THE

A NOVEL

FALLEN

ONE

The donkey lay on its side in the middle of the road, flesh quivering, tail beating against bloodied haunches, breath steaming in the cold night air. The pavement around it, littered with bits of broken glass, reflected the colours of the fire that licked the walls of the Stazione Marittima.

Huddled in a nearby doorway, Aldo Cioffi watched the dying animal. He knew that before long someone would come to collect the carcass so that it might be sold off to a *macellaio*, and that by morning it would be butchered, cut into slabs—rib steaks and flank steaks and loin filets and sinewy briskets—and laid out on dampened beds of sawdust in a shop window on Via Roma. There would be shank cuts and shoulder clods and cross ribs, too. Nothing would go to waste, not even the offal: the intestines could be boiled, the brain stewed, the tongue sliced cold, the marrow simmered from the bones, and the kidney, heart, and spleen, and whatever else was left, ground up and made into spiced *salsicce*.

The thought of it focused Cioffi's hunger and made him aware again of the nagging pain in his belly. He wished he had some way of taking the beast himself. It would fetch a good price, and he might keep some of the meat—a shoulder cut to stew, the liver for his anemia; it had been a simple, textbook diagnosis: shortness of breath and dizziness, headaches and a mild angina.

The air around him was laced still with the sharp smell of gasoline, and Cioffi could imagine the fire burning for days before the last drop of fuel evaporated. Or maybe it would never go out. Maybe it would become like the eternal flames lit at gravesides, always flickering, a constant reminder of loss.

Though loss was not something of which Cioffi needed reminding. He lived with it every day. More often than not, his life seemed to him an incessant pageant of forfeiture—a relentless dissipation, a never-ending giving up of things.

He had made a list once. And sitting with his friend, Lello Conforti, in the Villa Nazionale, on a bench in the shadow of the Stazione Zoologica, sharing a bottle of honey grappa that he'd stolen from a crate left untended at the back door of a taverna in the Spaccanapoli—how his heart had pounded as he fled the alleyway with the bottle tucked into the lining of his jacket—he'd begun to count off on his fingers all that had been taken from him: "My family, my legacy, my career …" Lello had stopped him there. "What do you mean, your career?" he'd asked. "I could have opened a practice," Cioffi said. "Or maybe I could have been a surgeon." "You hated the idea of being a doctor," Lello said. "It was your parents who wanted that for you." "I might have changed my mind," said Cioffi. "But you never finished your studies." "That's not the point." Lello shook his head. "It isn't, eh? Then what is the point?" "It is simply," Cioffi said, "that opportunity has been denied me by wretched circumstance." "I see," said Lello. "Tell me, then, this legacy—are you talking about your inheritance? The allowance that your father left to you?" "I am." "But you spent that, Aldo. It wasn't taken from you." "That may be," replied Cioffi, "but who's to say that if I had been able to establish myself in a practice or in a surgery that I wouldn't still have it today?" "You're being ridiculous." At that point a group of German soldiers

came towards them along the cinder path. Seeing the honey grappa, they stopped and demanded the bottle from them. Cioffi gave it up without protest, and once they'd gone, he turned back to his friend and said: "Now do you see what I mean?"

He braced himself against the breeze coming in off the bay; it was wintry with the last chill of January. Tonight he could add a few more items to his list of lost things: a decently forged Roman coin bearing the likeness of the siren Parthenope, two twenty-gallon jerry cans of U.S. Army gasoline, and the three hundred lire that Maggio the second-hand dealer had advanced him as payment. But where another man might have cursed his luck, Cioffi had long given up the notion he'd had any to begin with.

When the petrol dump exploded, he had been beneath the portico of San Francesco di Paola, forcing his last twenty lire on the girl he had followed there from the Caffè Gambrinus. She was young: sixteen, maybe younger. He had watched her through the café window while he and Lello drank away the *bancarellaro's* money. She had noticed him, too, and waited in the darkness just beyond the terrace. Lello had tried to warn him away from her, said that it was likely she would take him someplace where others waited to rob him, but by that time Cioffi had drunk enough not to care. Lello reminded him of Maggio and the American military policeman and of all the trouble he had gone through getting the forged coin. A good deal of risk had gone into concocting his little business arrangement, an investment had been made, and not just by himself; it would be foolish to chance it on something so trivial—and besides, he hadn't enough money left to pay a prostitute. But Cioffi would not be discouraged. He left the café and met the girl in the shadows and then followed her across the darkened expanse of Piazza del Plebiscito to where she lived rough in a small alcove outside the basilica. In the shallow niche she had fashioned a

bed out of sandbags and cloth sacking, and had collected about her sentimental trinkets: a cracked ceramic vase, an empty wooden picture frame, two small figurines—African heads carved of ebony—and a plaster madonna. She told him she wanted fifty lire and said that there were boys who protected her and she would call to them if he didn't pay. He heard their voices farther along the portico, but when he turned back, she had already lifted her skirts. He stood a moment and stared at her nakedness, then began to fumble with his trousers. He had only just lain down on the sacking when the air-raid sirens began. The girl tried to push him away, but he held her arms. When she cried out, he put a hand over her mouth. She struggled against him, but he was stronger. When her body went limp, he thought that he had smothered her. He looked into her face: her eyes were rolled back, as if she were trying to see something behind her. Then he felt her lips moving against his damp palm. He took his hand away. He realized that she was praying: a whispered appeal to the cheap statuette of the Virgin. He stood up and dressed himself and took the twenty lire from his trouser pocket and held it out to her, but she would not look at him. Then it was as if the gates to the inferno had been thrown open: a great bloom of fire rose from behind the Palazzo Reale, flames curling into the night sky.

It seemed to Cioffi that he was always paying a price for something: a foolish indiscretion, a lapse of judgment. He should have listened to Lello—Lello, his best friend and conscience—and let the girl alone. And he should never have trusted the American MP; he should have given the coin to him after he'd received the gasoline, and not have believed him when he said the canisters would be waiting for him outside the depot fence. He doubted that they had been there at all. And so, once again, he was left empty-handed. It was a familiar refrain.

He looked along the wide boulevard towards the port. The fire brigades had arrived and tanker trucks pumped water. Several warehouses were ablaze, as well as the customs sheds and a number of motor launches moored on the quayside. In the other direction, beyond the Giardini Pubblici and the Marina of Santa Lucia, the searchlights atop the walls of Castel dell'Ovo continued to rummage the night sky.

Then a voice from behind startled him: "Good evening, *dottore*."

He turned round to see Maggio, the second-hand dealer, standing not more than an arm's length away.

"Marcello," Cioffi said. "Where did you come from?"

Maggio grinned. He was a big man, the sort whose body, once muscled, had gone mostly to fat. Heavy jowls that quivered whenever he spoke stretched his round face. His coat was made from stolen U.S. Army blankets that had been sewn together and fixed with large, mismatched buttons. "I've been watching you," he said, and nodded his bulging head in the direction of an alleyway a short distance off. "I thought you had something for me."

"The gasoline," said Cioffi.

"Yes. The gasoline. The gasoline that I *paid* you for."

What Cioffi wanted at that moment, more than anything, was another drink: something to dull his senses. The warm drunkenness from the Gambrinus had drained away and he felt the cold again. "I'm sorry, Marcello, but the bombs … The depot is destroyed."

Maggio stepped closer and Cioffi could smell his breath: cigarette smoke and mint leaves. "And my money?"

Cioffi pointed into the road. "If you help me, we could take the donkey. We could sell it for the meat. I'm sure you must know someone."

Maggio looked over at the animal. It had begun to scrape its hooves across the pavement in a hopeless attempt to raise itself: the forelegs

scrabbled, but the hindquarters would not respond—the spine was broken somewhere above the haunches.

Maggio left Cioffi standing in the doorway and went into the street. He found a loose paving stone and picked it up. As he approached, the donkey brayed, its flesh sticky with blood. Maggio looked down at the animal, then he lifted the paving stone above his head.

The sound that Cioffi heard was like the soft thud of something being dropped onto wet earth. The animal trembled once and then was still.

Maggio came back to the doorway. “I didn’t come for horsemeat,” he said, and slapped Cioffi hard across the face.

The iron taste of blood filled Cioffi’s mouth, and his eyes began to water.

“Where is my money?”

When Cioffi did not answer, Maggio slapped him again. When he raised his hand a third time, Cioffi cowered. “Please, Marcello,” he said, pressing his palms together. “It’s gone.”

“You mean you drank it.”

Cioffi nodded. “Yes. And a girl …”

Maggio lowered his hand. “A girl?”

“It was only twenty lire,” Cioffi said. “We could get it back, I’m sure of it. I know where she is.”

“What kind of a *puttana* spreads her legs for twenty lire?”

“It was more. It was fifty. But I lied to her, you see.”

Maggio shook his head. He stared at him. Then, after a moment, he reached out and smoothed the lapels of Cioffi’s jacket. “I should have known better than to do business with a drunk like you, *dottore*.” The title was offered in mockery. Maggio delighted in the reversal of fortunes. There was a time when the Cioffi name was important in the city’s garment business, but left in the care of a dissolute only son, its shine had quickly tarnished. “I should never have taken pity on you,”

Maggio said. "You are more trouble than you are worth."

"Yes, Marcello. I am sorry."

"Now I have to tell don Abruzzi that I was wrong about you—and he held out such high hopes, what with your connections."

"What can I do?" Cioffi said.

Maggio smiled. "What can you do?" he said, and patted him gently on the cheek. "You can come and see me tomorrow at the market, that's what you can do. We'll go, the two of us, to see Abruzzi and you can tell him yourself what happened."

"Tomorrow?"

"Yes, tomorrow. What? Have you already got plans, *dottore?* Other business engagements to keep maybe?"

"No, Marcello."

"Good. Tomorrow at eleven o'clock, then. You come and see me. Maybe you can even get my money back."

After Maggio had gone, Cioffi sat down on the pavement. He leaned his back against the cold brick wall of the building. For a time he had difficulty catching his breath and he spat onto the ground beside him. He thought how nice it would be to leave Marcello Maggio with a bloody mouth. The fat *bancarello*—before the war Cioffi wouldn't have noticed him in the street, let alone spoken to him; yet now he grovelled for his favour, let himself be beat for the chance at a few extra lire.

He lifted his head and looked down the street. A young man and a boy had appeared, pushing a low-slung handcart with wooden-rimmed wheels. They came from the direction of the port, like two devils from out of the fires.

It was difficult work loading the donkey; the carcass was uncooperative. Twice the animal, drenched with its own gore, slipped from their grasp and landed, with a wet slap, on the pavement.

Cioffi wondered, if he offered to help them, would they share the profit with him, but the young man, who had noticed him sitting in the doorway, kept an eye. There was something in his look that convinced Cioffi he had no claim on the animal; the young man would fight him for it.

Finally, after rigging a makeshift pulley with bits of rope and using the tilt of the cart as leverage, the young man and the boy were able to shift the donkey into place. Its head hung over the side and the thick pink tongue dangled from between its slack lips.

Cioffi watched them as they started on their way back towards the port and the fire brigades and the flames. Then he lifted himself up and went into the road. He went to where the donkey had lain and looked down at the paving stone that Maggio had used to kill it. He pushed it with the toe of his boot. It was much heavier than he'd imagined.

An American jeep sped into the square. The severed beams of its blacked-out headlamps sliced across the stone lions that stood guard over the Monument of the Martyrs. In the trick of the light it appeared as if the marble beasts had moved, and Thomas Greaves could imagine them lifting themselves from their pedestals and stepping down into the street. Then the jeep was gone and the square was dark again and the lions settled on their plinths.

Greaves stood in the gateway to the courtyard. He'd waited out the raid there rather than go into the cellar with the others, because being locked away in the darkness while the bombs fell all around them seemed too much like the nightmares that already robbed him of his sleep. He preferred to take his chances above ground, under the wide open heavens.

To the south there was a false sunrise: the fires burning in the port bloodying the night sky. The fuel depot that shared the quayside with

the ferry docks looked to have taken a direct hit. Twenty minutes earlier, when the terminal exploded, it was as if a great angry fist had slammed into the earth, and the windows in the buildings bordering the square had shuddered and cracked in their frames. And though it was more than a mile away, Greaves had felt the heat of the blast, like the gust from an open furnace, but it was quickly replaced again by the chill of the Mediterranean winter.

He made his way now into the square. He went to the monument and sat down on the plinth of the nearest lion, the one writhing in animated pain from the pike driven deep between its ribs. He took out a cigarette, struck a match, and blew smoke into the cool night air. Then he reached into his pocket and took out the music box he'd purchased the week before from a blind merchant in Piazza Mercato. The lid was inlaid with mother-of-pearl: a likeness of the Sorrentine peninsula—chalky cliffs and fishing boats, white clouds, and the tiny slivers of gulls riding the winds over deep blue waters. He ran his hand over the lid, feeling the smoothness of the lacquer, then glanced back at the palazzo. It looked even shabbier in the pale moonlight—a heap of tumbledown old stones. Even the hand-painted sign on the courtyard gate announcing it as headquarters for 803 Field Security Section had come loose and hung now at a clumsy angle.

Greaves thought it fitting that the place looked as if it were about to fall in on itself. A single detachment of Field Security policemen left to care for military safekeeping of this teeming city: it was a hopeless mission. Before he'd arrived, there had been only one Italian-speaker in the unit, and that was Sergeant Jones, who had such a thick Welsh accent that many of the Neapolitans couldn't understand him. Not that their own clipped dialect was any easier to decipher. It had taken Greaves almost the entire six weeks he'd been in Naples to finally get a handle on it. And now that he had, most of the drudge work came his

way: civilian liaison, coordinating the transfer of intelligence with the local police, marriage vetting. He didn't mind so much; he preferred to be on his own. And the other members of the section seemed fine with the arrangement. His secondment hadn't met with much enthusiasm. It was a battlefield transfer, which immediately drew suspicion: a man wasn't moved off the line without good reason. Being Canadian hadn't counted for much, either. King and Country carried little weight with his British colleagues; as far as they were concerned, he was as good as a Yank. The FSO, Major Woodard, had let on as much when he'd arrived, paperwork in hand. It was mid-December and the other members of the section were gathered around a makeshift desk in the foyer, cutting out paper snowflakes to decorate the office for the holidays. The interview was conducted in the large gallery on the main floor of the palazzo that served as the major's office. After he'd gone through Greaves's file and his transfer documents, he set the paperwork aside and leaned back in his chair. He offered up a solemn look, as if he were a headmaster faced with a pupil he was certain would cause him grief. He hesitated a moment before he said: "I've been told by a fellow I know at GHQ that you were found with your revolver in your mouth. Is that right, lieutenant?" When Greaves didn't answer, the major became uncomfortable, and sat forward and flipped again through his file. He cleared his throat. "We don't go in for that sort of melodrama round here," he said. Greaves replied calmly, "No, sir, I don't suppose you do." Officially, he had come to 803 FSS on a training detail; he was listed to assume the Field Security Officer position of a Canadian Section stationed at Campobasso. However, no timetable for the reassignment had been included in his orders. And Greaves understood, as did the major and the others, that his designation to 803 FSS was to be indefinite. Someone at General Headquarters had made up his mind to lose him for a while.

The idea of being lost appealed to Greaves. For the last six months, it was exactly how he'd felt. He had tried to explain as much to the doctors when he was in the field station at Lentini and then later at No. 5 Canadian General Hospital at Catania. "I don't know who I am anymore," he'd told them. "I've completely lost my bearings." At No. 5 CGH they had psychiatrists on staff who wanted to hear more about this sense of disconnection; talking, they told him, would offer clarity. But Greaves hadn't known how to make it any clearer to them. He explained that sometimes, when he looked into the mirror, he didn't recognize the face looking back at him. "I mean, I know it's me," he said. "I can recognize my own features, but at the same time it isn't me. It's a complete stranger." Finally, a course of lithium carbonate was decided upon to calm his nerves. Greaves, though, wasn't convinced that his nerves were the problem. He wasn't like those poor souls from the last war who twitched and jerked and wet their pants when someone dropped a spoon on the floor next to them. His problem was that something had gone missing.

He looked down at the music box in his hand. He gave the key on the side a half turn. Inside, the spiked drum pricked at the stiff metal teeth of the tuning plate. The first slow notes of "Santa Lucia" chimed, and then the mechanism wound down again and the music stopped. Just then the all-clear was sounded, and Greaves could almost sense the stirring beneath the city of all those who had sought shelter in cellars and vaults and sewers, and in the labyrinthine warren of catacombs that ran like veins beneath the skin of Naples. And he thought to himself: it doesn't matter how well you hide yourself.