

THE BAG

When my father came home on Friday evenings after five days away for work, he was exhausted.

Almost every week he asked me to go to the garage and fetch two things from his car: the folder and the bag.

He needed both.

At 9:30 p.m. sharp, an inspector would call and the numbers had to be ready.

It became our Friday ritual.

I never complained.

I did it for my father.

I did it for us.

The numbers were never wrong.

The results were never below expectations.

And I never saw him angry.

As a child, I came to believe that he owned a magical bag.

At home, however, my mother often asked me to fetch her bag and her wallet.

That was my first lesson.

Two completely different objects could carry the same name.

One large, filled with work.

One small, filled with money.

Years later, on a winter evening, my father and I were returning from a funeral.

Roadblocks caused by labor unrest forced us onto a route we normally never used.

Along a dark avenue stood several women beside small fires.

Each carried a handbag.

I asked who they were.

My father smiled.

“They are ladies looking for work.”

I looked at the bags.

“They carry their tools with them,” he explained.

“And who are their customers?”

“The people who perform good actions.”

I was ten years old.

Naturally, I assumed that the people dealing with actions somehow also dealt with those women.

The misunderstanding made perfect sense to me.

Years later, my father took me to Milan.

For the first time I entered the temple of Italian finance, Piazza Affari.

The trading floor was filled with shouting.

People buying.

People selling.

People waving pieces of paper as if civilization itself depended on them.

I looked around in confusion.

“Why are they all yelling?”

My father laughed.

“That's how this business works.”

I disagreed immediately.

I had watched him work for fifteen years.

He had never needed to shout.

We laughed like lunatics.

That evening ended on the Navigli, where my memories once again mixed together.

The women by the roadside.

Their handbags.

The traders in the stock exchange.

Their briefcases.

Different markets.

Different merchandise.

The same human search.

Some of those men could buy almost anything.

What they found difficult to obtain were feelings.

They hoped to purchase love.

What they usually bought was something else.

Then there was my aunt.

She kept her makeup hidden inside her handbag because her jealous husband believed beauty should appear naturally.

When she returned home, perfectly groomed, he would smile proudly.

“You look wonderful today.”

“What a healthy complexion.”

And she would nod in silence.

Another bag.

Another secret.

Another market.

As I grew older, I discovered that the world contains many kinds of bags.

Some carry numbers.

Some carry money.

Some carry desires.

Some carry lies.

And some carry entire lives.

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The Wall Street Saga

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