

GIULIO MOZZI

F.

Translated from Italian by Elizabeth Harris

“It’s all theater. When they decide to, the mafia will kill me anyway.”

— *Giovanni Falcone*

THE MAGISTRATE, alone in his room, is trying to sleep. He slouches in his chair, shuts his eyes, settles his arms on the armrests, stretches out his legs. He’s extremely tired. The fluorescent lights are bright: in front of his closed eyes, the magistrate sees black and purple specks disappearing into two large red spots. His eyes hurt; they burn. The armchair’s comfortable, but he can’t find the right position. The magistrate sinks down, down some more, but now he’s too hunched over, and it hurts at the base of his spine. He sits up, but after a few minutes, the circulation’s cut off to his thighs, and his legs start to fall asleep. He turns his head to the right, to the left, the cool leather soothing his temples, the two red spots less pressing, but this puts a strain on his neck and makes it hard to breathe. He realizes he’s clenching the armrests and tries to open his hands, but now his arms don’t feel secure; they might drop to the floor. The magistrate jolts to—he’s been sleeping a few seconds, a few minutes—his left arm slipped off the armrest sideways and woke him. His left hand tingles. The light’s painful, and the magistrate tries to cover his eyes with his left hand, but the hand is heavy, still asleep. He checks his watch: only a few minutes since the last time he checked. He laces his fingers across his stomach, lets his head drop forward, feels his neck grow stiff, his beard stubble scraping. He tries to stay still, hoping to fall asleep, though he’s completely uncomfortable. The light can’t be turned off. There’s no natural light: the room’s two windows were bricked up months ago and now a built-in safe almost blocks one of these windows entirely. The brickwork’s bare, red brick with gray-mortar stripes. The magistrate, who can’t sleep, listens to the sounds coming from his quarters, which are isolated from the rest of the building. There’s the hum of the small generator for his separate power system. And someone walking down the hall. Now and then a phone rings, but he can’t hear any voices. There are no doors to the rooms in his quarters: the guardian angels took them, and now all that’s left are the two fire doors to the single entrance. This way, whoever’s patrolling the

hall can see into every room. In the magistrate's room, in the furthest corner from the door, a convex mirror hangs two meters off the floor so you can also see down the hallway. It's the same in all the rooms. The magistrate, eyes closed, is completely still now, maybe he's been sleeping a few minutes. Arcangelo has entered the room; he's standing by the table, looking at the sleeping magistrate. Arcangelo's standing there looking at the magistrate, looking at him, listening to the magistrate's breathing as if, by the rhythm of this breathing, he might figure out what kind of sleep this is: an exhausted sleep or one from unbearable tension or tension soon to be relieved. A restful sleep that puts your thoughts in order or one that makes you feel bad after, muddle-headed. Slowly, Arcangelo draws his lips in, and almost whispering, he says: *bang*. The magistrate jumps up in his chair, gripping the armrests, wide-eyed, sees Arcangelo. Then he slumps back, sprawled in the chair.

"Arcangelo, you idiot, you scared me."

"Scared's my job, Judge, not yours. You trying to steal my job?"

The magistrate can't stand it when Arcangelo talks this way, part hired gun, part lone avenger. Still, the magistrate knows what he, Arcangelo, means when he talks this way and considering everything, Arcangelo's right. He means: security's my job, the inquest is yours; try your hardest not to worry about security, because I'm here, and that's what I'm breaking my back over the whole damned day. The magistrate thinks: This is all I can do, entrust my life to this man. If it were up to me, I'd be much worse off. Arcangelo sits down at the table opposite the magistrate, steadily staring him in the face and asks, "Are you all right?," sounding almost casual as he pulls a scrap of paper and a pencil from his right pocket, clears a space among the mountains of papers on the table, leans over the glass tabletop, and starts writing while he says, "I've been thinking of sending you home in a little while. But there's a problem," and shows the magistrate the scrap of paper which has written on it: "Do you want to see your wife?" The magistrate nods yes while of course he's thinking no, he has no desire *to go home*, which, in Arcangelo's language, means getting to his room (windowless, no door, with surveillance and a convex mirror, same as here) in another barracks full of *carabinieri*, but of course, yes, his eyes tell Arcangelo, he wants to see his wife, no question: he hasn't seen his wife for twenty-seven days, hasn't spoken to her on the phone in five. He gestures to his watch, asking when, and says, "I've been trying to get a little sleep before finishing up a few things. I'll need at least an hour, maybe two, two and a half," while Arcangelo's written beneath

his question, “Ten minutes. Stay put,” which he shows the magistrate and says: “Okay. But I don’t know if I can get you out of here in two hours. You might wind up waiting a little longer,” and he’s already standing up, putting the note back in his pocket, pencil too, already walking out of the room, winking from the doorway, smiling, as if this were all a joke. Something pops into the magistrate’s head: how much this reminds him of the expression on his college classmate’s face when this classmate made him come along on an errand delivering notes to another classmate, a girl from a nice home. In this nice home, they certainly couldn’t turn down an espresso, but before the coffee even arrived in the small sitting room, this friend suddenly remembered another engagement, an obvious lie, and so he left him there with this girl who accepted the situation with such natural ease, she was clearly prepared for this all along, if not the one who orchestrated it in the first place. In the doorway, before he bolted, his classmate tried to give him a meaningful wink and a cheerful smile, but the smile was twisted with embarrassment.

Arcangelo has the exact same expression, the magistrate thinks, except Arcangelo’s in charge of all the guardian angels so he’s not the least embarrassed; his is more of an approving smile, like a teacher smiling at his clever student. Even Arcangelo admitted once that they didn’t need all these precautions inside the compound, though that could change (“for now, sure, but who knows about tomorrow . . .”); still, he insisted—and the magistrate thought this was ridiculous—that they should at least follow protocol “purely as an exercise” when it came to discussing transfers: say one thing, write down another. Alone, the magistrate thinks, Funny: this time, he actually talked about a transfer, so he made a mistake, unless . . . unless someone’s really listening in today, and that someone’s so close, so ready to interfere, it’s not enough just to keep him from knowing what we’re going to do—we need to try and make him believe we’re doing something else. Or maybe Arcangelo’s compulsion makes him keep inventing and lying, inventing lies that keep getting riskier, closer to the truth: there have been times when the magistrate’s thought that Arcangelo himself longed to be in the dark about these complicated plans that he ceaselessly worked out, modified, transformed, and in the end, nearly always canceled.

The magistrate, stretched out in his chair once more, wonders if he’s really going to see his wife tonight. It’s five fifteen. Maybe Arcangelo’s playing a trick on him so he’ll be more prepared, more obedient, when the actual time comes to leave. He hasn’t done this yet, but he might. The last

time the magistrate saw his wife, he and Arcangelo wound up in a ferocious argument. They'd dropped the magistrate off at eleven o'clock at night, in a makeshift bedroom in a *carabinieri* barracks in another city: it must have been some kind of conference room with all the furniture pushed to one side, and at the center of the room stood two little folding cots, which, if you shifted around too much, folded up on their own; his wife had been waiting there since morning, no one told her when he'd come; you have 'til six, Arcangelo said, practically tossing him into the room. The next day, Arcangelo defended himself, saying he didn't have a choice, her security was even more complicated than his; and the magistrate, shocked he could be so vulgar, had screamed that if Arcangelo thought all he wanted to do was fuck, then why not just bring him some train-station whore and then, for security purposes, take her and all his little notes and stuff them in the incinerator, or maybe he'd like to have a go at her himself, to blow off some steam; and Arcangelo answered in a very flat voice that if the magistrate wanted, this could be arranged, as if his screaming were really a request Arcangelo was ready to fill, within the limits of what was possible, and of course taking into account all the planning involved. Stupid idiot. But in the meantime, with Arcangelo not fighting back, the magistrate could feel his fury waning, and quit talking. I should have said something else entirely, the magistrate thinks as he sits in his chair: I should have told him how much we love each other, Renna and I, so much that physical intimacy hardly matters anymore, all we need is a little time together, time to settle in and be tender with each other and whisper together. Probably the most beautiful thing tonight for Renna would be if she could make us supper, just a little something, and we could eat her meal together: like a married couple living in the same house, a stupid little married couple in a romance novel, the man coming home from working all day, the woman seducing him every night with her little gastronomic wonders, and of course she'll insist he stuff himself, because they don't have any children, and so he'll have to eat enough for the four children she dreams of. . .

The magistrate feels a little stupid thinking this way, but he can't help himself. Arcangelo's news (put in the form of a question, but that was really a trick: the only response to one of Arcangelo's requests was yes) has reawakened all his longing for his wife; all his longing not to be here, in these armored quarters; his longing to be another person in another world with another job. It's been four years since the magistrate realized he no longer had a choice. As soon as they relaxed his security, he'd be killed. Even if he wanted to abandon everything, the inquest, his profession,

even if he went into hiding, with Renna, without Renna, someplace faraway, they'd be found and killed in no time. On the desk, four files lie open, four different testimonies about a meeting that took place in a secret mountain cabin a few months back, a meeting of representatives from the families who control people's lands, lives, and deaths; the goal of the meeting: an agreement on how to allocate each family's sphere of influence as tied to its economic and military strength, to reduce costly border wars and power struggles; an obviously provisional, illusory agreement, and certainly no peace treaty, that's come about at the request of a few families currently in a bit of trouble: these four testimonies, from people accused of various crimes who've decided to provide state evidence, corroborate one another, corroborate so completely, that the magistrate thinks it's simply not possible they weren't carefully prepared to confuse the inquest. The magistrate knows there's always a precise correlation between a lie and the reality hidden behind that lie (Arcangelo also knows this, toys with this), and these days, his job consists of imagining, through deduction, experience, intuition, and even through pure fantasy, what the reality is that's been so carefully hidden behind these blatantly similar testimonies. Of course the witnesses themselves don't know— you'd have to be crazy to let people give false testimonies who actually had any real information: they'd let something slip and not even know it, maybe their lies would be too perfect, false truths too meticulously hiding real truths (that's what makes Arcangelo's perfectionism so costly and dangerous). While it was tough getting hold of these people and convincing them to talk, that's still no guarantee their information's valid. They were probably already in jail when they learned what to say in their testimonies: even from jail, they could still serve the organization, could still earn their pay and protection. One of these four witness-defendants was killed in prison by a convict from an opposing family. But this doesn't mean anything, either. No security system's perfect; no one's to be completely trusted.

It's been a long while since the magistrate first realized all he felt toward the State was hatred. When the inquest began, that wasn't the case. The work made him happy, a strange happiness, almost bordering on shame. His work was like that of a surgeon sinking his scalpel into flesh: the flesh was the people in these cities far from the city he called home; it was the buildings and walls here, especially in the historical districts and in the towns furthest from the cities, up in the mountains, where the forms and colors were almost Asian, gorgeous, awe-inspiring, so ancient; it was the strange countryside, arid, stubbornly cultivated, almost treeless, run

through with dry, phantom-river beds that came alive only a few days a year, where, now and then while you traveled, you saw the evidence of lost prosperity, clusters of white, deserted houses; it was all of this, the flesh he cut into, and back then, so long ago, the magistrate had fooled himself into thinking he was like an expert surgeon who cuts away a tumor, who makes organs function again and restores the body to good health. That this was all false hope, foolish ambition, the magistrate only realized over time: you couldn't tell the healthy parts from those turned monstrous; blood and poison circulated in the same veins; snakes formed in women's wombs; babies hatched from snakes' eggs. It was too hard, this land, for men to live as men; maybe this wasn't always true, but by now, in this century, it was, and the magistrate felt like a torturer, like a surgeon who has before him Siamese twins that share a single heart and liver and has to pick which one to kill and which one to save. The magistrate studied the tumor, how it metastasized and spread inward from the marginal lands where it exerted its control toward the center, creeping into the capital like the hyphae of some fungus; and then there was that terrible time he'd never forget, in a sumptuous ministry office, and what he saw in his superior's face, his superior who was complimenting him in such noble, generic language, commending him for his work so far, urging him to continue with the inquest, and this was the exact reason, his superior announced—so the inquest could be even more fruitful—that some areas of the inquest were being removed from his jurisdiction and assigned to other magistrates, for maximized effort, and the magistrate saw in his superior's face, he recognized, the all too present signs of evil. Oh, of course this high official, so dignified, so pompous, wasn't controlled by one of the families, and if the magistrate had told this official what he'd seen in his face, the man would have been outraged, would have screamed, his face turning red (and the tumor, more obvious), and kicked the magistrate out of his office and run to a higher official demanding the impudent magistrate's head. No, it certainly wasn't one of the families that controlled this official: it was a thousand reckless instincts that always kept him wanting more, though never the one thing truly worth wanting—the destruction of the families. Rather than letting himself obsess over that, like a doctor lets himself obsess over someone ill, this high official simply let himself be distracted: maybe he wanted a position for someone close to him, or for someone close to someone close to him, and the inquest might help that person's reputation, help launch a career or provide a noble finish to an otherwise drab career; maybe with this inquest, he wanted to apply good common sense (one person doing

the work vs. more people doing more and even better work), which he still wanted to believe in, even if the families' increased power these last few years had torn the State apart; maybe he wanted to satisfy someone he felt obliged to—for noble reasons, of course. The magistrate hadn't told this high official what he read in his face because he didn't want to be cut off from everything: that would have compromised the inquest completely.

That was the first compromise: the magistrate decided to live with the tumor because cutting into it in any one place would mean losing the chance to cut into it. For a while, the magistrate considered this compromise: *playing it smart*; but before too long, he knew he hadn't so much played as lost. Then one day he realized that through this loss, the tumor had now spread to him: in a way, he continued with the inquest because the families let him, but only with those parts of the inquest that they hadn't taken away, or rather, with those parts of the inquest that they let him continue with. He couldn't help thinking that the families must profit from the inquest, though in some secret way impossible to tell: the magistrate already knew that sometimes the stronger families left it to state law to liquidate the smaller families; first, though, they'd make sure and kill the bosses and anyone else who might know something important or that couldn't be recycled once he was cleaned up and gotten under control; then they'd leak something small and let *the law* scrape off the plate.

The magistrate only met one family member who decided to tell the actual truth. This was an important man in his family, and he'd turned over some valuable information. He was nothing like the four fake witnesses whose four files lay open on the magistrate's table, or any of the other dozens of fake witnesses the magistrate had encountered over his years on the inquest. When the *carabinieri* raided his hideout, this man was holding a submachine gun, and he shot and killed two young officers. At his trial, he was convicted only for this, along with possession of a military weapon; the court couldn't be convinced of this man's high position in his criminal family. He sat in his cell for almost two years without saying a word. Then he asked to speak to the magistrate, and slowly, he forced the words out, they seemed to stick in his throat, to be anchored behind his teeth, and he'd stop himself to cry, trembling, never looking up, wringing his hands, whispering, barely audible, as he gave out detail after detail, later all confirmed: people's names, the organization's decision-making process, bank accounts, addresses, future plans. The first interview lasted six hours, from ten in the morning until four

in the afternoon, then the man collapsed from exhaustion; afterwards, the magistrate's first thought was for the safety of the man's family, his elderly mother and his wife; he managed to keep them alive for almost two weeks and got them the man's brief note just in time, which basically said: I killed you, forgive me, I don't want to see you. Miraculously, the man stayed alive another three years, and some of the inquest's definitive cases were brought to a close thanks to him; that this so-called key witness survived so long was clear proof for the defense that his testimony wasn't reliable.

The magistrate felt oddly disturbed by this key witness. He felt an odd love, an empathy toward this man. He'd never have believed it if the man said he'd decided to talk because, over two years of isolation and silence, he'd come to recognize justice; but the key witness never said anything of the kind. He was elliptic concerning these matters, a strange contrast to his hesitant yet precise description of events that occurred. One day, responding to one of the magistrate's questions, the key witness said: "You, Mr. Judge, they're going to kill. No matter how well you're protected. You don't know when, but you already know there's no escape. You already know there's no escape, but you don't know when. And there's no getting out of it: the longer the inquest goes, the uglier your death will be. But somewhere down the line, you can choose a day to die. All you have to do, the day you're ready, is step outside in your shirt-sleeves and go for a gelato in the piazza."

This is what the key witness said. Less than two weeks before, during a night of tears, the magistrate and Renna, who was unexpectedly pregnant, had decided she'd have an abortion. That night they realized they couldn't bring someone into this world. It wasn't just the unlikelihood, so painfully obvious, that this child would ever see his parents grow old or that he himself would ever reach adolescence or young adulthood. It was also, above all, their complete lack of hope in any future. By now, the magistrate and his wife didn't find life worth living without their moments, their fragments of happiness found only on occasion in the present. They wouldn't know what to give a child; they'd raise him like a plant blowing in the wind. And so they decided she'd have an abortion, no matter how repugnant the idea. Their decision felt supremely unjust, but they didn't know what they could decide that was less unjust. In the years that followed, their child showed up often in their dreams: he was a boy with bright eyes touched with gray, light blond hair, thin lips, extremely small hands, disproportionately small, like a doll's. He was always wearing jeans

and a red shirt. In their dreams, the child was with his parents in a big field of dark grass, the woods off in the distance, no clouds in the sky but also no sun, a sky filled with silver light. They were strolling in the field, and then the son walked off toward the woods, looking back now and then at his parents who couldn't follow. He didn't seem to hate them for killing him, and that was a comfort. But his red shirt was blood red, and that was painful.

The magistrate had only a short time to get the most dangerous papers into the safe. He slipped them into their files, opened the safe, put the files inside, closed the safe, went back to the table and started flipping through an enormous *ABI* volume, the proceedings of a conference of the Italian Banking Association on money laundering. If someone was listening in, he needed to think the magistrate was still working, that he'd set some documents aside for something else. The magistrate had once tried getting an arrest warrant for a participant of this conference, one of the chairmen who'd proposed what was probably the most astute, impregnable set of controls. Of course there wasn't much evidence, just some testimony in exchange for a deal, so not very credible; still, the magistrate recognized the same intellectual style in some of the laundering operations that he saw in this set of controls (never actually applied) from the report. These were the words he let slip, *intellectual style*, and they laughed in his face. "Now you're seeing ghosts," they snorted.

"Next you'll want us to arrest the Interior Minister because he walks like a criminal or the Pope because from the back, he's got the neck of a felon. You've got a case of Lombrosian syndrome, you know—you're inventing an intellectual physiognomy—you want to arrest people based on the quality of their souls. Oh, please do go on with the inquest—we're not here to protect anyone—if you want to arrest a bank president, we're certainly not going to stop you, but you need to learn how to tell the difference between motives for arrest and oracles. You're identifying far too much with your work: you have to remember, it's not your job to institute justice throughout the land. All those who dreamed of bringing back a paradise on earth just wound up producing indiscriminate terror—if we left it up to you, you'd arrest anyone in this wretched country who had the slightest bit of power." And so the bank president remained safe and clear at the helm of his bank, although maybe he didn't feel quite so safe now that (for reasons the magistrate hoped stayed a mystery) certain channels had been, if not cut off, at least restricted, and certain contacts had grown weaker, certain people, less reliable.

With the secret complicity of one of the bank executives, a subordinate to the president though still fairly autonomous, the magistrate got some people transferred from one branch to another; had the duties changed for others; even managed to corrupt someone and turn him into an informant. If the flow of money were slowed down or interrupted, he might just be able to use this as evidence, and *evidence to the contrary*, that the bank president was guilty; at least it might cause a few problems, force those making use of the money to change their procedures or commit some kind of error.

Arcangelo had said ten minutes, but all that meant was: "No advance warning." One of the guardian angels paused in the doorway, glanced to the empty side of the room, to the mirror, then glanced at the magistrate by his desk and smiled.

Just kids, twenty-two to twenty-four years old, all handpicked by Arcangelo: in a way, they revered the magistrate; they treated him with the respect you might hold for an ancient relic, a precious Chinese vase, but it was Arcangelo they obeyed, down to the smallest detail. The boy disappeared from the mirror; the magistrate heard his light step a few seconds more. One day, when yet another trial ended without a conviction, due to contradictory testimony and problems interpreting the evidence (even though everyone knew, in their heart of hearts, that the accused were guilty), the magistrate had sent a top-secret letter to the capital, which basically said: I can't take it anymore, I'm worn out, my brain's not working anymore; a few days later, the head of state himself called to say that the State really couldn't manage without him; his experience was indispensable, his devotion, most admirable and meritorious; and for everything he'd done and might do in the future, he'd have the eternal gratitude of an entire nation; and he was wrong to feel isolated and abandoned, even if the head of state understood his frame of mind, down there, so close to the capital, maybe two hundred kilometers' distance but light-years away; and then a few days after that, Arcangelo showed up with his black suit and black hair, and he handed the magistrate a letter (the signature looked a great deal like the Interior Minister's) and told him: "I'm here for your security. You can accept or refuse my services. If you accept, then you have to accept whatever measures I take, and if you refuse, then I've been instructed to inform you we can't be held responsible for your security"; and the magistrate consented; there was nothing left to do: he could either choose to die soon, by the *gelateria* in the piazza, or he could die a little later, though he'd certainly still die, and this wasn't too far off, either,

maybe at the hands of this very man who didn't seem to have a real name, and so the magistrate dubbed him Arcangelo.

He didn't take Arcangelo on because he had any hope for the future. He wasn't afraid, either (though they apparently thought he was, since they sent him Arcangelo). Still, once he understood that by sending Arcangelo, they'd washed their hands of his fate, the magistrate decided to survive. From then on, once Arcangelo arrived, he'd pretty much done what Arcangelo wanted, meaning his security—or more accurately, his survival—was Arcangelo's problem now; he'd stop struggling to survive; Arcangelo struggled for him; the magistrate focused on going ahead with the inquest, working as hard as he could, because he knew as long as there was an inquest, he'd have Arcangelo, and that there'd be an inquest forever, because as soon as you cut off one branch, two more grew back; it wasn't like it once was, in years past: he no longer did this out of any sense of justice, or because he hated these ferocious criminal families, these drug dealers, gunrunners, racketeers, these criminals in their white gloves, secret bosses but public officials in local administrations—by now, he did all this out of love for Renna, to have one day more, to be able to hold her now and then, to cry with her and collect her tears, to vindicate the death of their child with love, a love composed almost entirely of distant thoughts, of controlled phone calls, of sudden, guarded meetings, with no intimacy whatsoever, no surprises, no relations, no hope.

Once the magistrate, not even knowing why, suddenly asked Arcangelo—“And what about you—do you have a wife somewhere?”—and to his surprise, Arcangelo reached into his inside jacket pocket and pulled out a leather case with a photo of a plain, chubby girl in a bathing suit, a blond, naked baby in her arms, some unknown body of water behind her, her mouth strained, eyes narrowed against the sun, blond hair barely held back, stringy and tangled around her face. Another photo showed this same girl, thinner, prettier, in jeans and blue canvas shoes, in a white blouse that tied in the front, very seventies style, her mouth and eyes laughing, practically climbing onto the pedestal of an awful gilded statue, and there in the background was the Eiffel Tower, of course. “How long since you've seen her?” the magistrate whispered, still stunned, and Arcangelo didn't answer, just tucked the case away, and squinted at the magistrate, like someone who'd been extorted, tricked into sharing a confidence he really didn't want to share. But the magistrate understood this lesson, and the next day he asked that one of the guardian angels be sent to his real house for a box of photographs he had in a drawer; he

found the photo he was looking for, a very old black-and-white snapshot from when they'd only known each other a few weeks, taken in a photo booth in the Bologna train station, that time they'd gone to the Patti Smith concert and missed the last train, and so they had to wait for two hours in the middle of the night, almost till morning; at first they wandered around the dark, deserted city, then exhausted, they sought refuge in the station, but there were already bums on all the benches and steps, and in the photo booth, they took that passport-sized photo of the two of them that looked a bit distorted; the taxi drivers outside the station offered them some wine, they were so hungry and tired and dazed: Renna had a big nose and thick lips, her most beautiful feature, and he still had that beard covering his baby face, his best feature, Renna taught him later, but at that point he was so timid and embarrassed, he tried to hide it. The photograph fit in his wallet, it would be a little creased, but that didn't matter: it didn't have to last very long. That night, many hours later, the train arrived, headed from Vienna to Rome, and there were only berths, so theoretically, they weren't allowed on, but the kind conductor told them, "Climb up," and "Watch your step," and in the berth of an empty compartment they dropped off to sleep, on top of each other, and that was their extremely innocent first night together; they woke up almost to Rome and began giving each other tiny kisses and caresses, dazed and happy, stinky and dreamy.

Renna looked very small, sitting with her heels tucked under her in the backseat of the enormous car, her shoes kicked off, wearing a worn-out blue linen suit; she was thin, her face drawn, dark, her nose huge now, her lips extremely thin; she only said, "Hi," as the guardian angels hurled him inside, and he took her right hand in his left, her hand felt light and fragile, and he clutched it and didn't let go. Arcangelo got in up front beside the driver. The motorcade sped off, who knows where they were taking them, there had to be at least two cars ahead and two cars behind, sirens screaming; they were out of the city almost at once, then onto the highway, not stopping, through the public vehicle toll-booth, speeding along as fast as possible, they're taking us to the airport, the magistrate thought, then he thought how strange, Arcangelo never goes in my car, then he felt the impact and Arcangelo was rising up, arms open, head back, almost on top of him; and he felt the car flying, metal opening below his feet, crumpling, red hot, burning, devouring Renna's legs; he heard Renna screaming and felt the pressure crushing his chest, pushing his eyes into his head, throwing his head back; he felt something

that wasn't flesh inside his flesh, cutting, separating his chest from his belly, his right arm from his torso; and with all his remaining strength, the magistrate gripped Renna's hand, and as long as he was able to love her he loved her.