. They offered me to spend the night there and it would have probably been the best decision.”

“But then we would have never met.”

⁴ Giulio Cesare Procaccini (1574-1625) was a sculptor and painter of the early Baroque era in Milan. He was a member of a prominent family of artists from Bologna.

Giulia smiled again, squinting her eyes a little. Giorgio tried to imagine her as a child, with that gaze, suspended in mid-air, and yet already loaded with expectations, all entangled with apprehensions.

Again, he forced himself not to linger on her crossed legs. Giulia had thin ankles, so slender to make you think they could break any moment. While climbing the entry stairway, hovering on her heels, she proceeded at a swaying, hypnotic pace.

He looked at her wrists, free from bracelets, they were also minuscule like her ankles.

Perfect.

He swallowed. He touched his temple. He turned away from her. "You must be tired. I thought I would give you one of our guest-rooms. Come, I will take you there."

She nodded. She collected her bag, the trench coat and followed him along the staircase to the upper floor. They walked along a hallway. The room destined to Giulia was the farthest. It was a wide space, with frescoed ceilings and another series of paintings on the wall, but this time they were distinguished by tiny strokes.

"Don't tell me they are authentic... Flemish, right?"

"Hieronymus Bosch school, very similar to the *The Garden of Earthly Delights* at the Prado.

"So many details..." said Giulia, looking closer. "All these naked bodies, all these terrifying scenes. Who is the strange creature with the head of a bird? It's eating a man."

"That's the beginning of Hell. Each one of these figures has a precise meaning. All of Bosch's production has strong symbolic connotations. He was a visionary."

She nodded with her head and was about to say something, but she bit her lip.

"When would you like me to wake you up tomorrow?"

"When it's convenient for you. I imagine you will be going to work."

"I'm retired, I can dispose of my time as I please."

"Retired? But you are so young?"

"I made my decisions."

Giorgio turned towards the door. A silence of embarrassment descended between them. She rubbed her eyes, put her bag on the bedside table, sat on the

bed. She remained there for a few minutes, waiting for a move, a word. But he didn't add anything.

“Goodnight” was his last word before leaving the room.

He left it quickly, his shoulders slightly curved, his pace fast. He wanted to get away from her, from her proximity, from that growing intimacy, but could not resist the urge to turn back one last time.

“Goodnight” said Giulia, in a whisper. She got up and went to the door, she closed it but only partially, leaving it slightly opened, but not before giving Giorgio a welcoming, tender look. He was about to return, but did not. Instead, he quickly went down the stairs towards the hall.

He had almost reached the ground floor when he paused, in silence. He went back up a few steps, uncertain on what to do, slowly walked towards the glimmer of light coming through the crack, and remained in the semi-darkness, unnoticed by her.

Giulia had slipped out of her velvet dress and shoes. Now she only wore a bra and a pair of panties, both made of black lace. She had a sculpted, perfect body. She was standing before the Luis XV mirror, in front of the bed. The light from the bedside lamp projected an anomalous shade on her face. He watched her touch her cheeks, eyes, with a furtive gesture. She seemed worried. Once again, he imagined her as a child, afraid of darkness and loneliness.

Unaware of being watched, Giulia opened the bag she had left on the bedside table, took out a little glass container, opened the cap, extracted a pill and swallowed it without a drop of water. Then she lifted the damask bedspread, slipped in between the linen sheets and covered herself completely, up to her forehead.

Giorgio remained to watch her in silence, disguised by the semidarkness and the heavy oak door. He remained until she dozed off, finally hostage of her artificial sleep.

TWO

That night he was unable to sleep, not even for a second, his mind lost in replaying every single detail from the previous evening. Giulia — climbing up the entry stairway with her slow, almost numb swaying. Her ankles, so thin. Her delicate face, like a porcelain doll. Her perfect, sinewy body. Among all those details that obsessively chased one another in his mind, one stood out. Standing outside of the room, protected by the darkness and by the semi-closed door, he had noticed one gesture: how she had compulsively rubbed her face in front of the mirror. The gesture lasted a fraction of a second, and yet it did not escape Giorgio's attention. It was a flat note in what otherwise would have been a perfectly harmonious picture of refinement and grace.

He looked at the clock on his bedside table: it was already 7:30 am. He thought about waiting for the arrival of Agnese, the housekeeper, before going to town to ask his mechanic to take care of his guest's broken car.

When he was ready to leave, he silently walked up the stairs to the upper floor. From the small crack left by the unclosed door, he saw that Giulia was still deep asleep. He did not want to wake her up, it was unnecessary. On his way down to the lower floor, he heard the familiar and comforting clanking of pots and pans. Agnese had arrived early. He went to the kitchen to let her know about his plans and about the new guest.

Agnese was pouring flour into a large bowl of white porcelain. She seemed surprised to see him.

“Good morning, Giorgio. Are you about to go out?” The housekeeper timidly smiled, while continuing to expertly add other ingredients to the flour, without measuring them.

He looked at her with tenderness. Seeing her every day in that large and dark kitchen made him feel good. Watching her cook, organize the rooms, lovingly take care the big villa was akin to receiving the touch of affection he had never got from his mother.

Agnese had recently turned sixty, yet she looked slightly older. Her ash-blond hair was gathered in an eternal ponytail, her eyes were of an intense sky blue, and deep wrinkles marked her face.

“Yes, I need to go to town” he replied to her. “Last night I gave a ride to a young woman whose car broke down. It was very late, Rita’s inn was closed already, so I thought she could stay here for the night. She is still sleeping in the Flemish room. If she wakes up before my return, would you let her know that I went to see the mechanic to take care of her car?”

He noticed a shade pass through Agnese’s eyes. It was just a second. She quickly lowered her head and began to knead the ingredients that she had poured in the bowl, with slow and measured gestures. She waited a little before answering. “Maybe I will make you some breakfast” —she finally said. “Would you like a coffee? I’ll make it right away.”

“No, thank you. I’ll have one later. I hope to be quick.”

He briskly went down one of the entry stairways, turned on the car and exited the villa through the iron gate. The day seemed promising: it was early in the morning, but the air was already warm, and the roses by the entrance sparkled in their full bloom colors.

A few miles down the road, the 500 was there where they had left it the night before. He looked at the license plate and noticed that the car had been registered only recently, and found it puzzling that it was already showing problems.

In town, the mechanic’s workshop had just opened. The ruddy owner, Egidio, welcomed him with his exaggerated smile: Saveri, the lawyer, was his best client. Together, they decided to grab a tool box to go check the car. In the event that the damage could not be repaired, they would then return at a later time to toe it back to the workshop.

When they opened the hood, after an accurate inspection, it became soon clear that no repair was needed.

“Mr Saveri, take a look here!”⁵ The mechanic was in disbelief. “... I thought about checking the ignition cables: they are all disconnected. I don’t understand how this could have happened...”

The two reconnected the cables and tried to turn on the car. The 500 restarted immediately. Egidio offered to drive Giulia’s car to the villa and later asked a coworker from the workshop to pick him up.

While opening the entry door, Giorgio thought how it would have been better not to solve the car problem so quickly. He would have liked to accompany Giulia all the way to Milan, and when the repair would have been completed, another opportunity to see her again would have arisen. From the hall he could hear the voices of Agnese and Giulia come from the kitchen. They were chatting lively, laughing out loud and heartily. Giorgio stopped, stunned. Agnese was a very reserved woman, she would not easily become so familiar with a new person. Evidently, Giulia had captivated her as well.

He entered the kitchen. The two women were seated at the same side of the table, next to each other. Giulia was having breakfast: a cup of tea and biscuits. As soon as she saw him, Agnese jumped off and went to check the tart she had just put in the oven.

“Good morning Giorgio, you are back. Any news about my car?” asked Giulia, with a wide smile.

“Good news. Your car, as I suspected, has nothing serious. We just had to reconnect the ignition cables, a very futile job. What I don’t understand is how it’s possible that they became disconnected all at the same time.”

“I cannot explain that to myself... I did not mess with the engine, I would not even know where to begin.”

“Actually, for me this is not good news. I would have preferred that your car had a bigger problem. It would have been a reason to keep you here a little longer.” Giorgio’s face lit up in an open smile, as Giulia’s did too.

“I would have had to leave anyway, my job awaits me. In any case, I promise to come by to say hi when I will be in the area. I owe you.”

⁵ In the original text the mechanic addresses Mr Saveri as “avvocato.” This is not a common usage in English, so I preferred to translate it as Mr Saveri. In Italy, however, it is very common to address people by their professional appellation even in daily life, outside of a professional setting, and also after they have retired. Your qualification remains with you (dottore, avvocato, professore, cancelliere etc...) and will also immediately place you in your social context. Giorgio Saveri obviously occupies a higher social position and being addressed as “avvocato” is meant to respect and stress it.

“Where do you live? What do you do?”

Giorgio’s eyes were two deep, dark embers. Giulia quivered. She bit her lip.

“I live in Milan, I work at a jewelry store” she answered, fixing an undefined spot in front of herself.

“Well, Milan is not far from here. Besides your friends in Bobbio, you could come visit me as well.”

“And you could come see me in my neighborhood.”

“I rarely travel, but for you I would make an exception.”

They exchanged phone numbers, then they both proceeded towards Giulia’s car.

“Thank you again for your hospitality. How much do I owe you for the mechanic?” she asked.

“Nothing. It was a small job, just a few minutes, and you were my guest anyway, it would have been on me.”

“You are a true gentleman, you know? It’s a rare virtue these days.”

Giorgio hinted at an awkward smile.

He was about to shake her hand, then suddenly retrieved his own, as if regretting it.

“One more time, thank you. Who knows, maybe we will meet again” she concluded.

Giorgio nodded, opened the door of the 500 and then gingerly closed it. Giulia started the car, ready to drive toward the iron gates. He saw how, waving goodbye, she gave a last look at the figure leaning at the window on the second floor. It was Agnese, her palms pressed against the glass, an indecipherable expression on her face.

Giulia mimicked a kiss, the woman returned it with a faltering smile. Giorgio lifted his eyes to the window, looking for Agnese. But she was gone. The 500 left the gate and disappeared beyond the dense curtain of the forest trees. Leaning against the handrail of the staircase, Giorgio watched her drive away with an unexplainable sense of emptiness chewing him inside.

THREE

He was reading again, for the umpteenth time, *Berenice* by Edgar Allan Poe, one of the most mysterious short stories written by his favorite author. He looked outside of the window, beyond the trees swaying in the wind, beyond the hills on which he could imagine Berenice, the agile and gracious protagonist, run amongst the Arnheim thickets, overflowing with energy. He returned to his reading, but this time his attention was diverted by a piece of fabric laying on the brocade couch. He got up to take a closer look: Giulia's scarf filled the corner between the left arm and the back of the seat. He wondered how she could have forgotten it, considering how visible the scarf was. He lifted it with his hands: it was made of a thick, opaque silk, hand decorated with a pattern of minuscule paisley motifs. He brought it to his face. It was saturated with a fragrance that he could perceive at a distance. But now, inhaling its perfume closely made him feel as if Giulia were before his eyes. Her soft blond locks, her wide eyes, her slender hands. He lowered his eyelids, immersed in that intense spiced aroma, allowing himself to be wrapped in the spell of her memory.

He had promised himself not to call her too soon after their first encounter. He would have let a few days go by, to avoid pestering her, but that scarf that so preserved her perfume was complicit in rekindling his desire to see her as soon as possible.

He placed the scarf on the backrest and grabbed his cellphone from the side table. He feverishly searched for her number in the contact list, pressed call, then quickly cancelled.

Better not ...

And yet, unconcerned with these recent hesitations, his finger searched that name again, that number again. This time, Giorgio did not cancel the call, he waited to hear her voice.

“If you hadn’t call me before this evening, I would have done it myself” said Giulia, with a voice that sounded deeper than he remembered.

He was grateful for her unrequested honesty, for revealing her vulnerability and desire, despite having been the one to make the first call.

“Actually, I would have already looked for you yesterday, but I did not want to seem bothersome. Then I saw you had forgotten your scarf on the couch, and knew I had found an excuse to call you.”

“You did the right thing. I want you to be your natural self with me. I dislike tricks, schemes, strategies...”

“Indeed, in the end I gave in. I am already at your disposal,” said Giorgio, laughing.

“That’s how I like you.”

“When will I see you again?” his asked spontaneously.

“Tomorrow?”

“Very well. Will you come here? I will take you to a hill covered with wild daffodils” he suggested.

“Tomorrow is my day off. I could be there in the early afternoon. Let’s go see the daffodils.”

As they were ending the conversation, Giorgio thought about her, bewildered among the yellow swaying flowers. He imagined her delicate ankles sink in the rough clumps of earth, *agile, gracious and overflowing with energy*, just like Berenice.