

That Day at the Lake

By

Rachel de Vine

©2015 by Blushing Books® and Rachel de Vine

All rights reserved.

No part of the book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Published by Blushing Books®,
a subsidiary of
ABCD Graphics and Design
977 Seminole Trail #233
Charlottesville, VA 22901
The trademark Blushing Books®
is registered in the US Patent and Trademark Office.

de Vine, Rachel
That Day at the Lake

eBook ISBN: 978-1-68259-157-4
Cover Art by ABCD Graphics & Design

This book is intended for *adults only*. Spanking and other sexual activities represented in this book are fantasies only, intended for adults. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual spanking activity or the spanking of minors.

Table of Contents:

CHAPTER ONE	5
CHAPTER TWO	18
CHAPTER THREE	29
CHAPTER FOUR	42
CHAPTER FIVE	53
CHAPTER SIX	64
CHAPTER SEVEN	74
CHAPTER EIGHT	83
CHAPTER NINE	93
CHAPTER TEN	103
CHAPTER ELEVEN	113
CHAPTER TWELVE	124
EPILOGUE	134
Rachel de Vine	136
Ebook Offer	138
Blushing Books Newsletter	139
Blushing Books	140

CHAPTER ONE

Adriana

I can hear him coming up the stairs, his boots making a loud noise on the bare wooden surface, and I tremble with fear. I wish I could wake Mamma up. She has been sleeping for such a long time. I must find a place to hide. He must not catch me, especially if he has been drinking. Mamma always intervenes when he tries to hit me or, worse, when he tries to fondle me. But she won't wake up and I don't know who is going to protect me now. I crouch down behind the sofa and pray that he is so drunk that he cannot see me. Perhaps he will go straight to bed and lie down with Mamma?

The door opens and I hold my breath. I hear his footsteps and the creak of the door as he pushes it shut behind him. I want to peer from behind the sofa to see him but I am too frightened. I can smell the drink. He sees Mamma on the bed.

"Get the fuck up, you idle bitch. You spend all day in that damned bed."

I hear him walk across to the bed and hear him slap my mother. There is no response from her and he gasps as he sees the needle sticking from her arm.

"What the fuck have you done now, you stupid cow?"

He calls for me. "Adriana, come here, girl. Come out from wherever you are hiding."

I do not reply and his voice becomes very angry.

"Come here right now or you will be very sorry girl. Come and see what your stupid bitch of a mother has done to herself. She's only gone and killed herself."

He begins to move around the room, looking for me. He comes around one end of the sofa and spots me as I move towards the other end. Cursing, he climbs over the back of the sofa and reaches down to grab me. He pulls me up with one hand while slapping me around the head with the other. But he is clumsy because of the drink, and he stumbles and falls. I know that I must get away and I run for the door. He tries to come after me but I am too quick for him and I manage to get the door open and get out on to the landing. I race for the top of the stairs and get down them as fast as my legs will carry me. I fall near the bottom, but I quickly get up and soon I am in the street.

I can hear his heavy footsteps coming down the stairs and I run, barefooted and dressed only in my nightdress, along the street. He is getting closer to me and his curses ring out so everyone nearby can hear him, but no one comes to my aid. He is a big man and most people fear him.

Just as I think I can run no further, a big black car pulls up alongside me and the door opens. I see a well-dressed man wearing a dark overcoat and a trilby hat get out of the car. He puts one hand on my shoulder and turns to the man chasing me.

"Mario."

That one word is sufficient to make him stop running. He is out of breath, but he manages to reply. "Angelo."

The man in the trilby, whom he called Angelo, looks very fierce. "So you're chasing children now are you, Mario?"

Mario looks angry and reaches to grab my arm. "She's mine, Angelo. Mind your own fucking business."

He does not notice that the driver of the car, who is even bigger than he is, has come around the back of the car and is standing right behind him. With just a slight nod of the head, Angelo gives his silent instruction and the driver produces a cosh from his coat and hits Paolo over the head. Paolo slumps unconscious to the ground.

"I made it my fucking business, Mario."

The man called Angelo takes my arm and points me to the open car door. "Get in, child. Come with us."

I climb into the car and see a young boy, not much older than me, sitting on the back seat. He looks warily at me as Angelo and the driver climb back into the car and the car moves away from the man lying in the road.

Angelo takes hold of my hand and feels me shaking. "Don't be frightened child. I won't harm you. What is your name?"

My voice is little more than a whisper. "Adriana."

"That's a pretty name. How old are you, Adriana?"

"I'm eight."

He points to the young boy sitting next to him. "This is my son, Luca. He's ten."

The car drives away from the streets of Naples where I was born and had lived all my life, and towards a brand new life. Nothing would ever be the same again.

** * **

"Adriana, come on, we will be late."

I take one last look in the mirror and hurry down the stairs to where my friend and flatmate, Naomi, is waiting anxiously.

"Don't worry. We have plenty of time. Is the taxi here?"

"He's been here for ten minutes. You do realise that they charge for waiting time, don't you?"

It is Graduation Day at Manchester University, where Naomi and I have both completed a Masters degree, me in International Business and Management, and Naomi in International Development. We met four years earlier as undergraduates on the very first day of term, and

have been friends ever since; first living a few doors away in the hall of residence, and then, for the past two years, in a shared flat a short distance from the university.

Naomi's family are due to meet us shortly before the ceremony starts, but there will be no family there to see me graduate. I wonder what Mamma would have thought about me going to university in England. Not for the first time I wonder who my father was, and if he had been clever. Perhaps if Mamma had lived she would have told me about him, but there is no one now that I can ask. I did, once, have foster parents, but we drifted apart after I left home at sixteen. I didn't dislike them, but I never felt much affection from them, or that we had anything in common. When I mentioned to Naomi that I would have no family to watch me collect my Masters certificate, she put her arm around my shoulder and gave me a hug.

"But you can share my family, Adriana. I've got enough to go around."

It was true that Naomi had a big family. As well as parents, she had two brothers, two sisters, and masses of nieces, nephews, cousins and the like. Ever since we met, Naomi has taken me home for Christmas and other breaks, and her family have simply treated me as yet another family member. It has been very comforting to have such warm hearted and loving people around me, but it never completely made up for the fact that I had no one of my own.

* * *

The summer heat is oppressive. I am sitting on the roof of the summerhouse with Luca and we have a giant watermelon, which he is cutting up with the penknife he always carries in his pocket. The roof is shaded by an old olive tree, whose branches provided our route up on to the tiled roof of the one storey wooden house that is rarely used by the adults, and which provides a hideaway for us. I am eleven and Luca is now thirteen—almost a man in my eyes. He is already eight inches taller than me and has just a wisp of facial hair on his top lip, which I often tease him about, and which annoys him intensely.

"What do you think we will be when we are grown, Luca?"

He lifts his head from the piece of watermelon he is eating and squints up at me against the bright sunlight.

"I am going to be an important man like Papà. Everyone looks up to him and respects him. One day they will give me the same respect."

This statement is not spoken with arrogance, but with a quiet certainty that this is to be his destiny. At eleven I do not know what my future holds, but I am clever at school, and I am ambitious to step away from my impoverished past and achieve great things in my life. I just do not yet know in which field I will achieve this success.

"What about you, Adriana? What do you want to be when you are grown up?"

I think for a moment, and look at the tousle-haired, but handsome boy whom I have looked up to and adored since the first moment we met, and cannot tell him what is in my heart, for I know that he will laugh and call me foolish. One of my dearest wishes is that Luca will one

day fall in love with me and that we will marry. But I know that he only sees me as his younger sister and that I will never achieve the exalted heights of becoming his wife.

Unable to tell him about the wish that lies deep within my heart, I tell him about my other great ambition.

"I am going to study hard and go to university, and one day I want to become a politician, because I want to make a difference to people's lives."

He looks at me with a surprised expression on his face. I don't know what he expected me to say, but I am certain that he had not been prepared for the answer I gave. He looks impressed.

"So both of us will one day be important people. I like that."

* * *

I had been living with the Bartolucci family for over three years and I was treated as just another family member now. It wasn't always so. At first Angelo's wife, Giulia, was not thrilled when her husband returned one day, bringing a young, traumatised child, bearing nothing except the dirty nightdress she was wearing, and not even wearing shoes, and announced that she would be living with the Bartolucci family from now on. But after a few weeks she began to smile at me and pat me gently on the shoulder to reassure me that she meant me no harm.

It took me longer to become more comfortable with her husband. Even at eight I had heard of Angelo Bartolucci, the local Mr. Big. I didn't know much about him, but I knew enough to be in awe of him and just a little afraid; but he was kindness itself to me and treated me like the daughter he did not have. I could see from the clothes he wore, the cigars he smoked, and the car he was driven around in, that he was a wealthy man, but I did not know the source of his wealth.

The Bartolucci home was a large and airy villa, surrounded by well-kept grounds and tall trees. The entrance was a tall pair of iron gates that were electronically controlled, and there were always a couple of men who guarded the house and family. I did not know why they needed to be guarded and, at eight years old, I did not have a vivid enough imagination to wonder why.

Giulia bought me some clothes and shoes and I was given my own room that was furnished with traditional dark wood furniture. It was a grown up room, but Giulia slowly added a few pictures and ornaments that made me think I was living in a palace, especially after the room where I had lived with Mamma.

I had tried hard to keep the memory of Mamma alive inside me, but I had no photograph and now, three years on, I had difficulty in remembering what she looked like. It upset me that I could not remember, but I kept the pain of it to myself. In fact I kept a lot of things hidden inside me, and visitors to the house would comment about what a quiet little girl I was. The only one I found I could talk to was Luca. He became like a big brother to me and we spent a lot of time together when we were not at school. We occasionally quarrelled, as all brothers and sisters do, but they were soon forgotten and we would revert back to being the best of friends again.

Secretly, and from afar, I hero-worshipped the handsome young boy who was my big brother and yet in reality was not. When we walked home from school I would be with my school friends, laughing and chattering, and Luca would be some way behind with two or three of his classmates who lived in the same direction. He seemed not to take notice of the silly little girls ahead of him, as though we were invisible, and yet, when I was once bullied by an older boy who snatched my bag and dangled it over the bridge, threatening to drop it into the river, he leapt to my defence immediately, punching the bully and threatening to throw him into the river if he ever behaved like that again. I glowed with pride that I had a defender, who would always take care of me. As we walked through the big metal gates of the house, Luca put his hand on my shoulder.

"Don't worry, Adriana, I will always take care of you when you are in trouble."

I glowed with pride at the words of my protector, and his touch and sentiment made me feel warm and comforted deep inside.

* * *

I see Luca standing by the small lake behind the house. He is skimming stones across the surface. I watch him for a moment, hidden by the large oak tree that has been there since long before the house was built, and I lean against the warm, solid trunk and peer around it to watch him without being seen.

He is sixteen now and almost a man. His body has filled out so he is less skinny than before, and his dark hair curls down his neck, almost touching his collar. It looks a little wild, as though he has neglected to comb it, and I think how handsome he is. I want to go to him and run my fingers through his hair and stroke his cheek where facial hair now appears. He now shaves; but not every day, and I like it when his face has twenty-four hours of stubble on it. It makes him look more like a man, and less like a schoolboy.

The day has been very hot and now, in the late afternoon, I long for the cool of evening. Sometimes, in the summer, Luca and I swim in the lake to cool down, but today I don't have my swimsuit and I am much too shy to swim in my underwear, especially now that, at fourteen, my body is changing and becoming more womanly. Giulia says that I need to start wearing a bra, now that I have little breasts appearing on the formerly flat surface of my chest. I am becoming more self-conscious about my body and won't even let Giulia see me without my clothes—and she is practically my mother.

I see Luca stand up and glance from side to side, as though he is checking that he is alone. He clearly does not see me hiding behind the tree and begins to take off his shirt. I feel a little uncomfortable; as though I am about to see something I should not. He drops his shirt on the ground and I look at his broad shoulders and developing arm muscles. I have seen him in the gym at school at lunchtime, lifting weights, and I now see the results of his endeavours for the first time. I feel little shivers running up my spine, but I don't know why.

I suck in air sharply as I realise that he is not stopping at taking off his shirt alone, but is now unfastening his jeans and pushing them down his legs. I feel trapped and embarrassed, but at the same time I have ripples of excitement running through my body, and I want to stand and stare but I know that Luca will be annoyed with me if he thinks I am spying on him. Should I call out before he becomes completely naked and pretend that I have just arrived? Or should I creep away and hope that he does not see me?

I am paralysed with indecision and now it is too late. He drops his underpants to the floor, steps out of them and splashes into the lake, swimming out about twenty yards in a slow, lazy crawl, before turning and swimming back. He stops a few yards from the edge of the lake, where the water is waist-high and looks towards the tree behind which I am standing. I move my head quickly out of sight, but it is too late. I have been caught.

"Come out Adriana, I know you are there."

He doesn't sound angry, or even irritated. His voice sounds disconcertingly normal. I hesitate for a few seconds and then step out from behind the tree. My chin sinks to my chest in embarrassment at being caught. I can't look up and see whatever expression is now on his face.

"Are you spying on me, Adriana?"

I shuffle my feet and still cannot find any words.

"Come into the water. It is nice and cool."

I walk slowly down to the water's edge, praying that Luca will not walk towards me and reveal himself. When we were young we saw each other naked once or twice, but now it is different. Now I have these disturbing thoughts and feelings.

Luca laughs to see my discomfort. He splashes some water in my direction.

"Come on. Take off your clothes and come for a swim. There is no one around. Mamma and Papà are out."

I am torn with indecision. I desperately want to tear off my dress and plunge into the water, but I am afraid. I am not afraid of Luca. I am afraid of myself, and my feelings. I am afraid that I will confess that I love him and I will see the mockery in his face as I make a fool of myself.

He holds out his hand and I stop worrying about everything, as I pull the dress off over my head and make a dash for the water in just my panties, my arms crossing my chest to cover my growing breasts. I stop about a yard away from him and sink down into the water so that it covers me to my shoulders.

"Don't be shy. I've seen you without your clothes on before."

But that was when I was younger and had a chest that looked like a boy's.

"Come, let's swim across to the other side and back and see how fast you can swim now."

Luca does not waste a moment and begins swimming to the other side. I am a good swimmer, but I know that I cannot match his broad shoulders and extra height. But I am a class champion at school for swimming and determined to give of my best. Perhaps he isn't swimming at full speed because he is only a matter of feet ahead of me, instead of the twenty feet I am

expecting. It is disconcerting because I can see his bare, white bottom bobbing through the water, in sharp contrast to his suntanned top half.

He turns and begins to swim back the other way.

"Come on, keep up. I'm going to beat you by miles."

I cheat and turn well before I reach the far bank, but he still beats me by a long way, as I tire. He stands in the water waiting for me and applauds as I come near, standing in water that barely comes up to his waist. I can see his boy bits through the clear water. I can feel my face colour up and don't know where to look, but Luca laughs.

"Don't hide yourself. You are becoming a woman and you are beautiful. Stand up and let me see you."

I slowly rise up until I am standing straight and drop my arms to my sides. I look at his face, but he is looking down at my breasts and he has a strange, intense look in his eyes. Then he looks into my eyes and smiles one of his warm, cheeky smiles that I have grown to love so much.

"One day, you are going to be such a beautiful woman, Adriana, and men will fight over you. I hope that I will still know you then."

It seems such a strange thing to say and I do not know how to respond. We stand and look at each other for what seems an eternity, but is probably just a few seconds, until the sound of a car coming up the driveway disturbs the mood. It must be Luca's parents returning home. I run from the water and grab my dress, pulling it over my head and wet body and make a dash for the house before I am seen, leaving Luca staring after me.

* * *

I did not know it then, but that afternoon swim marked the end of my childhood and my life changed dramatically. The next day, while driving through Naples, Angelo Bartolucci and his wife were murdered, mowed down by an assassin's bullets. Their car was forced to a halt by a staged accident ahead of them, and a gunman appeared from nowhere and pumped a round of bullets into the car. Angelo and Giulia died instantly. I was as though I was an orphan once again. In fact, I was worse than an orphan; I did not officially exist.

While I was at school, unaware of events, someone came to fetch Luca and he was whisked off in a big black car by his uncle, who, I was later told, had travelled up from Sicily, but I was simply abandoned; turned out of the house I had called home since my own mother had so cruelly abandoned me. I was called into the head teacher's office and informed that there had been a terrible 'accident' and that I was going to go to live with a foster carer until a decision was made about my future. I did not even have the chance to see Luca and say goodbye, and I felt as though my world had collapsed around me.

I was handed to local social workers, who sent me to stay with temporary foster parents while enquiries were made about whether I had any relatives willing to take me in. It seemed there were not. Once again I was alone and I felt utterly abandoned. Not only had I lost my

'adopted' parents, but I had lost the boy who mattered to me more than anyone in the world, the boy who teased and protected me, and whom I utterly adored.

I did not speak for several days, so bad was my grief, and yet I did not cry. I lay awake for night after night, thinking about what had happened, but the tears did not come. The Bartolucci family had abandoned me, just as my mother had done, and I wondered if that was to be my lot in life; to have those people about whom I cared, ripped from me. Perhaps I should learn not to care so much.

I stayed with the temporary foster parents for nearly six weeks before I was put up for long-term fostering, and I was finally fostered by a couple called Arnaldo and Bianca Millazo. They were in their late thirties and had been trying for many years to have a baby, without success.

I was nearly fifteen when I went to live with my new foster parents, who lived in a village a few miles outside Naples, and I was very unhappy about being made to leave the city of my birth and the city where I had been happy living with the Bartoluccis, and I suppose I made life difficult for Arnaldo and Bianca, who would much rather have had a newborn baby to care for than an angry and damaged girl, who was in those difficult teenage years.

I went days without speaking to them, and when I did speak I was rude and uncaring. Looking back now I can see that I must have made life so trying for the young couple, but at the time I had no sympathy for their suffering, wrapped up as I was in my own. Twice I ran away from home, and twice the police brought me back. If it hadn't been for the intervention of a young teacher called Miss Marzano, I am sure that I would have turned on to the wrong path in my life, and my original hopes and ambitions would have turned to dust. For the next four years she befriended me at school and tried to encourage me in my studies, and she was eventually rewarded for her patience when I managed to turn myself around and began to achieve success in my exams.

"You have only one life, Adriana, and one chance to make a success of it. You can either let the bad things from your past weigh you down and stop you from achieving your dreams, or you can tell yourself that you are going to achieve great things *despite* what has happened, and use your strength and determination, that I know you have inside, to allow yourself to succeed. I know you have the talent and intelligence to reach the goals you have set, so all you need now is the will to succeed."

Because of Miss Marzano I began to apply myself to my studies and achieved good results in my exams at sixteen that would allow me to go on to higher education. I wish I could say that my reformed attitude to my education led to a better relationship with Arnaldo and Bianca, but it had been badly damaged and never fully recovered. However, when they announced just after my sixteenth birthday that we were moving to England, where they had relatives, and were going into the restaurant business, I did not make a fuss. Italy held nothing for me now and I decided that perhaps a fresh start in England was what I needed. Our

relationship limped on for a further six months after arriving in London, but eventually I could bear it no more and announced that I was leaving home to strike out on my own.

My foster parents put up a token resistance, but I think that, deep down, they felt nothing but relief. Any guilt they felt was forgotten when, shortly before I left, after fifteen years of marriage, when they thought they would never have a child of their own, Bianca found to her joy that she was expecting a baby. I was happy for them and relieved that I would not be long missed.

I had already begun my new school by then, and was studying to obtain my A level exams that would enable me to get to university in England. I had briefly flirted with the idea of returning to Italy, but decided against it. There was so much pain and so many bad memories associated with Italy in my mind that I decided to stick with my adopted country. The school put me in touch with social workers who found me a place in a hostel and the funds to enable me to live independently; which I topped up with money I earned while working as a waitress in a local restaurant a few evenings a week, and stacking shelves in a supermarket four nights a week.

It could have been a lonely life, striking out on my own at such a young age, but I had learned not to need people or care for people too much, in case they too were taken from me. Despite the permanent ache in my gut that never seemed to go, I eventually came to terms with the way my life had changed. I made one or two superficial friends, but refused to let them inside my heart in the way I had before. I eventually settled into a much more stable and contented life, concentrating almost entirely on my studies and my work, but a large part of my heart remained in Naples, at a house with a lake and a large watermelon patch. Just occasionally I would catch a glimpse of a man with messy, dark hair and my heart would leap until I came closer and saw an unfamiliar face. I wondered if I would ever see Luca again.

* * *

Naomi and I lay on the floor of our flat, empty bottles of red wine lying around us. Her family had left some hours previously, following our post-graduation celebration meal at a local restaurant. Our friends joined us afterwards for a party at our flat, but they had now all left, except for Naomi's boyfriend who, having drunk more than he could cope with, was currently sleeping it off in her bed.

Naomi and Hugh had only been together for three months, and he was the latest of the many relationships that she had had while at university. She was pretty and attracted a lot of attention, but she told me she had no intention of settling down for years.

"There's such a big world out there, Adriana, and I want to see it all. Marriage and babies can wait for a long time yet."

We had been applying for jobs, both in the UK and abroad, but after four years of continuous study neither of us was keen to rush straight into the world of work. As we lay on the carpet, feeling heady from the day's activities and the bottles of red wine, we pondered our options.

Naomi and I had become as close as sisters in the years since we met on our first day as undergraduates. I had never had a close girlfriend before, and had resisted, in my normal, slightly morose way, her constant efforts to engage with me. But eventually something clicked between us. She never pushed me to explain why I sometimes had the moods I did, or why I would not talk about my past. She was simply a lovely, warm and funny person, and we became the best of friends.

Naomi was fortunate in having parents who were comfortably off and they gave her an allowance, so money was not her greatest worry but money was very important for me, not having a family to fall back on for support. I had worked throughout my time at university—waitressing, barmaid work, supermarket checkout girl—you name it, I had done it. I had managed to accumulate a small amount of money, which meant that I could probably manage for three months before a job became a necessity if I was not to end up sleeping on the streets of Manchester.

"Let's travel around Europe for the summer, Ad. I've never been to Italy, and you've never been back since you left at sixteen. You can show me the Coliseum in Rome and the Amalfi coast, and Florence and Venice. It will be exciting. Let's just take off and see where the route takes us."

She rolled over towards me when I did not reply, and I must have had a pensive look on my face, for she reached out for my hand and squeezed it.

"I know you have some sad memories of your home and your childhood, but let's make some new memories."

I thought about it for a few moments and was persuaded by Naomi's enthusiasm. "Okay, let's do it."

She squealed and rolled over towards me and gave me a hug. The squeal must have woken Hugh, for he appeared at the doorway, rubbing his eyes, and looking at us as we rolled on the floor together.

"If you are having an orgy, can I join in?"

"No Hugh, this is girl bonding. Go back to bed."

He trotted off without a murmur. I looked at Naomi.

"What about Hugh?"

"Well, I might send him a postcard from Rome, and then again I might not."

I deduced from her comment that Hugh might be getting his marching orders before too long.

I was right. Two weeks later we had packed up our flat, shipped our belongings to Naomi's parents' home for storage, and were on the train, speeding through the Channel Tunnel to our first stop of Paris. We found a cheap hostel in one of the more rundown areas, and bought French bread and lumps of delicious cheese, which we ate for both breakfast and lunch, and then ate dinner in some of the more interesting, but less expensive, backstreet restaurants.

We went to all the usual tourist haunts, such as the Eiffel Tower and The Louvre. We walked along the banks of the Seine and visited flea markets and galleries. We even did some window-shopping in some of the expensive boutiques. Paris was everything it promised and we were sorry to leave, but after ten days we headed south towards the Mediterranean and eventually into northern Italy.

It was strange speaking my native language again and seeing familiar sights, although, to be honest, much of it I was seeing for the first time too.

Naomi was mystified. "You mean you never visited Venice or Florence? I don't believe you."

Coming from a wealthy family as she did, she had no concept of what life had been like for me for the first fifteen years of my childhood. I had never really talked to her about my beginnings, about my mother's death from heroin and my rescue in the street by Angelo. She knew a little about Luca, but much of it I had kept hidden inside. One night, after consuming rather a lot of wine in Venice, I told her my story—well, most of it.

"My God, Adriana. I had no idea. I can't believe you went through all that and kept it to yourself for all this time."

"Well it's not something you want to brag about. Anyway, it is all in the past and there's no point in dwelling on it. I live a completely different life now."

"And Luca? You've no idea where he went after his parents were killed?"

"No. I did try to find him once, but it was as though he had disappeared. I guess if your parents have been murdered by the head of a rival family, you don't hang around too long in case your name is on the list, too."

"So Angelo was a criminal?" Naomi asked.

"I'm fairly sure that he was involved in a lot of criminal activity, but as a child I didn't really take much notice of all that. He was just a nice guy who rescued me and took me into his home. I grew to love him and Giulia as family in the few years I was with them. You know what hurts the most? I never got to say goodbye to any of them. I didn't go to the funeral and I never got to see Luca again."

My voice must have reflected some of the pain I felt about it all, and Naomi took my hand and squeezed it.

"That is so sad. And it makes me so sad, too, to think of how much pain you have carried around with you all this time. I think that it's time we put some of that right for you."

She was as good as her word, for when we arrived in Naples she insisted that we make enquiries about where Angelo and Giulia were buried so that we could visit the grave. Two days later we arrived at a cemetery not far from where I used to live, and walked around the graveyard until we found their headstone.

I hadn't realised just how emotional I would be to see that stone. Seeing their names carved on that piece of polished marble released something I had kept locked away for so long,

and I sank to the ground and cried and cried for the couple that had taken me in and cared for me. Naomi sat by my side and waited for me to get the pain out of my system.

I had brought a bunch of flowers and put them into the urn, after taking out some dead ones that had been there for some time. At least someone had once brought them flowers. I wondered if it had been Luca.

"Do you know where your mother was buried?"

"No, I have no idea, and I doubt that she will have a headstone like this. I can't imagine that Mario would have spent money on her funeral. In fact, she is probably buried in a pauper's grave somewhere," I said.

Naomi squeezed my hand. "One day we will try and find her."

When I felt sufficiently composed, we walked down the road away from the graveyard and I recognized many of the streets and buildings.

"Look, there's my old school."

We stood near the school gates and watched as some boys played football in the yard in front—the same yard where I had once watched Luca play football. It felt so strange to be back here again.

"How far was your home from here?" Naomi asked.

"Not far. Come, I will show you."

We strolled through the same streets along which I had walked back from school each day. We came to the bridge where Luca had rescued me from the bully, and threatened to throw him into the river. I smiled at the memory.

Eventually we came to the Bartoluccis' villa, with its high metal gates and tall trees. The gates were closed and there was a padlock and chain around the railings. Peering through the railings, it was clear that the house had not been lived in for some time. It looked very neglected, compared to the pristine condition it was in when the family was there. The gravel drive had dead leaves scattered around, and the grass had gone to seed. It all used to look so well kept when Angelo employed two gardeners. I followed the wall around to where there used to be a gap that I sometimes squeezed through when I was younger. It was still there and Naomi and I, with some difficulty, managed to squeeze through it and into the field at the back of the house.

I looked towards the old oak tree, and there, close by, was the lake, where Luca and I had our last meaningful conversation before the dreadful events that followed. I stood still, remembering my feelings as I saw him strip off his clothes and dive in, and when I threw off my dress and joined him in the water. I remembered every word that he had said to me as I came out.

"One day, Adriana, you are going to be such a beautiful woman and men will fight over you. I hope that I will still know you then."

I must have said it out loud because Naomi came towards me and rested her hand on my shoulder.

"You are a beautiful woman now, and perhaps one day you will meet Luca again and he will see that you are, and fall in love with you."

I smiled at those words from my incurably romantic friend. "Maybe. He will be twenty-four now. I wonder where he is, and if he still thinks about me."

He may no longer think of me, but I think of him, and my thoughts are not the innocent ones of childhood, but the erotic ones of adulthood. I still see his naked body in the lake, but now I don't want to swim with him, I want him to make love to me. I want him to come to me, take my hand and pull me down on to the banks of the lake and lie on top of me so I can feel that young, solid body pressing down onto mine; his strong arms pinning me to the ground while he uses his tongue to—I cut off those thoughts; they are too graphic and intense for here in the heat of an Italian afternoon. They should be reserved for the darkness of my room when, alone, I dream about what we might have done together and what might have been, but never was. They are such bittersweet memories.

We retraced our steps and headed back through the gap and on to the road. It hadn't been as difficult as I had feared, going back to the house after all this time. In fact, I felt good that I had seen it again. Naomi was right. I had now had the opportunity to say goodbye to Angelo and Giulia, and to remember some happy times as well as the sadness that followed. I resolved to make a success of my life to repay them for their kindness in giving me a home in my time of need.

We spent the next two months travelling from Italy into Switzerland and Germany, and finally to Holland, before the money began to dwindle and we knew that we had to return home and begin our adult lives. I had come to terms with the tumultuous childhood I had experienced in Naples, and now I could turn over a new leaf in the book and start a brand new chapter.