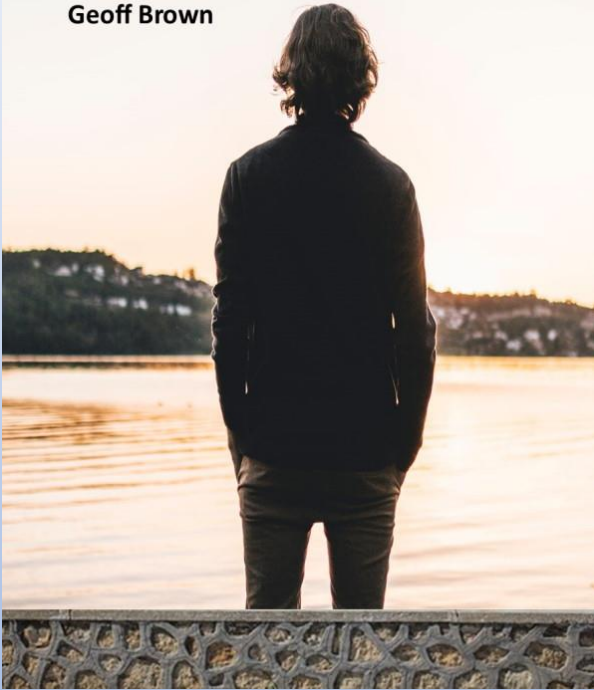


# CRUEL DEFLECTIONS

Geoff Brown



Be different: buy direct  
from the author or  
[tslbooks.uk](http://tslbooks.uk)  
ebook @ [lulu.com](http://lulu.com)

15 AUGUST 1974

## LECCE, PUGLIA, ITALY

Luca woke drenched in sweat after his third nightmare in as many nights. He had snapped awake as he was about to be engulfed by a massive avalanche. Pursued by dark hooded figures, he was emitting a high pitched scream of pure terror. This had probably set off the avalanche thundering towards him. It had also disturbed old *Signora* Martucci in the flat above who was banging her stick energetically on her floor to make him stop.

It was the first morning of Luca Vento's twenty-sixth year on earth. Even at 6 a.m, Thursday 15 August promised to be another sweltering, energy sapping day. It was *Ferragosto*, a national holiday since Roman times. He was in his small apartment off Viale Otranto in the Puglian city of Lecce. The first stirrings of his cohabitants in this crumbling block of flats incongruously called a *palazzo* filtered through the partition walls and mingled with the insistent buzzing of the scooters outside.

He rose from the sodden bed sheets and sat at his tiny desk pouring a whole litre of water down his parched throat. He thought about the momentous events of the past few weeks and wondered what the future held for him. President Nixon had finally announced his resignation the previous Thursday. An idealistic young man, Luca had felt repulsed by the endemic corruption and abuse of power exposed by Watergate. This had somehow strengthened his resolve to do the right thing in his own birthplace in the heel of Italy.

The right thing was to blow the whistle on the widespread corrupt collusion between local government officials and the Camorra, the Neapolitan branch of the mafia with tentacles reaching into Puglia.

The day before the Nixon announcement, Luca's beloved grandmother, *nonna* Valentina, had died suddenly at the age of seventy-five. Her old friend Adriana had sent for Luca when she discovered Valentina lying dead in her vegetable garden.

"She died of a broken heart you know Luca," she said. "She never got over the death of her lovely daughter."