

We return to their house. Uncle gives us his matrimonial bed, in the only bedroom of the house, and they take the sofa bed in the living room where Charlie usually sleeps. Susan makes a fuss, saying it isn't right and that she insists we take the sofa.

"No! I've decided. There will not be any discussions." He raises his voice and Susan acquiesces.

Charlie leaves and says that he will see us in the morning. He tells us he is staying at a friend's house.

"*Buona notte*," Uncle and aunt say at the same time.

"*Buona notte*," Susan answers, but, still angry, I say nothing.

An old porcelain doll in a frilly pink dress centres the bed we have been assigned, and I feel out of sorts. *Zia* told us that she changed the sheets when she found out that we were coming, a small consolation for what I'm feeling. I have not said a word since we left the restaurant, trying to make sense of what I heard and what I felt then and of what I remembered then and of what I feel now. It wasn't so much my mother's ghost that bothered me but that my memories were back-pedaling and confusing me. I don't remember telling my father, I thought he just knew.

Pictures of the Madonna and multiple prints of Padre Pio, the new beloved religious patriarch of Sicilians, adorn the walls. A large crucifix with a rosary coiled around it is above the headrest. The religion comes from *zia*. Uncle only believed in himself. Did *zia* know? A large green transport chest is at the foot of their wooden bed. An armoire, of the same dark veneer as the bed, and a porcelain washbasin on a stand complete this Spartan décor. His welcome had been so amiable, so hospitable, as if there had been no history, no past. As if no one had done anything wrong.

John Calabro

My skin crawls and I am reluctant to touch anything in this room. As a child, this bedroom had always been forbidden territory. I resolve to sleep in my clothes, on top of the sheets, and to barely move. Susan, slightly inebriated, could not begin to understand what I was feeling, and taking this adventure in stride, goes to the washroom, brushes her teeth and changes into the summer pyjamas she brought with her. After a peck on the cheek, and a declaration of love, she promptly falls asleep.

I can't sleep, but dare not toss around too much. Immobile, I stare straight up at the cracks in the ceiling stucco. The shadows and the cobwebs are lit by a slight moon that shines in through a small back window. I close my eyes.

Couscous in oversized plates, the cemetery, people dressed in black, my father, dirt pathways, my uncle, grandfather Salvatore, the edge of the mountain. The Mediterranean, a coffin, the fig tree, Rosetta, the castle, Antonio, my mother, Charlie, Susan... each image comes and goes, but still I can't sleep, and open my eyes to watch the shadows against the wall. I close my eyes again, and everyone is eating and laughing except Charlie and me. One more plate, one more glass of wine, one more memory, one more contradiction. Lizards are crawling all over my mother's body, and I let them. My father is tied to the fig tree and the lizards are gnawing at his feet. The fragments of images, in their repetitions and in their rearrangement, conspire to keep me awake. My stomach tries to regurgitate both dinner and indigestible memories. I fight back and send everything down. I try counting to a thousand. When there, I count backward to zero. The exercise sharpens my mind and I go back to thinking about my mother and my uncle. It wasn't right. Maybe I might have said something to my father, maybe that I saw them kiss. I am not even sure that

the memory is correct. And what if I did tell my father, now everything is my fault. Sure, so easy, blame the victim. Fuck them.

An hour later I am still miserable, and because of that still awake, except that my bladder is ready to burst and I need to find a bathroom.

Silently cursing everyone and everything, I stumble my way to the side door that takes me to the garage-kitchen that leads to the washroom. I find it easily; the bathroom, although modernized, is in the same place. The lamppost outside the garage window slats gives enough light to guide me towards the door. I don't even need to reach for the light-switch.

My hand is on the knob of the bathroom door before I realize from the sliver of light under the door that it is occupied.

It is locked; there is a pause, and then the words "*Che cazzo*" come through the door, and then, "I'll be out in a minute."

Embarrassed, I say nothing and debate going back to bed, but the need to urinate is too strong and it keeps me standing to the side of the door. There is a faint smell of sweet smoke coming from the washroom.

"Charlie, it's me. Are you going to be long? I have to pee badly."

He doesn't answer.

I wait, and wait, cross my legs and wait some more.

The door finally opens, and he walks out smiling, a devilish smile with a 'got-you' smirk.

He looks me in the eyes, waits for my reaction, and says nonchalantly, "*Vado a Trapani, vuoi venire?*"

Did I want to go to Trapani with him?

"No!"

John Calabro

He stares, and notices that I am fully clothed.

“You look ready to go. I have the Vespa outside, we’ll be there in no time, I’ll bring you back when you want.”

He’s still smiling, knowing that this is not funny and that he shouldn’t do this to me. He raises one perfectly tweezed eyebrow, and continues to smile a half-ironic, half-prankish smile. Although it should be, this is not a joke.

He asks as if we are in the middle of the afternoon, looking for something to do to pass the time, but it isn’t like that at all. This isn’t an invite for a *passeggiata* to the *Piazza*. The plan is a midnight escapade, a sortie with a Sicilian cousin, whose thinness is being back-lit by a dangling bathroom light, and whose long, shoulder-length hair is now tied in a tight pony tail, framing cheeks that he has brushed with rouge and lips that he has tainted with bright red lipstick, and wearing a short black dress over fishnet stockings, and whose pointy, razor-sharp high heels make him look taller. It is a shocking and incongruous picture of my cousin Charlie in full drag, smiling at me, and offering me a toke from a half smoked joint.

Did I want to go to Trapani with him looking like that? I don’t think so.

“*Allora?* The club I’m going to has a rock and roll DJ tonight, all American music, it will be fun.”

I don’t answer. I am actually quite grossed out. I know about transvestites, I have seen them in Toronto, around Jarvis, or outside El Convento Rico, or during Pride Week, but this is different. Other people are transvestites, other people are gay, but not family members. My chest tightens, my stomach hurts.

He pushes for me to go. “You’ll like it, see a different Sicily.”

My silence tells him that I am not going, and he sounds disappointed. “I understand cousin, it’s okay, it’s not everybody’s thing.”

He says it as if he had misjudged me and then adds apologetically, “But cousin, it’s too bad...”

Charlie quietly makes his way towards the door, picks up a pair of large denim overalls and slips them over his dress, takes off his shoes and puts on a pair of runners.

No longer in drag, and looking like a car mechanic, he says, “For the town, you know, in case... So cousin, for sure it’s no?”

“I’ve got to pee.”