

1926

*The year that Liborio B. makes his entrance on earth, but in summer*

Now those people, those others, everybody in this shitty town, go around saying I'm crazy. And it didn't just start now, those people, those others, all the people in this shitty town, having to tell me I'm crazy. I know it too, and I think about it all the time, night and day, winter and summer, I think about it every day that God Almighty delivers births and deaths, in sunshine and in darkness, I have always thought about it to try to understand how come this noggin of mine went from being more or less normal to having bats in its belfry, an unraveled muddle nutty as a fruitcake. Which is as if you were walking along a straight road, and then all of a sudden, at a junction, it's crooked like a snake, you get twisted up and take the wrong road without even noticing it, and so out of nowhere you find yourself in a place you've never seen before, where not one thing is familiar, you don't recognize the houses, the trees, people's faces, voices, even your mother's lovely voice jolts you, and you can't even find the fountain in the main piazza, though it's a really big one, and after the pigeons shit on your head for spite, you can't even find the house where you were born with its old ugly dilapidated wooden door, because public housing breeds woodworms and they feed on the wood piece by piece, those woodworms even eat rust and mold. It can happen. I think that's what happened to me too. It may well be that it all began right when I came into the world, at least according to what my mother told me, as for my father I don't even know who he is or where he is now, whether he's still alive, or whether he died like the poor devil he was, because he was a poor unfortunate devil. Those who remember him say he went to L'America, to Argentina or Brazil, somewhere across the sea, but an enormous sea, they tell me, but what can you expect me to know about him after such a long time. How big must that fucking sea be? Well anyway, when I was born all these and many other things happened, and many more would happen. So much water came down even when I was born, it was an evening in August so my grandfather, Peppe Bonfiglio, was always telling me, and my mother, God rest her soul, between shrieking and shuddering, gripping two candles in her hand to give a bit of light at least, swore at wave after wave of pain, screaming: *Holy Mother of God, where the hell is that jackass Don Nicola? Where the hell is that slut comare Elisa?* And so in a round of swearing and *madonne*, I was born. Then a whole life of chicory and greens. That was how it was then. And even though hunger was never absent in my house, I didn't die after all. My grandfather, on the other hand, died unexpectedly, no one thought you could die just like that, in the space of a day. Because it was in the afternoon that a scaffolding plank had broken, a wooden board

rotted by water and wind, a cracking under his feet, there at the site where they were building the new school, and he fell right on a stack of newly unloaded bricks; his back, which was already rotting on its own, shattered into a hundred pieces, maybe more, and he died too, renouncing Christ on the cross. That's the only way my grandfather could die, repudiating. After that my mother started getting sick, little by little, a coughing fit every now and then, but it went on for a long time, until she started spitting up dark blood on the pillow, anyway she spit blood, she spit and didn't talk anymore, even though in the evening she told me stories and tales that I don't remember too well now and maybe it's best I forgot, apart from the story about my having the same eyes as my father's. How can a person not get angry at the world, heaven and earth, the priests who wanted to console you with an Our Father and a Gloria, and also with the idea of paradise, and the angels, already I could smell a rat, the stink of deception, though I only later became aware of this hoax. So I got the idea of recounting everything that's happened to me from the time I was born until now when I am over eighty years old, sitting here at the marble table in the kitchen. Which is cold and I don't know why this marble and this cold, the table with the marble surface makes me think about death. Now and then I think about death even if I'm not at the table, you take a look around and you see that every day people die, and even if you don't know them there are notices about the dead, obituaries written especially for the dead, you see them, you read them and you always feel a little sorry, even if the name printed there is a stranger to you. I also think about my own death, but not often, small potatoes. That's why I write, write and rewrite, that way death will wait, even though sometimes I seem to see it, with its ashen white face and black-rimmed eyes, like those who suffer from heart disease, and I tell it to wait a few more months, if possible until Christmas so that at least I'll remember the creche they put up at the big church one last time, when the book is finished then I'll call it myself, in short I let it hear that I'm ready, because death understands these things right away, it doesn't take a whole lot of explaining. Death is also a tiny bit kind, it puts on a show of patience and believes me and goes away; once, but only once, it even smiled at me, though just barely, something that just sort of slipped out. It bid farewell to me with a shriveled hand that was all creaky when the fingers moved to wave ciao, like someone with osteoarthritis who when the weather changes feels the stabbing aches as if pricked by thistle spines. Meanwhile now that death went away I breathe a big soothing sigh, close my eyes to remember the things I have to remember, and I start writing but slowly, because if I proceed slowly like this, life will last me a little longer, and that's good too.