



Spiro tossed flour into the open revolving drum and chased out cockroaches with his toes. One night he slipped and the blades took off his big toe. "I've lost my toe!" he exclaimed, and Yasmin probing the ball of dough around his foot replied, "Why, so you have." While she helped him hobble to the doctor, Spiro's wife returned and finding nobody about promptly shaped the dough into loaves and put them in the oven. Next morning after the bread was all sold we wondered what family was surprised to discover a big toe in their breakfast. Sometimes we walked across the island to the wilder western side and one day standing high above Mousmouli bay on the very edge of the cliffs of Hiros with the dark sea thundering in the caverns far below Yasmin raised her arms in exultation or supplication to the Gods. "If I had wings!" she cried, "I would fly to the sun like Icarus." Then on impulse she grabbed both our hands as if to gather us in one great leap into space. "To throw away our lives is the ultimate liberation," she challenged, as we dragged her back and collapsed laughing hysterically among the undergrowth. The narrow harbor mouth was guarded by a statue of a Paxos patriot brandishing a firebrand. Island legend claimed that during a naval battle when the islands were fighting the turks for their independence, this young hero swam to the Turkish fleet and set fire to the armaments vessel which exploded and blew up most of the boats. During our evening strolls along the harbor Yasmin always paused by the statue. I rather think the gesture symbolized for her the blowing up of present-day society, for she was as scathing in her criticism of the complacency of the masses as for their political overlords. "Religion is not the modern opium of the people!" she declared to an astonished priest. "Materialism and well-being are far more seductive drugs." But you know, as well as I do, Antonio, there was nothing sinister in these statements. It was as if she was teasing the world, poking her tongue out at society. Despite all that happened later Yasmin was fired by simple idealism there was nothing demonic about her. And how she loved to laugh-at herself too, at her own irrationality. It was joy to watch her laugh, green eyes shining; head flung back, hair flying in the wind. She never wore make-up. It was as if nature had given her adornment enough. Antonio, you know I never meant to pry-for I loved you both equally, 'amici miei'- but I wondered on Paxos did you and Yasmin grow closer together or go further apart. I, of course, did not live on the boat. There was no room and it would have been an intrusion. Instead, you may remember I lodged with a delightful old woman, "Aunt" Euridice. This sprightly lady spoiled me rotten and charged me next to nothing. The little garden of her house overlooked the harbor - there were lemon and pomegranite trees. In the early evening looking eastwards she related how during the war they sent boys up to the ruined fortress among the pines on the harbor island to watch out for German planes. To reassure me she insisted she

bore no ill-feeling for the Italian occupation. "We share the same culture," she said, but she did not disguise her hatred for the Germans and the atrocities they committed. Our holiday drew to a close. At the feast of the Madonna we all rowed out to the windswept island offshore, where following the mass there was a simple meal of bread and wine and olives and goats cheese. Next day our little yacht was hoisted aboard a ferry bound for Brindisi. So we arrived back in Rome rather dejected. The boat was sold to a policeman named Pesce (fish) which helped cheer us up because we were convinced he would soon be joining them.



Antonio, you remember we had whitewashed the hull as we couldn't afford real paint and on the day of the sale when we lowered the boat into the dock at Fiuicino she 'wept' in a spreading pool of milky white. Pesce seemed unconcerned. He thumped the hull -fortunately missing the rotten patches where his fist would have gone straight through, christened her 'the mermaid of the sea,' and set off for Anzio, twenty kilometers to the south. Perhaps he even got there. By now Yasmin was completely beyond control. Even you, Antonio admitted as much. Megaphone in hand she



addressed the massed thousands of students. "Communism," she derided, "was an elitist, intellectual, philosophy that manipulated the masses with spell-binding rhetoric but simply drove them into another state of slavery." Anyone else would have been shouted down with howls of derision, but Yasmin somehow held her audiences spellbound- perhaps it was her sheer audacity. She went on, "Nowadays the masses are more educated, they can see through the pretence of the so-called democratic process, they realise the corruption of the party system, the vote buying, the big business interest. People are not so easily fooled by grand

sounding words such as Globalization-when they know it is just a tool to colonise and dominate small economies. Why," she demanded, her voice hoarse but afire as ever, "Why should the world be run by a few multi-nationals who buy up and starve out al competition. What is wrong with village economics, tariffs to protect the small local producer; the local ice-cream, the village firecracker maker? Why should countries and cultures be forced to unite. What is wrong with city states? Why have states at all.

Do away with States, with laws, with money- start again from scratch!" Antonio, how many times have we stood together in the crowd fearing for her safety as Yasmin held forth, cheered, booed, heckled, but I think always admired. She was a female Che Guevarra- nowadays she even wore his black beret, and her hair whipped by the autumn wind lay over the collar of her black raincoat. By now she had been expelled from the university but that didn't deter her. She had moved in with you, Antonio, until one day your landlady declared she needed the room. Oh, we knew it was a set-up.



For days a detective- you can always tell them as they model themselves on the movies; the turned down hat, the turned up collar, the big newspaper they pretend to read for hours- had been waiting in your alley. The landlady had been told to chuck you both out. So you moved in with me. I had a spare room. But it wasn't long before the strange telephone calls started; - warnings, threats, obscenities. Of course it wasn't all gloom. Yasmin was magnificent and her face shone with excitement. She delighted in the challenge. "At least they are worried," she argued. But she also had a precarious existence. Her father would have nothing more to do with her. It appeared she really was stateless and had papers to prove it. Perhaps her father was frightened the whole family might be deported. Antonio, we could not keep up with her. Even at night she hardly slept. Sometimes I could hear her talking to you until dawn. We tried cooking at home to be more economical we agreed, but it never was, and Yasmin was not made for domestic life. So we returned to Mario's and a pizzeria in Via Giovanni Vecchi where Yasmin scandalised the more bourgeois artisan customers by her outspoken opinions on everything. Even religion did not escape her scathing- if God is creator, God must be a woman. "Madre nostra qui es in coelis" (our mother who is in heaven), became her credo. But there was nothing hostile about her. Yasmin's charm was warmth itself. We sat around her just as we sat around the ceramic stove that warmed the apartment. I had recently bought an old open lancia and us sometimes we drove around the city late at night with Yasmin standing up singing arias from Verdi. She liked Verdi, saying that a hundred years before instead of Viva Castro painted on the walls it would have been Viva Verdi-which also stood for Victoria Emmanuelle Re D'Italia. Sometimes we drove out to Lake Bracciano and lunched in a cave- Yes, a cave at Anguillara reached by steps and dominated by two old moustachioed sisters who were forever quarelling while the customers consumed their patience playing chess. And then the violence began. Bombs at railway stations in Milan and Bologna, parcel bombs at post offices and the university. And the kidnappings. Now a new name began to emerge, Brigati Rossi (the Red Brigade). At first Yasmin denied absolutely any involvement, but we suspected she knew more than she admitted. Just to listen to her approval of terrorism was to doubtr her innocence.

"Where does passive non-violence get us," she declared. "Where has non-violence got the people of Tibet or Vietnam?" For this was the height of the anti-war movement in America. Students shot at Kent University. We had all been to see a film at the student cinema in Campo dei Fiori, "Sangue e Fragole (Blood and Strawberries), and it seemed somehow to chart Yasmin's progress from a peaceful idealistic student to a grenade throwing terrorist. And then came the day but for Yasmin's timely intervention you, Antonio, would certainly have been a victim. Late afternoon and you were hurrying to give a music lesson. The tram stop was at the end of Piazza Navona, you could hear the tram car



clanging along the track hooting to clear the traffic, only you could not yet see it when yards from the stop Yasmin darted out of nowhere and literally threw herself in front of you, blocking the way, before vanishing in the crowd just as the tram you would have caught slowed to a halt and blew up- exploding in flames. Most of the passengers seemed to be carabinieri who ran screaming into the street their uniforms ablaze. "I was terrified you would be killed," Yasmin exclaimed later, hugging you close. It was the first time I ever saw her burst into tears. You were too stunned to say

anything-but what did you think as you brushed the strands of hair from her tear-stained cheeks. A week later the police arrested three leading members of the Brigati Rossi and with astonishing speed considering the usual lengthy legal process they were brought to trial in a steel cage. We watched on television. Yasmin commenting merely, "I would kill myself before anyone imprisons me." She meant it. She carried a phial of barbituates around with her. Yasmin was a creature of the light and her one fear was incarceration. Viewing the appalling scenes of maimed and mutilated bomb blast victims even her own rhetoric failed to sustain her. Antonio, you were merciless in your attack. "You consider these legitimate targets," pointing to the television pictures. "If your idealism is so fine why not direct your terror at war ministries or munition factories or could it just possibly be that mindless mayhem delivers a more brutal and effective publicity." For once she was mute. Only later as the tension between us unwound did she declare, "I could be a suicide bomber if it meant changing the world for the better or getting rid of a greater evil," But Antonio, believe me it was herself she was prepared to sacrifice- not innocent bystanders. Yasmin was not made that way. She did everything herself-you, of all people know that. She did not use others. The next day a great demonstration was planned starting from the Coliseum to gather in Piazza Venezia. No one knew how many would be there. Some predicted half a million, but the police set up barricades and when the students broke through the police opened fire. It went on all afternoon and late into the night. I watched the news on television. Demonstrators had been shot, it was claimed, but no one fatally. Later that evening an anxious cry for help came up from the street below. Antonio, you were supporting Yasmin. Between us we carried her up the narrow spiral staircase to my apartment and laid her on the bed. Beneath her raincoat her clothes were drenched in blood.



She had been shot in the chest and we were able to staunch the wound. I didn't ask why you had not let an ambulance take her to the hospital for the news earlier that contained the by now familiar pictures of the court proceedings of the Brigatti Rossi - defiant in their steel cage , showed another picture. The photograph of a girl who was wanted for questioning about the tram bombings. The photo was fuzzy and not so easy to identify

but had you gone to hospital the police would have arrested her. So what were we to do? Then I remembered my cousin Roberto, a young doctor at the hospital in Terni, one hundred kilometers north of Rome and near the hill village where our grandmother lived. I was sure I could persuade Roberto but I dared not use the telephone in case it was tapped. We carried Yasmin down to the Lancia and sped off up the via Cassia-avoiding the autostrada in case the police were stopping vehicles. We reached Roberto's apartment by midnight, fortunately he was not on night duty. At first he was worried and confused but we managed to calm and to convince him. We were anxious not to implicate him in any way otherwise his career would be ruined. As a casualty officer Roberto was the ideal person. He carried a bag of surgical equipment for emergencies at any time. We did not bring Yasmin into the apartment but transferred her to Roberto's car and drove to grandmother's village in the hills nearby. It was one of those places where everyone is in bed by ten o'clock and the piazza was fortunately deserted. Our grandmother lived in a large house and Roberto had his own key. We let ourselves in quietly, prepared everything and operated on Yasmin on the kitchen table. Antonio, it was, you remarked later like something out of a wartime movie; the table, the bottles, the bandages, a local anaesthetic and Roberto trying to extract the bullet which had lodged between two ribs just above the heart. With profound relief I finally heard the metallic clatter as he dropped the bullet in a tin dish. He bound her up, gave her a strong sedative and turned to us weary with exhaustion but jubilant too. Roberto was one of us, remember Antonio. "Where are you going to keep her?" he asked. "She will need time to recover and she cannot stay here." "Or in Rome," I added, certain my apartment would now be under surveillance more than ever. Then we hit on a plan. It came to both of us at once. "Sensati," we exclaimed. Antonio, you looked puzzled. I had never told you of this abandoned village in the mountains. Everyone had left it years before and now only animals inhabited the ruins, but there had once been a village school and that house was still intact. I knew, because my family owned land nearby and I had gone up there the previous winter. There was no road-only a track for foot or a donkey. What made it more attractive was that it was off-limits to hunting-an 'oasis of protection,' they called it. Once installed there, Yasmin would have a safe refuge to recover in-if you stayed with her, which you agreed without hesitation. By now the early cockerels were crowing and the village would soon be awake. In the cellar below the house lived the donkey, Rondinella- all village donkeys are called Rondinella, I know. But we managed to get Yasmin on her and guide her up through the village onto the mountain track above the church. The story that Roberto would put about was that I and a friend were going up to check on our land.

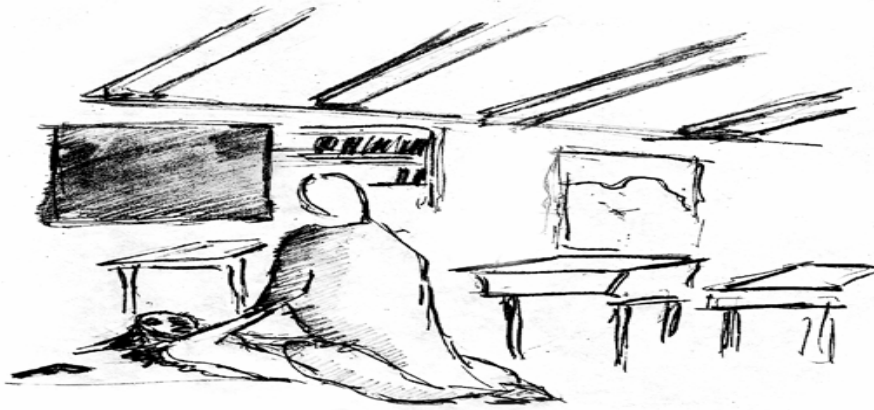
He returned to clean up the kitchen and sleep off what little was left of the night. We three made our way slowly through the forest as the sky paled overhead and the mountain peaks started to glow in the first rays of the sun. It was a gruelling climb but Yasmin never complained.



You and I took turns to lead the donkey while the other propped Yasmin up- for we were mortally afraid she might fall and her wounds haemorrhage. The path climbed steeply, leveled along a wooded valley side from where we could hear the waterfall and once past it the path narrowed where it cut across a cliff face before winding up to the village set out on a spur above. As expected the lower floors of the houses were tenanted by wild mountain cattle while in the church a little way off lived a snorting bull. Yasmin even managed to joke that we should rename the village 'Animal Farm,' 'Later she called the bull George in honor of Orwell. Most of the roofs were fallen in but school-house as I remembered had remained intact although the stairs shook precariously. There were even school benches, tables and a decent fireplace. Now in the daylight the view from the window was fantastic. The valley below lay hidden in low cloud while all the peaks rose majestic-some just capped with early snow. We had only managed to bring basic supplies;-what we could take from grandmother's kitchen; eggs, pasta, smoked ham, wine, olive oil, bread, but enough for a few days until I could return. For we agreed that to allay any suspicion it was vital I got back to Rome as soon as possible. Roberto was waiting for me in the village and after some essential gossiping with old acquaintances in the piazza and assuring my grandmother-to her delight, that I would be a frequent visitor from now on, Roberto drove me back to Terni and I reached Rome in the late afternoon. Only the elderly Swedish artist, who lived on the second floor, was suspicious. Old Bjorn knew everything that went on. Yasmin joked that he painted green frogs for the walls of French restaurants. Now he waited for me on the landing having presumably watched me park the lancia."So where are your revolutionary friends?" he chuckled. "Gone to join Marx, off to Cuba..." I forget how I joked to get away from him. Antonio, I cannot tell you how anxiously I waited those next few days for the T.V. news bulletins, the newspaper reports and worrying about the two of you up there in Sensati. Finally at the weekend I drove back, buying supplies at a supermarket in Terni and parceling them into sacks I loaded up Rondinella and climbed up to Sensati. How great was my relief to discover you both well-Yasmin especially. There was even color in her usually pale cheeks. You had been sitting out in the autumn sun. Yes, and Roberto had been up the day before to check Yasmin over. And now I had brought the mandolin.



We got out a flask of Chianti classico and lit candles and after a wonderful meal of chicken stew (chicken by compliments of the village), and wild mushrooms and panetone, we sang our old taverna favorites;-from Puccini and Verdi and finally as the moon showed his face above the imposing peaks you played Yasmin's song. Something I forgot to mention earlier was the gun- pistol really, no bigger than ones used to start races except it had bullets not blanks. We had discovered it in Yasmin's capacious raincoat pockets when we unrobed her. She claimed and we believed her that it was only for protection and she had never used it. Where and how she acquired it we chose not to inquire for we realized that Yasmin had enemies on both sides who would prefer her silence to her witness,-- those of the Brigati Rossi still at large and the authorities for whom she might prove an embarrassment. Why? because when the threads start to unravel who knows where it all leads. Have not recent events showed these Politicians at the pinnacle of power now disgraced. So, who do we blame? Our own carelessness. Bjorn-the artist of green frogs? He had once painted a portrait of Yasmin seated in a high-backed wicker chair. I think he envied her capacity to live life to the full, or envied you, Antonio. So was the motive jealousy? Or had I failed to take precautions that my journeys along the Via Cassia might be followed, or that every village has an informer with links to who the local Carabinieri. So it was next weekend when I reached the village anticipating a pleasant weekend- even scenting the wood smoke, the cooking, grandmother snapped me out of complacency by commenting that I should be careful as the woods were full of huntsmen. "Here," I asked, trying to check my anxiety. She shrugged. "Oh, they have left here- gone up towards Sensati I suppose."How many, who, what were they carrying? But grandmother didn't know- all Italian weekend hunters wear army camouflage suits and carry automatic rapid-fire shotguns. All pretend they are great men, returning with a few sparrows to prove it. And where was Antonio, I asked. "Antonio has been here-this morning. So helpful. He took the donkey. He had bought a sack of cement for repairs." I rushed out and ran up through the village. "Your things!" cried grandma, but I was deaf. I only needed to be ahead, ahead of you plodding up the track, ahead of the hunters who should never be in an area banned to hunting. I needed to be instantly at Sensati. I was out of breath before I passed the church. I caught up with you, Antonio, securing the cement more safely on the cliff path. And then above the roar of the waterfall we heard the patter of gunfire. Oh, these were not the shots of ordinary hunters. We left the donkey to find its own way and raced up the path. There was still an acrid tang of spent cartridges in the room but Yasmin lay on her side as if sleeping. Only as I turned her over I saw with horror and disgust that the lower side of her face had been shot away.



Her eyes opened a little and she tried to speak. "Shoot me," she gasped, her hand reaching limply towards the where the pistol lay on the floor just out of her reach. I shook my head, aware she was focusing her attention at you, Antonio, standing behind me, paralysed with shock. "If you love me, shoot me," she begged. I pressed my eyes tight and opened them only to reach the doorway. I glanced back once to see you kneeling beside her, holding her in your embrace. Antonio, forgive me, my mind was reeling. I stumbled to the orchard and collapsed kneeling among the fallen leaves.



I waited --It seemed an eternity for that single final shot. The kiss of death, of love only you could deliver- death for love for Yasmin. We laid her on a schoolroom bench and stepping carefully between the stones carried her to the ruined church. For once even the bull stood silent, barely snorting. A couple of rusting shovels did the work and when it was over I left you sitting among the autumn flowers. If there was a fitting resting place it was there -in a ruined chapel, in an abandoned village high in the forests above a precipice with only the sound of the waterfall, and an occasional eagle soaring overhead. From

far below in the valley I heard a church bell solemnly tolling but really I was back in Paxos the evening you played the mandolin and the whole population of Gaios danced on the quayside, arms linked, Yasmin laughing in their midst .

*"Shower down your love, so burning bright for some night or the other night will come the gardener in white, and gathered flowers are dead, Yasmin."*

James Elroy Flecker.