

Murtorio - Chapter 13  
(translation extract by Natasha Lehrer)

September, I emerge after the battle...I stayed inside the house up in the mountains all summer. I didn't go down to the coastal plain more than two or three times in August, to buy cigarettes, the newspaper, fill up the car, when I absolutely had to; and one other time when I had some revolting infection in my mouth and I had to go to the chemist to get some medicated mouthwash, a sort of orange liquid which stank of strawberry. I know what you're thinking: where exactly had he been shoving his mouth: what could he have been licking to get himself infected like that? But no, I'd been chaste, pretty much, all summer, a real monk of the mountains, I'd only slept with a couple of old trollops, for hygiene reasons - old, but clean. That's not how I got it. I don't know how I did get it, but one day my teeth were hurting and I noticed that my gums were oozing blood. There I was, waiting next to a pine tree, rifle in my arms, hoping to kill a blue jay to hang in my garden, when I started spitting blood, I could taste it in my mouth. A real fucking pain.

The next day I go off to see the doctor. I have to wait a good half hour with a whole bunch of patients before I was seen. There's a fat Arab woman with a kid, two or three years old, a young woman that I recognise from a neighbouring village, but we don't say hallo, anyway she's pig ugly, her nose is out of this world; there's a German tourist waiting too, wearing just one shoe, the other foot is covered in a huge bandage, I figure the twit must have stepped on a sea urchin when he went swimming, and there's another Arab, old, sitting next to me, I can see his socks are all patched up. He's the calmest of the lot of us, a sort of wise old country man, who's come here to work for some slave driver entrepreneur. The old guy seems to be really suffering, you can see it in his eyes, I have no idea what's making him suffer like that, maybe really bad headaches, but I'm not a doctor. Then there are a couple of *pinzuti* on holiday, the man's wearing flipflops with socks and he's losing patience. His wife looks like a barrel, with a pair of completely threadbare slippers. The guy can't sit still any more, he can't bear to wait any longer.

*'Let's go, I'm fed up,'* he says.

*'It's fine, stop it Jean,'* his wife says.

*'And you know what, I bet he's got no idea what he's doing. He's an Indian!'*

*'Stop it Jean. Keep your voice down.'*

Had I heard right? Had I understand what I'd heard him say? Who is he talking about? The doctor? I'm just debating what angle I should take to kick him, this fucking *pinzutu*, when the doctor comes into the waiting room and sees me.

*'Monsieur Cianfarani, please,'* he says in Indian dialect.

I get up and walk across the waiting room, not in the slightest bit embarrassed in front of the other patients. The doctor's a friend of mine, and I'm quite sure he's not respected the appointment list. As I pass the *pinzutu* I smirk at him, he is puce with fury but won't look at me. Loser. I could scalp him if I wanted to, like at Little Big Horn, except we are in a doctor's waiting room. So instead I think how this shiteater's going to have to wait a long time for his turn after me, there are privileges to do with solidarity between different tribes, and that's what this idiot's having a hard time swallowing.

Inside the consulting room we chat about everything and nothing, then I open my mouth wide to show him the disaster inside. The doctor is truly horrified as he examines me; he looks close to passing out as he draws on some gloves to palpate my

gums. He gently breaks the news that my mouth resembles a sewage pipe, then he writes me out a prescription for antibiotics and mouthwash.

Finding somewhere to park in town is a real nightmare, the place has been invaded by overweight tourists, swarming all over the place. Punch drunk from too much sun, they take over the roads and pavements. They just wander around, completely purposeless. It's like watching zombies in a Romero film. To get to the central square takes me a good ten minutes. Standing right in the middle of the road, his back to me, some dickhead in shorts is taking a photo of the Mairie. I'd really like to know what this moron finds so interesting that he has to take such a stupid picture. I'd also really like to know why I have to hang around like an idiot for him to finish faffing around. I press the horn furiously and the clown jumps out of the way like a frightened goat.

I swing into the private car park of the Mairie, and find a nice place to park in the shade. I have to be quick getting to the chemist because some town hall employee could put the chain up and then I'll be stuck inside the car park. So I run down to the chemist who makes up a mouthwash and gives a huge bottle of it to me with the other medicines. He chucks the lot into a bag and I run back to the car. That's when the lid pops off and the liquid spills. So there I am, fighting with the bottle top which doesn't want to stay on, my arms drenched in viscous liquid, when these three slags, twenty or twenty two, drive past in an old black car with a number plate from 1976. One of them's got her foot hanging out of the window, something that might very quickly push me to murder.

'Are you leaving?' says the bitch with her foot hanging out.

'Yes, but I'm having a bit of difficulty with this bottle.'

They park alongside my car, waiting for me to leave.

'Have you got an elastic band?' I ask the barefoot girl.

'What?'

'An elastic band, to try and close this bottle that's leaking everywhere.'

'Vero, he wants to know if we've got an elastic band.'

One of them throws me a thing for a ponytail that I try to use to hold the bottle top in place but it doesn't work. I chuck the elastic in the boot and decide to go back to the pharmacy to get another container.

'Sorry, I just have to go back to the chemist to change the bottle.'

'Ok,' says the bitch that does the talking, 'But do you think you could move your car so that we can park?'

I actually can't believe my ears. They can see that I've got liquid leaking all over me from this fucking bottle, but I'm supposed to move my car so that they don't have to waste two precious minutes while I try and sort my problem out.

'No, you can park on the side and wait for me to get back!'

They all pull sulky faces, give me really filthy looks, that make clear how happy they are to be have a local telling them where to get off – an Indian, as the *pinzutu* in the doctor's waiting room put it, just some fucking Indian, a loser local who's keeping them out of this perfect parking place. Who do I think I am? Their equal, perhaps?

'Okay then, give us back our elastic then!'

I turn around, open the boot, take the elastic and hold it out to them.

Between gritted teeth, I manage to spit out, 'Thank you, too kind! Really.' Seeing my cold expression, the tense muscles in my hands and neck – I think I might actually have changed colour – they understand that if they say a single word I will

sling each one of them a couple of punches: they take back their elastic without protest, tight lipped, just like any little vulgar slut wanting to show her contempt.