

*Mam,*

*Maybe I'm not mad. Maybe I'm not suicidal. Maybe I'm restless.*

*I might be 1300 miles away but I have Neapolitan blood and Neapolitan blood is restless. San Gennaro was beheaded but his blood is still flowing. Naples takes a couple of vials of it out every so often and it keeps on liquefying. Only it dawned on me that Neapolitan blood doesn't need a body and so deep down I mustn't care whether I live or die. I'm restless and reckless and this blood will kill me before it keeps me alive.*

*Did I ever tell you my earliest memory? Me burying my face in my dad's neck because lunging at us was a blind monster the same colour as the stone.*

*I don't remember how you explained it to me but I knew I was looking at a dead body and it burned into my brain then that that's what happens when people die: they turn the colour of stone and their eyes fall out. You shouldn't have brought me to Pompeii when I wasn't old enough to cope with monsters. Though I wonder now if that was the plan. Did you think bringing me there when I was small and easily scared would do the trick? That I'd steer clear if I associated Italy with death?*

*Like volcanoes. In Ireland we barely have mountains, in Napoli the mountain can kill you. And obviously Pompeii goes with Vesuvio. I found out years later that the bodies were just*

*plaster casts, but it didn't make a difference. Death, death everywhere, souvenirs of an explosive mountain.*

*Remember the wan you used to sing with at weddings? Stephanie? Once you were in the kitchen and it was bucketing down out and she said, I don't know why you'd live here, Maria, when you could live in Italy where it's hot, and you said, Raise sons in Napule? Jesus, girl, I'm not crazy. I asked Dad after what was so murderous about Napoli anyway, apart from the mountain? He said it had more than its share of head-the-balls. This would have been around the time of the Scampia thing. Don't live in Napoli, the place can kill you in a hape of different ways.*

*And you were from there, so I always knew you were going to die too.*

*Thing is, after you died the frequency of visits to Napoli was dictated by your mam and dad and their need to pinch our cheeks eclipsed your deserter's logic. Usually I went when the option was there. I was last over in the summer. I went to see you but I didn't do any talking coz Karine was with me and we'd just done a week in Ibiza and were both fucking goosed. So maybe you didn't notice me there. I was though.*

*Karine was quiet too but I didn't think much of it. I mean, she speaks only English, why wouldn't she be quiet? But on the second day we went out for a poke around and some proper pizza, and she said to me:*

*Ryan, this is so weird.*

*I thought she meant the mess. She kept gawping, as if Napoli was a bedroom I'd forgotten to tidy before inviting her round. In a narrow lane between crumbling walls tagged over and over again she told me, It's so weird that you're talking and I can't understand you.*

*She'd never thought of me as anything but a Corkonian, and now all of a sudden I was a Neapolitan, gibbering and kissing fellas. It was a part of me she'd glimpsed only during long-distance phone calls or Napoli matches. Front-and-centre, she*

*had to accept that I'd never been a whole person, just two torn halves.*

*It's a fucked up thing to feel drawn to somewhere you don't really belong. I think you'd get that, you felt that way about Cork. You spoke English with a Cork accent, you collected Irish legends, you gave us Irish names. And me: I shout for Napoli, I gesture even when I know no one will understand, I've got Il Mattino on my phone.*

*See, I have a nose for corpses and quaking ground.*

*That's why my dad would lose it whenever I was arrested. Your mam tried to keep you from this kind of shit, and look, you went and found it anyway.*

*But where'd I get the restless blood in the first place, Mam?*